We Are Who We Were: A Case for Understanding History through the Lens of Personhood

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Presidential Address

I: Charleston, South Carolina

On June 17, 2015, a young man walked into a prayer service at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina and opened fire slaying nine people. The murders, we found out, were explicitly racially motivated. "I have to do it," the gunman was quoted as saying before he fired. "You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go" (Ellis). Across the country communities confronted the horror of these events with the question: "what kind of *person* could do such a thing?" In the aftermath of the attack, journalist began to uncover photos of the shooter posing with the Confederate battle flag and making claims about starting another Civil War. Quickly the confusion and hurt over the attack turned into outrage about the history and values represented by the Confederate battle flag. Newspapers and websites were filled with debate about the flag and its history.[1] Many saw the celebration of the Confederate battle flag, especially the fact that it was (and is) still flown over many state capital buildings, as a reminder and glorification of America's cruel racial history. Defenders, on the other hand, held (and still hold) the old position that the confederate flag is a Celebration of southern heritage, not a declaration of hate.

Despite the contentious nature of the disagreement, both sides seemed to agree that it was the *history* of what the flag represented that was the important issue. Both sides of the debate over the history of the Confederate flag agreed on two implicit premises: 1) that history is a defining feature of a community and its members, and 2) that history can be morally evaluated. The murders in Charleston

are an extreme case that demonstrates that a person's relationship with a specific historical narrative is one of the main determining factors of the values, and thus actions, that constitute personhood and the morality of a community. While this might seem like a fairly innocuous insight, when the actions of a person lead to killing, mutilation, and enslavement of other persons, the relationship between personhood and the moral effects of history is certainly worth exploring.

The tragedy in Charleston presents a case study of a more general philosophical idea: History forms and informs our thought and values by showing how the past is revelatory of the present and the possibilities available to the future. It reveals how those values both create and embed the person in moral communities. Our personal and communal values are informed by and infused with history. To the extent that being a person involves acting in the world as a valuing creature, all of our moments are full of and trained by our history. By turning to our own histories, we can have a richer understanding about *why* we value *what* we value. That is, by looking to the history of a community we can ask not only why we think something is good or just, but also whether or not we *ought* to think that way.[2]

I contend that the ability to think and act within a narrative historical framework is a defining characteristic of personhood. While many approaches to the philosophical position called personalism make a similar argument, by emphasizing the dialogical relationship between personhood and history the hope is to open many new and fruitful veins for analysis. Exploring the historical dimensions of personhood and the personal dimensions of history illuminates three key points: First, history is a key to understanding the temporal structure of personhood. Second, the historical nature of a person's relationship to their communities is fundamental. Any being that operates within a history will likely understand themselves as a part of a community, though not reducible to that community. And finally, drawing on the previous points we have a tool for the evaluation of the moral dimensions of the study of history.

Today I aim to accomplish three things. First, I want to discuss, in broad strokes, the philosophical position known as personalism. Personalism, as I will try to demonstrate is a philosophy of relationships that avoids the reification implicit in both collectivism and individualism. It provides groundwork for understanding a person's deep relationship to their communities and vice versa. Next, I will explore the narrative function of history in understanding the temporal dimensions of personhood. Through an analysis of history, we can both understand and respond to the legacy of our inheritance as members of the moral community. Third, examining the importance of history to community and persons leads to an analysis of the relationship historical between narrative and moral values. It is through influence of narrative structures that we can judge a given history as uplifting or diminishing, good or bad, helpful or unhelpful.

II: Why Personalism? Which Personalism?

As a philosophical approach, personalism is uniquely situated to assess the relationships between history, community, and personhood and provides the groundwork for the development of a moral evaluation of values expressed and perpetuated by a community. Personalism is an insightful and powerful philosophy providing the groundwork of many of the important social and political movements such as the American Civil Rights movement. Sadly, personalism does not currently have a celebrated or influential place in much academic work. (I confess that one of my goals today is to not only explore some of the more important relations between personhood and history, but to introduce and/or sell you on personalist philosophy.) Given personalism's historical and social influence and its explanatory power, it is a philosophy that deserves more academic consideration that it usually receives.[3]

