

## CHAPTER «PHILOSOPHICAL SCIENCES»

### INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF FRENCH PERSONALISTS

Roksolana Verbova<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Our work examines the freedom of the individual in the philosophy of French personalists as a central concept that combines the ontological, anthropological, ethical and political aspects of human existence. It is shown that for Emmanuel Mounier and thinkers close to him, the person is not reduced to the individual as a unit of the species or an element of statistics. It is understood as an internal center of initiative and responsibility, capable of initiating new meanings, going beyond the boundaries of natural, social and psychological determinations. Freedom appears not as an abstract possibility of choice, but as a process of spiritual maturation, associated with dignity, conscience, loyalty and inner integrity. The first part of the work analyzes the ontological and anthropological principles of personal freedom in French personalism. It is substantiated that freedom is rooted in a personal way of being, which cannot be reduced to a role, function or set of external characteristics. The unity of the spiritual and the physical in man is emphasized, as well as the fact that his specific embodiment, historical situation and cultural ties do not abolish freedom, but constitute a field for responsible choice. It is shown that the person is revealed as an irreplaceable bearer of dignity, which cannot be legitimately sacrificed to any collective goal. The second part focuses on the freedom of the person in the context of relationships and community. It is shown that the human self is formed in an encounter with another you, and true freedom is manifested in the ability to dialogue, solidarity, and complicity. The criticism of individualistic liberalism and totalitarian forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Candidate of the Philosophical Sciences,  
Senior Teacher of the Department of Philosophy,  
Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4653-6057>

collectivism by French personalists is analyzed. It is substantiated that the community in the personalist perspective is understood as a space of co-responsibility, where the common good is born from the responsible contribution of free individuals, and not by suppressing their uniqueness. The third part is devoted to the historical and political context of the formation of French personalism. It is shown that the experience of war, totalitarian regimes, social crisis and manipulative mass culture forced personalists to combine the concept of freedom with the themes of resistance to injustice, civic engagement, criticism of economic and political structures that degrade human dignity. The role of small communities, education and the culture of critical thinking as a space for supporting and protecting individual freedom is emphasized.

### 1. Introduction

Individual freedom in the philosophy of French personalists appears not as an abstract possibility of choosing between different options for action, but as an inner calling of a person to get out of the isolation of his own ego and enter into a relationship with others, with history, with the transcendent. French personalism arises in the context of deep crises of the twentieth century, world wars, economic upheavals, the growth of totalitarian and mass ideologies. Against this background, freedom no longer looks like a private matter of an individual. It becomes a question of the survival of the human in a person, a question of whether a person will be able to preserve his dignity in the face of faceless collectivism, technical rationality and the market that turns subjects into things. That is why personalists constantly emphasize that freedom is unthinkable without responsibility, without internal work on oneself, without going beyond the limits of narrowly understood private interests. For French personalists, first of all for Emmanuel Mounier, the starting point is the concept of the person as a spiritually bodily center of initiative and responsibility, which is revealed only in relationships. The person is not reduced to biological individuality and does not dissolve in the collective, it is always more than a social role, profession or function. Accordingly, freedom is not an arbitrary possession of a set of rights, but is a process of personal formation. A person becomes free not when he has no external restrictions, but when he finds a meaning capable of ordering his desires, and directs his energy to serve something

higher than his private comfort. In this sense, freedom for the personalist is the inner maturation of the person, his growth towards his own truth, which is always associated with openness to the other. Another important feature of the French personalist understanding of freedom is associated with the criticism of two opposing distortions, namely individualistic liberalism and totalitarian collectivism. In the first case, freedom is reduced to an unlimited play of interests and desires, where other people are perceived mainly as a means to realize one's own plans. In the second case, freedom is sacrificed to the collective, the state, the race, the class, and the individual is transformed into a cog in the great machine of history. French personalists try to go beyond this dichotomy, arguing that true freedom is possible only where the individual recognizes the unique value of the other and where relationships are built on mutual dignity. Freedom then ceases to be a simple confrontation with authority or tradition, it becomes the ability to create a common world in which everyone has the right to a voice and at the same time assumes a share of common responsibility.

In the personalist vision, the motif of the embodiment of freedom is particularly strong. Unlike purely abstract concepts, where freedom is conceived as a logical property of the subject, French thinkers emphasize that a person is always rooted in a specific time, space, historical situation, body, social ties. Freedom does not exist outside these conditions, it manifests itself precisely in the way a person accepts or rejects the roles imposed on him, in the way he responds to the challenges of his era. The choice that personalism speaks of is not a game of pure possibilities, but a sometimes painful decision to remain human where violence, indifference or cynicism reigns. That is why freedom in this tradition is associated with the concepts of testimony, loyalty, sacrifice, as well as with the willingness to go against the flow if dominant structures humiliate the dignity of the person. At the same time, French personalism views freedom as a movement towards the transcendent, as openness to what goes beyond the closed human world. A significant part of these thinkers is based on Christian inspiration, in which personal freedom is understood as a call to love, which frees from egocentrism and fear. This does not mean a mechanical identification of philosophy with theology, but it gives the personalist understanding of freedom a depth that is lacking in purely secular models. In such a perspective, freedom is not a final possession that can be acquired once,

but is a path, a loyalty to a certain movement that leads from the closed individual to a person capable of responding, loving, creating. It is in this tension between inner depth and social responsibility, between embodiment and transcendence, that the specificity of the French personalist view of personal freedom is revealed, which will be the subject of further analysis.