Personalism is an approach to philosophical problems that takes the category of "person" as primary. There are many different versions of personalism but in general there are a few points of commonality. As Jonas Mortensen aptly notes, personalism holds to the ideas that, "Humans are relational … humans are beings that engage … humans have inherent dignity" (Mortensen 16).[4] One of personalism's strengths, Joseph Selling notes, is that it relies upon a description of the person that is culturally and historically contextualized (Selling 60ff). As such, personalism is "continuously open to new experience and insight" (61).[5] By giving supreme value to the person, a personalist philosophy fights against any attempt to reduce or objectify the personal subject to an impersonal object. This demand, that all persons be granted the dignity and respect that they deserve, is, perhaps, the greatest contribution of any version of personalism.[6]

Personalism is not usually systemic or doctrinal philosophy, but rather a unique philosophical approach and style. Personalist philosophical positions can be found in the American philosophical tradition, the European tradition, and has a long history in Eastern, particularly Indian, thought. All approaches begin with the premise that it is the person, as a philosophical concept, that is the foundation for ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, politics, and so on. The personalism I am drawing on today is particularly influenced by the French Catholic thinkers Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier. With its emphasis on the fundamental dignity of the person, personalism is often associated with religious traditions. I hold however that there is nothing necessarily religious about personalism. The vision of community and person I am articulating aims to reflect a more secular vison.

Personalist philosophies usually present analysis on two levels. First, it articulates what it means to be a person. Second, it explores some of the consequences of this understanding of personhood. What then is a person? The term "person" is often used to distinguish human life from animal life.[7] This is the

idea that there is something unique or sacred about human life that sets it spiritually apart from other forms of existing. I side with many other personalists that this is a misunderstanding of what we connote by the term "person." Mounier argues:

> There are not, then, stones, trees, animals—and persons, the last being like mobile trees or a more astute kind of animal. The person is not the most marvelous object in the world, nor anything else that we can know from the outside. It is the one reality that we know and that we are at the same time fashioning from within. (Mounier xvii)

"Person" is also often used synonymously with "human." This too is misleading. "Human" refers to a biological reality while "person" refers to a way of being in the world. Most, if not all, humans are persons, but the term "person" is not necessarily for humans alone. Finally, we often think of person as synonymous with "individual" in a Lockean sense. This claim, that the person is ontologically and ethically distinct from all other forms of existence, is also antithetical to most forms of personalism.[8]

I will here use "person" or "personal" as a designation for (1) A type of relationship and (2) The type of existence capable of having these relationships. A person is recognized through at least three relationships: The self-relationship, the other-relationship, and the community-relationship. First, a person is capable of recognizing their own personhood. This subjective awareness is the core of the self-relationship. The ability for subjective self-awareness does not mean that the person is always, or ever, self-aware only that they could be capable of understanding themselves as a person. That is, a person could understand themselves as a being with unique interests, values, and relationships as more than just an object in the world. In their confrontation with their own existing, a person struggles to comprehend the meaning, order, and purpose of that existing. Through this grappling with their own personhood the person finds themselves. We can recognize along with Mounier that a person "is the living activity of self-creation, of communication and of attachment, that grasps and knows itself, in the act, as the *movement of becoming personal*" (Mounier xviii). The inter-subjectivity of the person is necessary but not sufficient for personhood. Indeed, an incomplete view of a person reduces personhood to only this subjectivity. Many philosophies recognize the importance of this self-relationship while failing to recognize that the person, through that the very self-relating of the self to the self, always contains the persons' relationship to others. In the "I" we do not find Cartesian solipsism but the whole universe.

This other-relating is the second personal relationship. A person is one that recognizes the personhood of the other. And in turn, has their personhood recognized by the other. This relationship, the struggle and striving to both recognize and be recognized by others is the key to a personalist ethic. Martin

Buber's distinction between the "I-It" and "I-thou" is a paradigm example of this type of other-relationship. The "I" for Buber is never spoken alone. It is either the "I" that recognizes an object, an "it," or, it is an "I" that recognizes the fully unique subjectivity of the other, the "thou" or "you." Objective relationships of the "I-it" are natural and necessary for functioning in the world. However, when we encounter others through an "I-it" relationship we objectify them and in so doing objectify ourselves.[9] Genuine personal relationships do not reduce others to mere objects but recognize them as full struggling beings. Objectifying others, treating them only as means to our ends, objectifies the self. We can only truly have ourselves as persons when we open ourselves up and encounter others in the deep complexity of their own personhood. The first relationship, self-relating, can only really happen through having personal relationships with others. And the personal relationship can only occur between persons that achieve personhood through their relationships. Depersonalizing others, reducing them to objects; seeing them only as providing a service; or reducing them to their race, social status, religion, etc. causes genuine harm to all. It depersonalizes not only the other, but also the one doing the depersonalizing and diminishes the complexity, possibility, and availability of values in the communities in which those persons live, work, and find meaning.