Individual freedom in the philosophy of French personalists is connected with very concrete historical experience, and not only with abstract theoretical schemes. Thinkers, who are conventionally united under the name of French personalism, formed their views during the deep tragedies of the twentieth century, wars, totalitarian regimes, economic crises, the collapse of traditional communities, mass culture that unifies man. That is why the focus of their attention is not the general image of man as a rational being, but a specific person who experiences humiliation, fear, the temptation to betray and at the same time is able to respond to the call of dignity. In this perspective, freedom cannot be reduced to a set of legal rights or to a purely internal psychological autonomy. It is understood as a dramatic path of becoming, as a constant effort to preserve the human in oneself despite the pressure of impersonal forces, be it state bureaucracy, the market, or technology. French personalists emphasize that individual freedom is always rooted in relationships. The person is not born in isolated thinking, but in the encounter with another you, with the face of another person, with the demands of justice, with the challenge of history. That is why they so sharply criticize both individualism, where freedom is understood as the right to not take anyone into account, and various forms of collectivism, in which the person dissolves in the mass, class, race or nation. For the personalist, true freedom begins where a person is able to say a responsible I in the face of another, where he recognizes that his choice always affects someone else, changes the fabric of common life. In this sense, the freedom of the person is not opposed to connections, on the contrary, it requires living, authentic relationships in which the depth of the human vocation is revealed.

## **2. Ontological and anthropological foundations of individual freedom in French personalism**

The ontological and anthropological principles of personal freedom in French personalism are connected with how personalists themselves understand human existence. They proceed from the fact that a person

is not a thing and is not just an element of the general order of nature. The basis of human existence lies in the ability of a person to say «I» and at the same time to address «you». This means that a person cannot be described only through objective characteristics, such as biological or social. In his existence, there is always an internal center that is capable of initiating new meanings, making decisions, going beyond existing structures. For Emmanuel Mounier and other personalists, personal freedom is rooted precisely in this ability to be a source of action, and not just the result of external causes. The ontology of a person in personalism is not built on the scheme of a passive being, guided by external forces, but on the vision of a living center of creative responsibility, which never completely coincides with any social role, function or psychological mask. From an anthropological point of view, French personalists insist on the unity of the spiritual and the corporeal in the person. Man is not a pure spirit who accidentally found himself in a body, nor is he simply a complex biological system that at a certain moment begins to think. His freedom is manifested in the way he lives his embodiment, how he accepts his own limitations, temperament, character, historical time and transforms all this into a space for responsible choice. The specific body, language, cultural tradition, social origin do not abolish freedom, but rather constitute the soil from which freedom sprouts. This is why personalists are so strongly opposed to concepts where a person is described as completely determined by economic structures, biological heredity or mental mechanisms. They recognize the influence of all these factors, but emphasize that at the heart of the person there is a zone of internal initiative, where «yes» and «no» are possible, where a decision arises that cannot be completely reduced to external causes (Table 1).

The ontology of freedom in French personalism is inextricably linked to the concept of dignity. The person is considered a way of being that cannot be transformed into a means without distorting the very meaning of the human. Dignity is not a reward for merit or the privilege of certain groups, it is an original characteristic of every person, even if this person has fallen morally, even if his freedom is deformed by fear or the habit of obedience. That is why freedom for personalists does not mean that a person can do anything without consequences. On the contrary, freedom is understood as the ability to rise to one's own dignity, to restore it where

it has been betrayed, in oneself or in others. This ontological emphasis on dignity explains why French thinkers so consistently criticize all forms of totalitarianism and any practice that turns people into statistical material, into raw material for political or economic projects [1-3].

Table 1

**Core distinctions between person and individual**

Aspect	Extended explanation
Ontological status	In French personalism the individual is understood as a unit within a biological species or a social system, while the person is a unique center of consciousness and responsibility. The individual can be described through objective categories such as age, profession, social role. The person always exceeds such descriptions, because in every decision it can begin something new that was not fully contained in previous conditions. This ontological surplus means that the person cannot be reduced to a function or to a predictable element in a collective mechanism
Interior depth	The individual is visible mainly from the outside, through behavior and measurable characteristics. The person has an interior life that includes conscience, self reflection, the capacity for shame and creative imagination. French personalists insist that the most important decisions are prepared in this hidden depth where a human being struggles with fear, temptation, loyalty and betrayal. Freedom therefore is linked with the discovery of this inner space that cannot be fully controlled by external powers, whether political, economic or cultural
Relation to the other	An individual can be described as a separate unit that stands over against other units. A person exists only in relation, in the movement between the words I and you. In personalist thought the person discovers its own identity when it is addressed by another free subject and when it answers this call. Freedom therefore is not a right to isolation, it is the possibility to enter into authentic encounter where the other is not an object of use but a partner in dialogue. This relational character distinguishes the person from the image of a self sufficient individual
Vocation and project	For French personalists the individual is mainly a given fact, while the person is a task and a vocation. A human being receives many conditions at birth, but becomes a person only by gradually assuming a life project that integrates values, responsibilities and relationships. Freedom appears as the power to say yes or no to this deeper calling. It allows the human being to resist social pressures that would turn life into a series of roles without inner meaning, and to orient existence toward a horizon of justice, truth and love

*Source: formed by the author*

In the anthropological perspective, the freedom of the individual in French personalism is described as a path that passes through an internal struggle. A person does not automatically acquire mature freedom. His initial state is rather marked by discontinuity, inconsistency, dependence on other people's opinions, fear of responsibility. Personalists draw attention to how easily a person hides behind the mask of a role, position, belonging to a collective, so as not to make his own choice. Therefore, the formation of freedom is understood as a process of personal growth, in which the experience of conscience, shame, repentance, the ability to admit one's own mistakes and again take responsibility for oneself and others are important. A person becomes free not when he rejects all restrictions, but when he accepts just duties and learns to distinguish between those norms that serve dignity and those that destroy it. In this anthropological logic, freedom is not the opposite of duty, but its internal understanding, when a person no longer acts out of fear or blind habit, but consciously recognizes the meaning of what he does. A special feature of the ontological and anthropological principles in French personalism is the combination of concreteness and openness to the transcendent. A person is always rooted in a certain historical era, belongs to a certain community, lives among specific people, but his vocation is not exhausted by any of these affiliations. Freedom is interpreted as a movement from a closed individual who lives only by his own interests to a person who is able to respond to the call of a higher meaning. For many French personalists, such a meaning is God as the absolute «You», which does not oppress, but liberates, because it provides a reference point that cannot be identified with any human power or ideology. Even if the reader does not share the religious beliefs of these thinkers, the very idea of freedom as openness to something that exceeds everyday utility remains important. It is in this combination of intimate internal struggle, concrete historical responsibility, and orientation towards a higher meaning that the ontological and anthropological principles of individual freedom in French personalism are formed, which determine further ethical and socio-philosophical analysis (Table 2).