The third personal relationship is communal. A person is a member of a moral community. And, a moral community is a community of persons existing in relation with each other. This explanation is not, however, as circular as it seems. Rather, a person and the moral community are co-generative: where there is personhood there is community and vice versa. Communities help to form, sustain, and perpetuate persons. Persons in their turn form, sustain, and perpetuate community. It should be noted that while persons grow from communities and communities come from persons, neither is reducible to the other. Both the community and the person are wholes. The community is not simply a collection of individuals but is itself a unique whole with its own goods towards which it is striving. Jacques Maritain notes:

> The common good of the city is neither the mere collection of private goods, nor the proper good of a whole which, like the species with respect to its individuals or the hive with respect to its bees, relates the parts to itself alone and sacrifices them to itself. (Maritain 50-51)

The other two relationships condition and are conditioned by their communities. A community is always a community of persons and a person is always in a relationship to the self and other through the community.

Arguing along these lines most forms of personalism advocate for a communitarian political philosophy. Personalism rejects both atomic individualism that treats the individual as distinct from the community, and

collectivism which reduces the person to the will of the community. Mortensen explains this position:

> Personalism emphasizes the individual's freedom and responsibility for his or her own life while simultaneously stressing how humans can practice this responsibility only in relation to others. Conversely, community may never take precedence over the individual. (Mortensen 17)

While members of a community may contribute towards the common good, each person's ends or goals may be at odds with the communal good. This difference between communal good and individual good helps to account, in part, the actions of those like the Charleston shooter that seem to be acting against the common good.

In so far as personalism understands reality and experience through the category of "person", its fullest application would be to the universe as a whole. Emmanuel Mounier refers to this as the "Personalist universe." The universe as we know it is shot-through with personality and personhood at every level, "The person … is the one reality that we can know ... Present everywhere, it is *given* nowhere" (Mounier xvii). On Mounier's account the person is not added substance or transcendental reality underlying experience but is the embodied activity of becoming personal. This activity occurs through and is expressed in the persons relationships with themselves, others, and their community.

Mounier's understanding of personhood as an act and a process helps to situate a personalist understanding of history and community. Emphasizing the person as a being that has a history is compatible with nearly all approaches to personalism. By showing that a person is a being that operates within history we can make an important distinction between a person and an individual. Any being that works within a history will always understand themselves as a part of a community (but again, not reducible to that community.)[10] The emphasis on the historical dimension helps to explain the important moral features of the person without a necessary appeal to transcendent or religious claims. Membership in a moral community involves the recognition that our ideas, actions, desires, and values are deeply conditioned by our communal relationships. It also involves the realization that while we may be the inheritors of a moral tradition we are not limited to that inheritance. The burden of inheritance is not in mimicking the values and traditions of the community but to challenge and critique those values and in so doing grow the moral community and revitalize the communities' traditions. Unfortunately, growth is not always the result the relation between person and community, as we have seen time and again the result can be depersonalization and diminishing. As such, understanding the role of history in the construction of personal and communal narratives is one of the primary tasks of explicating a personalist ethic.

Finally, as has been demonstrated many times, personalism is a philosophy of action.[11] This is perhaps personalism's greatest strength. Personalism, as I outline it here, is compatible with many other popular philosophies while at the same time providing a point of critique against the most academic and insular philosophies that lead to a depersonalization of the philosophical project.[12] The danger with the depersonalization of philosophy is that it leads to systematic injustice—racism, sexism, and so on—in philosophy as an academic discipline and in the community at large. That is to say, personalism does not just look good on paper, but is a philosophy that encourages and even demands action. "A personalism that was content with speculation about the structure of the personal universe would belie its name," Mounier chides 97).