Table 2

**Anthropological features of freedom in French personalism**

Features	Characteristics
Freedom as a path rather than a state	French personalism does not treat freedom as something already possessed in a complete form. It is seen as a path of growth that passes through failure, repentance, new decisions and renewed responsibility. A person may live long years in a condition of inner slavery to fear, habit or the opinion of the crowd, even in a formally free society. The personalist view stresses that freedom matures when a human being takes ownership of life, recognizes past errors and still chooses to act according to conscience rather than convenience.
Unity of body and spirit	In personalist anthropology the human person is a unity of body, psyche and spirit. Freedom does not float above the concrete body and history, it is exercised through gestures, work, speech and relationships. Character traits, temperament and physical limits influence how freedom can be lived, but they do not abolish it. The person accepts these conditions and transforms them into a field of meaningful action. Thus freedom is neither pure spontaneity without constraint nor mechanical obedience to biological or social forces. It is the creative integration of all levels of human existence.
Role of conscience	Conscience has a central place in the personalist understanding of freedom. It is not only a private feeling of guilt or approval, but an inner experience of being summoned to respect the dignity of self and others. Through conscience the person evaluates motivations, examines compromises and discerns when obedience to external orders would mean complicity with injustice. Freedom is not separation from moral norms, it is the capacity to recognize which norms serve human dignity and which destroy it. Acting against conscience is therefore seen as a form of self betrayal and loss of true freedom.
Time, memory and narrative identity	Personalist anthropology emphasizes that human freedom unfolds in time. A person builds a narrative identity by interpreting past actions and projecting future possibilities. Freedom includes the power to reinterpret one's own history, to discover new meaning in past suffering and failure, and to change the direction of life. The same event can be integrated either as a source of bitterness or as a source of compassion and wisdom. This narrative dimension means that freedom is not only a momentary choice, it is a long term faithfulness to a story that gradually becomes more coherent and more responsible.

*Source: formed by the author*

The ontological and anthropological principles of freedom in French personalism cannot be understood without a clear distinction between person and individual. The individual describes a person as a separate unit of the species, as an element of statistics, as a carrier of certain characteristics



of character, origin, profession. For personalists, a person means another level of reality. It is the inner center of conscious life, capable of self-referral, of saying to itself and the world not only «I exist», but «I respond». On the ontological level, this means that a person is not part of a more general structure that can be fully explained by external causes. It is a point where a source of new beginnings opens, where history not only continues, but begins anew. That is why freedom in French personalism is not reduced to a mechanical choice between already given options. It is connected with the creative ability of a person to introduce new meanings, new forms of solidarity, new ways of being human into the world. This understanding of freedom is closely related to the idea of the inner depth of a person. French personalists emphasize that a person has not only an external biography of events, facts, career changes, but also an internal history, which unfolds in the dimensions of conscience, loyalty, trust, disappointment, repentance. It is in this hidden history that true decisions mature. From the outside, only a separate act can be seen. For a personalist, what is important is what stood behind it at the level of a person's internal dialogue with himself and with what he recognizes as higher than himself. Ontologically, freedom means the ability not to dissolve in superficial impulses, not to obey the automatisms of habit, but to stop, to comprehend, to return to the deep axis of his own «I». In this sense, freedom is not only an act, but also a state of concentration, the ability to maintain internal unity among the dispersing influences of the modern world. The anthropological approach of French personalists emphasizes the dramatic nature of freedom. A person lives at the crossroads of different forces. Natural inclinations, temperament, instincts, the pressure of social roles, the expectations of the environment, mass culture, traumatic experiences of the past form the field in which a person makes his choice. Personalists do not deny any of these factors, they refuse to simplify the person to any one explanation. Freedom appears as the ability not to identify oneself completely with any of the external or internal determinations. A person can admit the presence of a tendency to fear, aggression, conformism, but in the very possibility of saying "I do not limit myself to this" there is already the beginning of freedom. That is why French personalists so often emphasize the decision not to identify with one's own falls, not to accept as final any form of evil in which a person has found himself involved. On the anthropological level, freedom is the ability

to break the cycle of repetition and start again, without denying the past, but also without allowing it to definitively determine the future [4-7].

The theme of time occupies a special place in personalist anthropology. The freedom of the individual is conceived as a tension between memory and project, between fidelity to promises already made and openness to new possibilities. A person does not simply experience a sequence of moments. He or she builds a story about himself or herself, combining fragments of his or her biography into a certain story, sometimes contradictory, sometimes painful, but one that allows one to say «this is my life». In this story, freedom manifests itself in the ability to rethink one's own past. What was once perceived as an absolute defeat can later be seen as the beginning of a new understanding, as a source of compassion for others, as a lesson in responsibility. Similarly, a decision that once seemed an obvious success can be exposed as a betrayal of deeper convictions. Thus, the ontological peculiarity of human existence is that it is always open to a new reading, and it is this possibility that personalists associate with freedom.