III: Personalist History

Following the rough sketch of personalism and personal relationships laid out here, it follows that an analysis of the ethical impact of a given historical narrative will emphasize the personal-communal relationship. The approach to history I am presenting pulls from several sources but in particular the work of both Ernst Cassirer and Alasdair MacIntyre. Odd bedfellows perhaps, but their understandings of history are quite compatible, and when taken together are consistent with a personalist philosophy. Cassirer's symbolic forms explain how history is written (literally and metaphorically) and how it functionally informs how the person and community relate. MacIntyre's narrative understanding of history provides criteria by which history can further be evaluated and deepens the ethical implications of a community's history.

An understanding of history as a symbolic form of culture relates the past to the present and the person to the community. In his *An Essay on Man* Ernst Cassirer presents a vision of history as a shared object in the memory of a culture. Following Ortega y Gasset, Cassier notes that history undermines any static view of human nature putting Cassirer's approach to symbolic forms in line with personalist philosophies such as Mounier's. Ortega captures the spirit of this approach when he declares, "*Man, in a word, has no nature; what has is…history.* Expressed differently what nature is to things, history, *res gestate*, is to man" (Ortega y Gasset 217-218).

From the personalist perspective it is clear that history plays an important role in defining community. Mounier goes so far as to call human history "the common destiny of mankind" (Mounier 79). All history is *our* history. Mounier argues, "If persons were no more than free and spontaneous individualities and strictly separate, they would not have *a* history, in the singular, there would only be many incommunicable histories. History exists because humanity is *one*" (ibid.) Of course, the idea of "common destiny" is a bit too fatalistic for personalism. While history is common and communal, its meaning is not made up in advance. History

might tell us who we are, but it never dictates who we must be. It opens up paths and possibilities to the future, but "history can only be the co-creation of free [persons] men, and whatever its structure or its condition may be, freedom has again to take them in hand" (ibid.).

History, then, is an empirical study of past cultures, in an attempt to better understand the self. This is what Cassirer calls the paradox of history. History presents itself as the objective knowledge of the past. But, the act of judgment by the historian means that all history is suffused with subjectivity. History that is too subjective is dangerous and misleading, yet one that is perfectly dispassionate is dead and empty. The historian works in the ground between the empirical and the poetic, bringing her "poetic spirit" to bear on the past, impregnating it with all the possibilities and personalities of her culture. "Poetry is not a mere imitation of nature;" Cassirer writes, "history is not a narration of dead facts and events. History as well as poetry is an organon of our self-knowledge, an indispensable instrument for building up our human universe" (Cassirer 206). History is enlivened and deepened by this dual nature. It provides access to the inner life of the person and at the same time insight into the culture and community of which that person is a part. And, the person is always a unique expression of a moral community and as such has a moral claim upon the whole.

In this tension between what we are, what we will be, and all our present relations, history is revelatory of the temporal structure of personhood. In history, we find the symbolic form of understanding that best represents the person's orientation as both individual and communal. A full account of personhood and community must always have an important place for history, for it is history that best symbolizes the temporal structure of the person. In the mode of the present we have access only to the person as individual. We do not have immediate access to the thoughts and emotions of our fellows.[13] History, on the other hand, is full of the experience of others. We must turn back and remember, so to speak, to have access to those persons, who contribute to our personhood, enrich our present, and add to the possibilities for our future. As such, historical narratives are necessary ground for both other-relationships and communal-relationships by providing access to the moral community in unique and essential ways.

This is the orientation of the person in time. The actions of the present are always taking up the past and moving towards the future. History follows the same pattern; it pulls from the past the entirety of the cultural possibilities it finds there and brings them full-bloom into the present.[14] In history, we find a symbolic form that gives us contact to both axes of the person: the axis of the culturally developed person who finds within herself the world of which she is a part, and the person who is free to critique and address the constraints of her culture. Through history a person both comprehends the source of many of their values and actions and is able to critique and respond to those histories.

IV: Living Traditions

History is one of the means by which a community comes to reflect upon itself, know itself, create and recreate itself. The historian in narrating, composing, and presenting a history suffuses history with personality. History is always personal—to the historian, to the community that bases its values on given historical facts, and to the persons that takes up histories as part of a unifying personal narrative.[15] Since history is essential to the integration and formation of concrete personalities it must be understood and undertaken as a deeply and profoundly ethical activity.

MacIntyre lays out clear lines for the assessment of traditions and histories on ethical lines. He takes the position that "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stores that aspire to truth" (MacIntyre 216). Narrative histories unify the person at three levels: action, personal identity, and community tradition. For MacIntyre all three have "a basically historical character" (212). This historical character is marked by *both* a feeling of unpredictability and teleology, "like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future" (216). MacIntyre's narrative understanding of history is in line with the personalist understanding of history I have presented here.[16]

Passing moral judgment on a person's actions involves understanding the person's intentions. And the key to understanding a person's intentions is found within the framework that makes "those intentions intelligible" (MacIntyre 206). MacIntyre locates this framework in narrative history, "Narrative history … turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions" (208). While intelligibility of action can be found in many contexts, the most familiar type is the conversation. A conversation, to be experienced as a conversation, must be *experienced* as a intelligible whole.[17] All personal relationships are made vital and active in the act of conversation. We converse with ourselves, with others, and with the community. And in those acts the personal relationships grow and thrive or wither and die. MacIntyre asserts, "Conversation, understood widely enough is the form of human transactions in general" (MacIntyre 211).[18]

Narrative history is a form of conversation and manifests at the level of self, community, and setting. To understand the actions of others, to render them intelligible, we must place them in historical contexts. We ask, how does the person understand what they are doing? What is the history of the setting in which they are acting? Any particular action is always understood and placed within these overlapping and nested histories. "Action," MacIntyre observes, "itself has a basically historical character" (MacIntyre 212). In our own lives and actions we are always living out a narrative and explaining our actions in terms of that

narrative. A person here is both actor and author. But, we are never solitary in our acting or creating. Our narratives are always embedded in and overlapping with the narratives of others. Each person's particular narrative history, each person, constrains others and in this struggle the communal narrative history emerges as a whole different from its parts (214) Mounier notes, "If persons were no more than free and spontaneous individualities and strictly separate, they would not have *a* history, in the singular, there would be only so many incommunicable histories. History exists because humanity is one" (Mounier 79). This unity of the community through history informs how we render actions intelligible. Any action then must always be understood within the context of a given history. "An action is a moment in a possible or actual history or in a number of such histories. The notion of a history is as fundamental a notion as the notion of an action. Each requires the other," explains MacIntyre (214).

History is an enacted narrative in which the actors are also the authors. One important consequence of this connection between action in the present and the history that renders the action intelligible is that an understanding of history is essential for an understanding of a value. The seeking of a universal good, whether by person or community, is always in relation to a particular moral inheritance. The person on this account is a unity of relations embedded in multiple nested narratives. In seeking their own good, their own end, the person is attempting to understand what makes them a unique whole. This quest for the good ties together the present, the past, the person, and the moral community. MacIntyre argues, "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is" (219).

The moral life of the person is always wrapped up with the history of the moral community. We are always free to respond to our histories, but any wholesale rejection of history can only stem from a misunderstanding of the relations between person and community. "For the story of my life," MacIntyre observes, "is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself from the past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships" (221). A person, whether they recognize it or not (and whether they want it or not), is part of a tradition. Tradition represents a kind of sustained historical argument. And it is just on this insight that MacIntyre points to where we may lay the groundwork for an ethical evaluation of history and tradition. Traditions may be judged as living or dead. Many philosophies emphasizing tradition, such as Burkean conservatism, tends to suffer from nostalgia at best and often trends towards glorifications of the past aimed at maintaining a status quo in favor of a ruling class. Given what has been established about the relationship between persons, history, and community, MacIntyre rightly rejects this approach arguing, "Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always

dying or dead" (222). Dead traditions and histories no longer operate in the pursuit of those ends that sustain the person and the community. Those, such as the Charleston shooter, operating on the narratives presented by dead traditions, act with little context. They are depersonalized and depersonalize. On the other hand, a living tradition is "historically extended, socially embodies argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (ibid.). A person operating in a living tradition recognizes their actions and values are rooted in a tradition but is not limited to that tradition. Instead, it is in the encounter and critique of tradition that a history remains alive and vital. Membership in a moral community involves the recognition that our ideas, actions, desires, and values are deeply conditioned by our communal relationships. It also involves the important insight that, again, while we may be the inheritors of a moral tradition we are not limited to that inheritance. The burden of inheritance is not in mimicking the values and traditions of the community but to challenge and critique those values and in so doing *grow* the moral community and revitalize the communities' traditions.