French personalism insists that true personal freedom is impossible without a certain vertical of meaning. If a person is not oriented towards something that exceeds his immediate benefits, his choices become chaotic, random, subordinate to moods and fashion. Mounier and thinkers close to him speak of a call to something higher than benefit, success or power. For them, this is often associated with religious experience, but the principle itself can be formulated more broadly. Freedom requires a horizon within which one can distinguish what elevates a person from what destroys him. Anthropologically, this means that a person is able not only to set goals, but also to evaluate them from the point of view of dignity. He can consciously refuse some opportunities if he understands that their implementation involves the humiliation of another, betrayal of the truth, participation in injustice. Such a refusal in the personalist sense is not a denial of freedom. On the contrary, it is one of its highest forms, because it reveals the superiority of dignity over mere expediency. No less significant is the fact that the ontological and anthropological principles of freedom in French personalism are always thought together with the experience of suffering. A person reveals the depth of his freedom not only when he can choose between several pleasant options, but also when he is faced with the impossibility of changing external circumstances and still maintains

internal loyalty to himself. Western societies of the twentieth century have experienced wars, camps, dictatorships, mass persecutions. It is against this background that French personalists formulate the idea that freedom consists in the way in which a person goes through the inevitable. He can be deprived of rights, the ability to speak freely, move, work. However, even in such conditions, there remains a space for an internal decision: not to agree with lies, not to refuse compassion for others, not to turn into executioners in response to violence. This experience shows that freedom is rooted deeper than any political structure, although without external freedom it can never fully unfold [8-11].

Ultimately, the ontological and anthropological principles of personal freedom in French personalism lead to an important conclusion. A person is not a ready-made entity that can be described and fixed once. He is a vocation, a task, an open process of becoming. His freedom is not an addition to human nature, as an option that can be used or not. It is part of the very structure of personal existence. And that is why any system that tries to make a person completely predictable and transparent, that wants to reduce him to a function or role, inevitably encounters resistance from this inner mystery. French personalists see this not as a defect, but as a dignity. The mystery of the person, his inexhaustibility, his ability to exceed any description every time is the ontological prerequisite of freedom. And anthropologically, this means that education, politics, economics, and culture should be aimed not at breaking this mystery, but at creating conditions in which a person can respond to his or her own calling, that is, become free in the true, not in the formal sense.

In French personalism, the freedom of the individual is never confined within the limits of purely psychological autonomy or legal status. It is connected with a deeper spiritual dynamic in which a person is faced with the question of the meaning of his own existence. For Emmanuel Mounier and authors close to him, the individual is not just a subject of choice between different behavioral options. He is a being who is able to ask himself the question of what is worth living for, what it means to be true to himself, what is more important than his own comfort and fear. In this spiritual aspect, freedom appears as a response to a call that is not reduced to the demands of society or to inner desires. A person feels that there is a certain depth, a certain horizon of meaning that goes beyond his own plans, and it is in relation to this horizon that the most important decisions mature.

For a significant part of French personalists, such a horizon is the personal God you. They come from the Christian tradition, but try to comprehend it in the categories of modern philosophy of the person. God here does not appear as an impersonal force or an abstract law. His presence is described as an appeal to human freedom, as a call to love, justice, mercy, truth. In this perspective, freedom is not opposed to faith, as some secular concepts do, but on the contrary, it turns out to be a condition for the possibility of true faith. A person cannot love or trust under coercion. He can only freely respond to the gift he has received. Therefore, personalists emphasize that any religious system that tries to replace this response with mechanical obedience betrays its own essence, since it destroys the very field in which personal freedom is revealed as an act of trust and self-giving. It is important that the spiritually transcendent aspect of freedom does not detach a person from earthly duties, but on the contrary, sharpens the sense of responsibility. If a person perceives his life as a calling that goes beyond the narrowly understood boundaries of success, career, or private happiness, then every choice acquires ethical weight. The decision to tell the truth or to remain silent, to help or to pass by, to accept injustice or to resist are no longer perceived as minor episodes. They become a place of encounter with one's own conscience and with what personalists call a higher meaning. Freedom here means the ability to say yes to the truth, even if this generates conflicts, loss of privileges, misunderstanding of the environment. Such a position is not reduced to moralism. It stems from the conviction that only loyalty to deeper values allows a person not to dissolve in the flow of changing desires and the pressure of mass tendencies. French personalists pay special attention to the inner experience of division that each person experiences. On the one hand, a person strives for goodness, truth, love. On the other hand, the forces of fear, selfishness, laziness, and the desire for convenient compromises are constantly at work in him. It is here that the spiritual aspect of freedom acquires special importance. Freedom means not only the ability to choose an external strategy of behavior, but above all the ability to disagree with one's own internal fall, not to accept as final the version of oneself dictated by inertia or traumatic experience. Personalists speak of the need for constant internal conversion, of a change of perspective, when a person learns to look at himself and others with the eyes of mercy and truth, and not with the eyes of cynicism. In such a vision, freedom is

closely connected with the experience of forgiveness of both oneself and one's neighbor, since without this experience a person is doomed either to pride or to despair [8-9].

If a person perceives himself as a person called to participate in something higher than private interest, he cannot remain indifferent to the way society is organized. Faith in the dignity of each person, reinforced by spiritual experience, inevitably leads to criticism of structures that demean this dignity. Therefore, personalists believe that freedom does not end in the private sphere of prayer or meditation. It must find expression in civic position, in the choice of professional practices, in the attitude towards the poor, towards victims of violence, towards marginalized groups. The spiritual aspect of freedom does not exempt a person from earthly responsibility. It deprives him of the last excuse for inaction, since it reminds him that in the face of a higher meaning, every indifference to the dignity of others is a form of betrayal of his own vocation. It is in this unity of inner experience, transcendent horizon, and practical responsibility that French personalism reveals how it understands the freedom of the individual in its spiritual dimension.

### **3. Individual freedom in the dimension of relationships and community in French personalism**

The freedom of the individual in the context of relationships and community in French personalism is revealed as a completely different reality than the isolated autonomy of the individual. For French personalists, the human self does not exist in a vacuum, it is from the very beginning turned towards the you. The person is born, formed and matures in relationships, in the experience of acceptance and rejection, in the encounter with another freedom that calls for a response. Therefore, freedom cannot be understood as a private zone where a person does whatever he wants, as long as he does not violate formal rules. The freedom of the individual in this tradition means the ability to enter into a genuine dialogue, into reciprocity, where the other is not a means or decoration for one's own self-affirmation. Where the other is perceived only as an instrument of benefit, freedom gradually turns into a veiled form of domination, even if outwardly it looks like complete independence. Personalist thought, on the contrary, emphasizes that true freedom lies in openness to the other, in the willingness to hear his pain, arguments, doubts, in the ability to change one's own decisions

in the light of the common good. In relationships between individuals, French personalists see a special space where freedom either flourishes or is distorted. In friendship, love, family ties, professional cooperation, a person learns to go beyond his own self-sufficiency. A relationship built on mutual respect, trust, loyalty helps a person to break out of the vicious circle of egocentrism. A person discovers that his freedom does not diminish when he takes on responsibilities towards another, on the contrary, it acquires depth, since the choice is guided by love, devotion, care. On the other hand, relationships built on domination, manipulation, use generate internal contradictions. He who suppresses the freedom of another gradually loses his own freedom, becomes a hostage to his own need for control. Therefore, in the personalist perspective, freedom in relationships never means the right to power over others, it means the willingness to share with others the burden of responsibility, the risk of sincerity, the ability to be misunderstood and still remain faithful to the chosen path. In relation to the community, French personalism tries to overcome the false alternative between individualism and collectivism. On the one hand, personalists criticize the model of society where everyone lives as if only his interests exist, where freedom is identified with the maximum expansion of the private comfort zone. Such a model destroys the possibility of true solidarity, turns other people into competitors or service personnel. On the other hand, they just as resolutely reject collectivist systems in which the individual dissolves in the mass, where the name, face, history of a person weigh nothing compared to an abstract class, race, nation or state. In this system, freedom is proclaimed a dangerous luxury, and devotion to the community is identified with the readiness to submit to any decision from above. Personalists offer a different vision of the community as a space of complicity, where everyone has an inherent dignity, and the common good does not absorb the personal, but is born from the responsible contribution of many individuals who are able to speak and listen. For the French personalists, the freedom of the individual within the community also has a clearly expressed political and social character. They wrote their texts at a time when totalitarian regimes tried to finally subordinate the person to the state, and the market and mass culture increasingly turned the person into an object of manipulation. In this context, freedom means not only the right to express one's opinion, but above all the inner courage to disagree with injustice, not to remain silent in the face of lies,

not to participate in the humiliation of others. A person who recognizes his own dignity and the dignity of his neighbor cannot indifferently observe how social structures destroy people's lives, imposing on them the role of cogs in a faceless machine. Therefore, freedom in the community is understood as active citizenship, as a willingness to participate in changing institutions, in defending those who have been deprived of a voice, in creating forms of collective life where each person can reveal his potential without fear of being sacrificed to political or economic interests (Table 3).

French personalists associate a separate dimension of freedom in relationships and community with the practice of dialogue. For them, dialogue is not just an exchange of arguments, but a meeting of two or more freedoms that are ready not only to convince, but also to change. In a true dialogue, a person does not give up their own beliefs, but recognizes that their vision is incomplete and that another can become a source of new understanding. This approach is the opposite of monological power, where one party only broadcasts its decision, and the others are assigned the role of listeners. In relationships between people, in community life, and in political processes, dialogue becomes a criterion for the health of freedom. Where dialogue is replaced by propaganda, information noise, and manipulation of fears, freedom gradually narrows to reactions to external stimuli. Where dialogue is supported as a moral norm and as a style of thinking, freedom grows because people learn to think together, to search for a common meaning that does not destroy, but preserves difference. Ultimately, the freedom of the individual in the context of relationships and community in French personalism appears as a dynamic process of mutual creation. The individual shapes the community in which he lives, through his actions, initiatives, acts of solidarity or indifference. The community, in turn, either supports freedom, creating space for responsible speech and action, or stifles it, introducing a cult of power, success, and conformism. Personalists emphasize that it is impossible to have a worthy community without free and responsible individuals, just as it is difficult to maintain mature freedom in an environment dominated by lies, violence, and cynicism. Therefore, the task of philosophical analysis and practical action becomes the search for such forms of communal life that help the individual mature, support his inner truthfulness, and at the same time require him to participate in the fate of others. In this perspective, freedom is no longer a private privilege; it

becomes a common cause, a fragile and yet powerful good that can only be preserved when people learn to see others not as a threat, but as a participant in shared responsibility for the human world (Table 4).