In his distinction between living and dead traditions, MacIntyre directly relates history to his understanding of selfhood and community. He is at pains to show that modern ethical theory fails in large part because it operates on an untenable atomistic conception of the self that fails to take into account communal dimensions of personhood.[19] Against this "liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing" MacIntyre argues for "a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative beginning to middle to end" (205). His narrative approach to the self emphasizes the interrelationships of the intentional, social, and historical in a way that eludes more popular modern approaches.

V: Hopeful History

A few things follow from this personalist approach to history. If history is tied up with personhood, and personhood with history, then this analysis points to a tool for understanding and judging the moral effects of different historical narratives (whether living or dead). We also gain insight into the importance of intelligible narratives for the person's relationship with themselves, with others, and with their communities. These relationships are always nested in a setting that is itself historically situated. In so far as persons are both inheritors and co-authors of a particular narrative history and tradition, we can judge that tradition on whether or not it is living or dead and whether not it will benefit and uplift or diminish and wither a moral community. An uplifting tradition is one that opens up possibilities and promotes values that support personal relationships. Here I add to MacIntyre's analysis. It is not enough that a history or tradition be living, but, following the integral relationship between history and personhood, we can add the dimension of moral analysis to history. A living tradition that actively engages in

depersonalization of members of a moral community is entirely possible. Such a tradition would be "vital" in MacIntyre's sense while depersonalizing and objectifying from the stance of the person-other relationship. An "immoral" or "diminishing" history of this sort distorts and harms moral communities. It depersonalizes the community, depersonalizes members of the community, and teaches the other members of the community to depersonalize others.

A history that distorts values, distorts persons and communities. We have seen one example of this with the history represented by the Confederate flag. The current understanding of the history behind the legacy of the Confederacy is influenced by what historian's call the "Lost Cause Narrative" which emerged as a dominate historical explanation of the motivations of the Confederate States of America shortly after the end of the Civil War. The Lost Cause narrative sanctified the actions of the Confederate soldier while distorting the remembrance of the role of slavery in the American south and supporting the dehumanization and depersonalization of African Americans.[20] This is but one example of an understanding of history that is, on this personalist account, morally corrupting. Any history that actively contributes to the devaluation of those worthy of dignity and respect, is an undesirable history. Approaching history through personalism gives us a tool for the evaluation of the moral dimensions of the study of history and way of understanding the growth and perpetuation of communal values.

Intentional or not, historical scholarship can influence the growth of persons and communities that advocate for destructive and impersonal values. The Charleston shooter operating on dehumanizing values expressed in the Lost Cause historical narrative is an example of just this kind of dangerous relationship between personhood and history. The relationship between person and history is an important dimension to historical work that must be navigated by the historian. As historians bring the past into the present, they can reshape how persons and communities relate to their own present and act into the future. The challenge here is this: How does the historian approach history with the ethical caution it deserves? Any answer to this must take into account at least two points. First, as we have noted, in order to properly do their work historians must personalize history. An act of critical self-reflection is necessary on part of the historian to become aware of the values advocated in a given history. Second, the work of the historian is further complicated by the fact that we cannot fully predict how ideas and symbols will manifest in action. I suggest that a personalist ethic concerned with value and value-structures would be the most efficacious when tackling these difficulties.

A personalist approach to history deepens our understanding of personhood and the structure and function of history, disclosing important avenues for the moral evaluation of historical narrative traditions. On the latter point this project presents not only a theoretical tool but suggests forms of future community engagement. The philosophical narrative I have presented here is, of course, part

of a larger project to explore the conditions in which persons and communities grow and flourish. History is an important part of this larger analysis. Saying that some history is bad for persons is like saying that some soil is bad for certain plants. Not just any soil, not just any history, will do. History, when it is vital, personal, and morally uplifting opens up possibilities for creativity and action. As Mounier puts it, "the personal life is that of freedom and self-surpassing, not of accumulation and repetition … in the heaping-up of knowledge, but in a deep transformation of the subject, enabling him to fulfill ever new possibilities in response to ever-renewed calls from within" (Mounier 118) Good history does more than explain the past; it enables and encourages creative engagement in the present—a bold grasping towards the future.