Table 3

**Freedom in interpersonal relationships**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Dialogue and recognition	In French personalism dialogue is the privileged place where freedom becomes visible. When two persons meet in truth, each recognizes the other as a subject with its own interior world and destiny. Freedom here means the ability to speak honestly, to listen without reducing the other to a stereotype and to allow the encounter to change one's own perspective. Manipulation, flattery and calculated silence are seen as failures of freedom because they treat the other as an object to be managed rather than as a partner in mutual growth.
Love and friendship	Love and deep friendship are understood as schools of freedom. At the surface level they can be confused with possession or dependence, but for personalists authentic love increases the freedom of both partners. To love someone is to will that this person becomes more fully herself, not a copy of one's own desires. Freedom in love is therefore the readiness to accept the risk of vulnerability, to remain faithful when feelings fluctuate and to support the other's vocation even when it does not coincide with one's own plans. Such relationships reveal that freedom grows through self gift rather than pure self assertion.
Responsibility in family and work	Everyday contexts such as family life and professional cooperation are concrete arenas where freedom is tested. Promises, contracts and implicit expectations shape the network of obligations. Personalism stresses that accepting responsibility for children, for a spouse or for colleagues does not destroy freedom but gives it a stable form. The person learns to coordinate individual aspirations with the needs of others. Freedom means neither rigid sacrifice that denies personal desires nor selfish pursuit of ambition without regard for relationships. It is the mature ability to negotiate just arrangements and to remain reliable over time.
Forgiveness and reconciliation	Interpersonal relations are inevitably marked by conflict and injury. French personalists consider forgiveness an advanced expression of freedom. When a person forgives, this person refuses to let the past offense define the entire relationship or identity of the offender. Forgiveness does not ignore justice, but it opens a space where a new beginning becomes possible. The decision to forgive cannot be imposed from outside, it is a free act that breaks the cycle of resentment and revenge. In this way freedom is shown not only in the original choice to trust, but also in the later choice to restore trust after it has been broken.

*Source: formed by the author*



Table 4

**Freedom and community in French personalism**

Elements	Extended explanation
Critique of individualism	French personalists argue that a purely individualistic understanding of freedom leads to loneliness, competition and hidden forms of domination. When freedom is defined only as the absence of external limits, the strong tend to extend their sphere of action at the expense of the weak. Community disintegrates into a market of interests where common goods such as trust, solidarity and public justice are neglected. Personalism responds by insisting that the person needs community in order to become truly free, because only in shared projects and mutual recognition can human capacities unfold fully
Critique of collectivism	At the same time personalism rejects collectivist systems in which the individual is completely subordinated to the state, party, class or nation. In such regimes freedom is sacrificed in the name of unity and efficiency. The person is treated as disposable material for grand historical projects. French personalists see in this the betrayal of the very idea of community, because a community that crushes persons destroys its own human foundation. True social order must protect the irreducible dignity and critical voice of each member, even when this voice challenges the majority
Role of intermediate communities	Between the isolated individual and the all powerful state personalists highlight the importance of intermediate communities. These include families, neighborhoods, professional associations, cooperatives, cultural and religious groups. In such settings persons can practice participation, learn to deliberate about common issues and experience effective solidarity. Freedom in this framework means more than the right to vote every few years. It involves ongoing engagement in local and professional life, where people can actually influence decisions and see the consequences of their initiatives
Political citizenship and common good	For French personalists political freedom is inseparable from the idea of common good. A citizen is not only a holder of rights but also a bearer of responsibilities for the quality of public institutions. Freedom here implies the courage to question unjust laws, to resist propaganda and to support reforms that enhance the dignity of all. Personalism proposes a style of citizenship that avoids both passive obedience and destructive cynicism. The free person participates in public life with critical loyalty, ready to cooperate whenever justice is served and ready to dissent when basic human rights are violated

*Source: formed by the author*

The freedom of the individual in the dimension of relationships and community in French personalism is particularly evident through the motif of the encounter. The individual is never a closed atom, he is included from the very beginning in a network of relationships, where the ability to speak, listen, and respond is formed. For Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel and other representatives of this direction of relationships, I-Thou is not a secondary sphere of life, it reveals the very structure of human existence. A person knows himself not only through self-observation, but primarily through the gaze of another, through the experience of acceptance or rejection, through gratitude, insult, forgiveness. In this perspective, freedom becomes an opportunity to say an authentic word to another, without hiding behind the mask of a role, advertising, or socially approved formulations. At the same time, an encounter always contains a risk, since the other turns out to be not an extension of our self, but an independent freedom that may not accept our expectations or confirm our image of ourselves. Therefore, freedom in a relationship implies the courage to remain open, not to curl up in a protective shell of indifference or aggression when contact with another brings pain or disappointment. French personalists especially emphasize that the first space for learning freedom is a small community, primarily a family, a circle of friends, a professional group, a religious or civil community. It is here that a person first encounters the reality that his decisions affect others, change their mood, life plans, and sense of security. In family relationships, freedom cannot be understood as the right to start everything from scratch every time, forgetting about the promises made. He learns to reconcile the spontaneous impulse with the memory of a common history, of wounds that have not yet healed, of seeds of trust that require long-term care. In friendship and professional cooperation, freedom takes the form of loyalty and competence, the ability not to use the trust of another for manipulation, not to build one's own success on the humiliation of the weaker. In a religious or civic community, one learns to see that freedom is revealed in service, not in the unlimited expansion of one's privileges, for true joy arises when personal gifts become a source of strengthening others. At the level of the wider community, French personalism formulates a concept of society where the central value is the individual, not an anonymous collective or an abstract market. Mounier criticizes both state centralism, which absorbs initiative from below, and the uncontrolled game of interests,

where powerful economic actors effectively dictate the conditions of life for millions of people. Personalists speak of the need for a multitude of living intermediate communities that stand between the individual and the state, such as professional associations, new-type unions, local communities, cultural movements. In these structures, individual freedom acquires a concrete form of co-responsibility. The individual ceases to be a mere object of politics and economics; he becomes a subject who influences the rules of communal life through participation, dialogue, criticism, and the creation of alternative practices. If this level of community disappears, the individual finds himself in direct contact either with the cold apparatus of power or with a market that knows no language other than the language of contract. In such a situation, freedom is easily reduced to a choice between products and services, while the individual's voice regarding the meaning and justice of social structures remains unheard [10-11].