In the early morning of July 27, 2015, Brittany "Bree" Newsome scaled a 30-foot flagpole outside of the Columbia, South Carolina State House and removed the Confederate battle flag.[21] In a statement released to the press Newsome explained her actions, "We removed the flag today because we can't wait any longer. We can't continue like this another day. It's time for a new chapter where we are sincere about dismantling white supremacy and building toward true racial justice and equality" (Holley and Brown). Again we can ask, "What kind of *person* would do such a thing?" The answer now seems clearer—a person fully and completely enmeshed and acting in a positive living historical tradition; a person that understands and appreciates that their own personhood is shot-through with history. Newsome's bravery echoes MacIntyre's assertions about living traditions, "an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present" (MacIntyre 223). Newsome, unlike the murders to which she was responding, was acting in a vital living history—a history full of hope.

NOTES

1. For example see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Take Down the Confederate Flag—Now."
2. This latter evaluation of the past can only occur from the vantage point of the historian who witnesses the past, reports it, and most importantly judges it.
3. See, for example, David Brooks,s "Personalism: The Philosophy We Need." https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/opinion/personalism-philosophy-collectivism-fragmentation.html
4. Thus the study of personalism is the study of communities with an eye towards striving for a communal ideal. This striving for an ideal is both intuitively recognized and empirically observed. We are driven in our actions and political discussions by some idea of the good (whether or not that ideal is justified is another matter). The field of political science alone is enough to empirically justify the idea that the individual is always, at some important level a communal and hence personal creature.
5. While there are many different forms of personalism this general notion seems to hold true across most philosophies that hold "personality" or "personhood" as the keystone to understanding.

6. As such, personalism is opposed to both individualism and collectivism. The former ignores the fundamental relations that constitute the person and the latter makes the person a subject to the will of a society or community. Both approaches ignore what is unique and dignified about being a person.

7. Kant, for instance made this argument

8. I also reject the idea that corporations are persons. Though I do recognize that the version of personalism is actually more compatible with corporate personhood than the atomic theory of individuality. But the legality of corporate persons is never applied consistently with the notion of personhood.

9. See Buber's *I and Thou*.

10. An "atomic" individual would on this analysis be ahistorical.

11. Indeed, the driving theological and philosophical ground for the American Civil Rights movement is grounded in Martin Luther King Jr's personalist philosophy.

12. The problem with the depersonalization of philosophy is that it leads to systematic injustice—racism, sexism, and so on—in philosophy as an academic discipline and to society at large. Most of American culture may ignore philosophy but anyone with a passing knowledge of philosophy and history knows that despite this anti-intellectualism philosophical thought, both in and out of the academy, is powerfully influential in the long run.

13. This is not to say that there is no richness in the immediate purity of the present. Poetry and art offer access to those unspoken depths and emotions, to those pure forms of self-experience that pervade and give shape to the present.

14. In history the person and the community are simultaneous and one.

15. Since history is a fairly new symbolic form there are other forms of narration, in particular, the myth that also provide narrative unity for the person. While space does not permit here, I think that fruitful work could be done exploring blurring of myth and history in personal narratives.

16. While MacIntyre is not usually understood to be part of the personalist tradition his narrative understanding of history and personal identity both illustrates the relationship between person and history I wish to emphasize and sets the groundwork for an ethical evaluation of history and tradition. Some work on the relationship MacIntyre in the personalist tradition: Susan Moyn, "Personalism, Community, and the Origins of Human Rights," Deborah Wallace, "Jacques Maritain and Alasdair MacIntyre: The Person, the Common Good and Human Rights," and Domenec Mele, "Integrating Personalism into Virture-based Business Ethics: The Personalist and the Common Good Principle."

17. MacIntyre wisely draws a distinction between intelligibility and understanding. One does not have to understand the what an overheard conversation is about to recognize it as an intelligible conversation. For instance you don't need to know a foreign language to understand that you are witnessing an argument.

18. A further extrapolation of the importance and function of the conversation can be found in the work of G.H. Mead who grounds all sociality in what he calls the "conversation of gestures."

19. This tendency to separate persons, and the different stages of their lives, into distinct units is an obstacle encountered by both analytic philosophy and existentialism.

20. David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* provides an excellent example.

21. A version of the Confederate Battle flag had been flown there since 1961.

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