A special place in the personalist analysis is occupied by the political dimension of freedom in the community. French personalists have experienced the totalitarian threat, occupation, collaboration, and passivity of a significant part of society. Against this background, freedom is understood not only as the right to vote in elections, but also as the ability to disagree when the law or official ideology contradicts human dignity. They talk about the importance of conscience, which can question the legitimacy of an order, even if it formally complies with legal procedures. Freedom in the political sense means the willingness to testify, to risk being in the minority, to the fact that the truth does not always coincide with the position of the majority or with the interests of the powerful in this world. At the same time, personalists do not romanticize the isolated hero who opposes everyone. They emphasize that the most stable forms of political freedom are born in a network of solidarity, in small groups that support each other, share resources, knowledge, and moral support. This is how a critical community is formed, capable of challenging unjust structures without becoming a new form of oppression. Another important topic concerns the influence of mass culture and modern means of communication on the freedom of the individual in the community. French personalists noticed quite early on that technical progress, which promises greater awareness and freedom of choice, at the same time creates new mechanisms of manipulation. Advertising, standardized entertainment products, the mass

press and later electronic media form a type of consciousness prone to superficial consumption of images and slogans. In such an environment, freedom in relationships is gradually replaced by the ability to quickly switch attention, choose a new stimulus, but not take on long-term responsibility for someone specific. The community breaks up into a crowd of individuals who simultaneously consume the same messages, but do not enter into a deep dialogue with each other. The personalists' response is a call for the formation of centers of critical thinking, for education that teaches reading not only texts but also contexts, for the development of a culture that values not only speed and novelty, but also depth, fidelity, and the ability to see a specific person through statistical indicators and virtual images.

As a result, the freedom of the individual in the dimension of relationships and community in French personalism appears as a joint project that can never be considered completed. It requires continuous work on oneself, on the quality of dialogue, on the forms of participation in common life. It requires both inner courage and solidarity support, because an individual easily breaks under the pressure of fear, propaganda, the temptation of convenient adaptation. Personalists show that freedom either grows together with others, or is gradually lost in a lonely struggle with the impersonal forces of the market, bureaucracy, and technology. Therefore, they see the true criterion of the maturity of a community in whether it is able to protect and support the freedom of its weakest members, whether it knows how to hear those who are easier to ignore. In such a perspective, freedom appears not as the private property of the strong, but as a fragile gift for which everyone bears mutual responsibility, and this is what makes the personalist approach especially relevant for the modern world, where issues of dignity and shared responsibility are becoming increasingly acute.

#### **4. The historical and political context of individual freedom in French personalism**

French personalism was born in a very tense historical context of the twentieth century, in the shadow of two world wars, the rise of totalitarian regimes, the crisis of democracies, economic upheavals and mass poverty. For Emmanuel Mounier and his associates, the question of individual freedom is not a subject of abstract speculation, it arises as a response to the

real experience of humiliation, fear, powerlessness before the state machines of violence. They see how ideologies that promise liberation, in practice, deprive a person of his own voice, turn him into an obedient instrument of the apparatus of power. That is why their texts constantly contain the motif of resistance to impersonal forces that try to finally subordinate a person. Freedom in such a context takes on the character of a moral testimony, a readiness to maintain fidelity to dignity even when the majority bows to force and the laws legitimize injustice. In the political sphere, French personalists criticize both the weakness of interwar liberal democracies and the rigidity of totalitarian systems. They believe that formal freedoms in themselves do not guarantee the protection of the individual if economic and social structures reproduce deep inequality, generate a sense of powerlessness and alienation. A person living in conditions of constant instability, unemployment, fear for tomorrow easily becomes a victim of propaganda that offers simple answers and promises a firm hand. Therefore, personalists emphasize that personal freedom requires not only legal guarantees, but also minimal conditions of justice that allow a person to feel not only an object of state policy, but a true subject of history. Freedom in this sense implies access to participation in decision-making, the opportunity to influence the forms of common life, and not just observe them from the sidelines (Table 5).

French personalists raise the question of the responsibility of intellectuals and Christian communities in situations of political crises with particular urgency. They see how often religious or cultural environments adapt to regimes that degrade human dignity, justify violence, and remain silent in the face of injustice. In response, personalists create an image of an engaged person who does not hide in private spirituality, but brings his faith and beliefs into the space of public action. Freedom for them means not only the right to internal choice, but also the duty to bear witness to the truth in the public space, even if this is associated with the risk of losing status, freedoms, and security. Such a position is not a romantic heroization of the victim; it stems from the conviction that without personal courage in the face of evil, no institutional mechanisms are capable of preserving the dignity of the human community.

Table 5

**Contemporary challenges to personalist freedom**

Challenges	Characteristics
Mass culture and media	French personalists anticipated problems that have grown even more acute in contemporary media culture. Constant flows of images, slogans and entertainment can weaken the capacity for sustained attention and critical thinking. When tastes and opinions are shaped by anonymous algorithms and marketing strategies, people may confuse immediate emotional reaction with authentic judgment. In such an environment freedom requires intentional practices of distancing, reflection and selective media consumption. The person must learn to ask who benefits from each message and how it affects relationships and values.
Technological and bureaucratic systems	Modern societies are increasingly organized through large technical and administrative systems. These structures bring efficiency and safety, but they can also make individuals feel interchangeable and powerless. Decisions are often justified by reference to procedures, data or expert rules without space for personal initiative. From a personalist standpoint freedom demands that institutions remain open to human judgment, that workers keep some autonomy in how they execute tasks and that persons can appeal to conscience when confronted with inhuman directives. Otherwise systems risk becoming new forms of impersonal domination.
Economic pressures and consumerism	Global economic competition and consumer culture place strong pressures on individuals and communities. Success is frequently measured only by income, productivity and the ability to consume more goods and services. Under such conditions freedom is reduced to the capacity to choose between different products and lifestyles offered by the market. Personalism argues that true freedom requires a different scale of values. Work should be oriented toward meaningful contribution, not only toward profit. Consumption should be subordinated to the cultivation of relationships, creativity and solidarity, rather than becoming an end in itself.
Education and critical formation of persons	One of the most important responses to these challenges is education understood in a personalist way. It is not limited to transfer of information or preparation for the labor market. Its central aim is the formation of persons who can think independently, enter into dialogue, recognize manipulation and act according to conscience. Such education cultivates habits of reflection, empathy and responsibility. It encourages students to engage with history, literature, philosophy and real social issues, so that freedom becomes a lived capacity to choose in favor of truth and justice, not simply the ability to follow preferences shaped by external forces.

*Source: formed by the author*

The attitude towards economic structures and the capitalist logic of the market also becomes an important topic. French personalists criticize both uncontrolled economic liberalism, which leaves man alone with market forces, and planned systems, where the state completely controls the distribution of resources, without taking into account specific individuals and small communities. They emphasize that the freedom of the individual requires a system where the economy serves human development, and not vice versa. This means that work should be considered not only as a means of earning income, but as a space for realizing a vocation, creativity, and solidarity. Where a worker or employee is perceived only as a variable resource, and an enterprise is focused exclusively on maximizing profit, freedom is gradually narrowed to the right to change employers within the same impersonal logic. Personalists, on the other hand, dream of an economic system where the individual and the community become the true addressees and co-creators of economic policy. Thus, the historical and political context of French personalism reveals another important feature of their understanding of individual freedom. They see that modern forms of power often operate not through open violence, but through subtle mechanisms of consciousness formation, through education, media, and mass culture. Freedom in such a world requires not only legal protection, but also the ability to think critically, to recognize hidden forms of manipulation, to resist soft forms of totalitarianism that do not physically destroy people, but teach them to think according to given schemes. Therefore, personalists attach great importance to education, the development of a culture of dialogue, and the support of small communities where genuine discussion is still possible, and not just the repetition of ready-made formulas. It is in these historical and political circumstances that individual freedom appears as a fragile but vitally necessary good that requires both inner courage and common concern.

### 5. Conclusions

Summing up the consideration of individual freedom in the philosophy of French personalists, we can say that this tradition offers a holistic vision of man, which refuses simplifications and one-dimensional schemes. The person appears as the inner center of conscious life, which is not reduced to either biological individuality or a functional role in society.

His freedom is rooted in the very structure of being, in the ability to start something new, not to be limited by what is given by natural inclinations, social conditions or psychological mechanisms. French personalists, relying on the experience of dramatic events of the twentieth century, argue that freedom is not a luxury for peaceful and well-fed times. It is a condition for preserving the human dimension of existence where a person is pressured by the impersonal forces of the state machine, economic structures, and mass culture. That is why, in the personalist sense, freedom is not an arbitrary whim, it is a response to the call of dignity.

From an ontological and anthropological point of view, freedom in French personalism is a process, not a given. A person is not born a mature person, he becomes one as he learns to be responsible to himself and to others. In this process, an important place is occupied by the internal struggle with one's own fear, inertia, the habit of hiding behind the masks of roles, behind the opinion of the majority, behind convenient ideologies. French personalists emphasize that freedom requires spiritual work, reflection, the ability to admit mistakes, and return to the deep core of one's own self. They emphasize the inexhaustibility of the person, its fundamental irreducibility to any scheme, seeing this as the ontological prerequisite of freedom. This approach allows one to avoid both biological determinism and the naive belief that it is enough to proclaim the right to choose and a person will automatically become free. In the dimension of relationships and community, French personalism shows that freedom cannot be understood as isolated autonomy. The human self is always turned towards you, it is formed in the encounter with another free person. It is in relationships of friendship, love, cooperation, solidarity that a person learns to go beyond egocentrism, discovers that his freedom does not decrease when he takes responsibility for another, but on the contrary deepens. Personalists consistently criticize both individualistic liberalism, which transforms freedom into the right to disregard others, and collectivism, which dissolves the individual in the mass. They propose a vision of the community as a space of complicity, where the common good does not destroy uniqueness, but is born from the responsible contribution of many individuals. Freedom in relationships then appears as the art of dialogue, the ability to hear, respond, change, without betraying the dignity of either one's own or that of others. The historical and political context of the formation of French personalism gives this teaching



special sharpness. The experience of war, totalitarianism, and social crisis has shown how easily a person can become a cog in a machine of violence, how dangerous the temptation is to shift responsibility to a system, a leader, or an ideology. In this context, freedom is understood as the ability to morally resist, as the willingness to disagree with injustice, even when it is supported by the law, the majority, or authorities. Personalists put forward the requirement of engagement, when philosophy, faith, and culture are not locked in the private sphere but come out into the public space, becoming a criterion for evaluating political and economic decisions. They emphasize that without a certain minimum of social justice, without living middle communities, without the possibility of real participation in the affairs of society, freedom easily degenerates into a formality, into the right to choose between several options for the same subordination. The individual, relationships, community, historical context, spiritual horizon of meaning mutually permeate each other. Freedom requires inner depth, the ability to self-knowledge, but it also requires dialogue and solidarity, and social structures that do not stifle initiative, but support it. French personalists leave behind a model of thinking in which there is no place for either the cynical assertion that everything is determined by the power of structure, or the naive belief that everyone can be free only by the power of individual will. They show that freedom is a fragile but necessary node where ontology, anthropology, ethics, politics, and spiritual experience intersect. That is why their approach remains relevant, as it helps to see in contemporary discussions about human rights, democracy, and social justice not only a game of interests, but a struggle to ensure that the human person is not sacrificed to any system, no matter how effective and justified it may seem.

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