

## SHAPING THE SOCIO-LEGAL NOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN FRENCH PERSONALISM

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The concept of "sustainable development" is one of the most important issues in the contemporary political and legal discourse, especially in the context of international environmental protection standards, having an immense influence on national regulations. Its ideological background seems to be quite rich. Apart from broadly defined environmentalism, the concepts of sustainable development also draw on numerous contemporary theories of human development, particularly on the ideas of humanistic development, present in the Catholic social teaching since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), including pope John Paul II.

This idea of humanistic development has been widely inspired by the views of representatives of French Christian personalism, such as the well-known philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), publicist and social activist, and, last but not least, an original theologian and Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). This article aims to present a human and economic development through the prism of those French personalists' thought.

Концепція «сталого розвитку» є однією з найважливіших проблем сучасного політичного та юридичного дискурсу, особливо в контексті міжнародних стандартів охорони навколишнього середовища, що значно впливає на національне законодавство. Його ідеологічний фон здається досить багатим. Крім широко визначеного екологічного підходу, концепції сталого розвитку також засновані на численних сучасних теоріях людського розвитку, зокрема на ідеях гуманістичного розвитку, представлених в католицькому соціальному вченні з часів Другого Ватиканського собору (1962–1965), включаючи папу Іоана Павла II.

Ця ідея гуманістичного розвитку широко натхнена думками представників французького християнського персоналізму, таких як Жак Марітен (1882–1973), Еммануель Муньє (1905–1950), П'єр Тейяр де Шарден (1881–1955). Ця стаття покликана показати розвиток людини і економіки через призму думки французьких персоналістів.

Концепция «устойчивого развития» является одним из важнейших вопросов современного политического и юридического дискурса, особенно в контексте международных стандартов охраны окружающей среды, оказывающих огромное влияние на национальное законодательство. Его идеологический фон кажется довольно богатым. Помимо широко определенного экологического подхода, концепции устойчивого развития также основаны на многочисленных современных теориях человеческого развития, в частности на идеях гуманистического развития, представленных в католическом социальном учении со времен Второго Ватиканского собора (1962–1965), включая папу Иоанна Павла II.

Эта идея гуманистического развития широко воодушевлена мнениями представителей французского христианского персонализма, таких как Жак Маритен (1882–1973), Эммануэль Мунье (1905–1950), Пьер Тейяр де Шарден (1881–1955). Эта статья призвана показать развитие человека и экономики через призму мысли французских персоналистов.

**Key words:** sustainable development, human development, French personalism, economy, environment Maritain, Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of "sustainable development" is one of the most important issues in the contemporary political and legal discourse, especially in the context of international environmental protection standards, having an immense influence on national regulations. In general sense, sustainable development means, that environment should be perceived from the perspective of the socio-economic process and, on the other hand, the development should be perceived from the environmental point of view, also because of the requirements stemming from

the principle of intra and inter-generational equity [1]. Its ideological background seems to be quite rich [2]. First of all, its roots come from broadly defined environmentalism. In XIX century economy there appeared already an issue of barriers of economic development. Growing economy started to devastate environment and brought a threat to future generations [3]. Apart from ecological thought concepts of sustainable development also draw on numerous contemporary theories of human development, particularly on the ideas of humanistic development, present in the Catholic social teaching since the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965), including pope John Paul II [4]. It has been widely inspired by the views of representatives of French Christian personalism [5], not always strictly orthodox Catholic, such as the well-known philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), publicist and social activist, and, last but not least, an original theologian and Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Personalism is generally defined as a philosophical school of thought based on the general affirmation of the centrality of the person. It posits ultimate reality and value in personhood – human as well as (at least for French personalists) divine. It emphasizes the significance, uniqueness and inviolability of the person, as well as the person's essentially relational or communitarian dimension [6]. This article aims to present a human and economic development through the prism of those French personalists' thought.

## **2. Jacques Maritain**

In the center of Maritain's thought there is a fundamental distinction between spiritual and material side of a human being, which he, in general sense, shares with Saint Thomas Aquinas [7]. As "individuals" people are related to biological and social order. Mankind is, in this aspect, "only a fragment of matter, a part of this universe, distinct, no doubt, but a part, a point of that immense network of forces and influences, physical and cosmic, vegetative and animal, ethnic, atavistic, hereditary, economic and historic, to whose laws we are subject" [8]. Nevertheless, they are persons equally, which means an autonomous being, which has an intellectual nature and are able to be free in the sense of ability of leading one's own actions. Maritain wrote that "the word *person* is reserved for substances which possess that divine thing, the spirit, and are in consequence, each by itself, a world above the whole bodily order, a spiritual and moral world, which strictly speaking is not a part of this universe <...>" and he continued "The word *person* is reserved for substances which, choosing their end, are capable of themselves deciding on the means and of introducing series of new events into the universe by their liberty" [9]. Distinction presented above is essential to properly establish relation between people and a political community. Human beings as "individuals" are subordinate to the society and they participate in the common good. One "exists for his city, and ought at need to sacrifice his life for it, as for instance in a just war" and reciprocally, "the city exists for him, to wit, for the advancement of the moral and spiritual life and the access to divine goods" [10]. The political community is, in Maritain's view, subsidiary to the person and her full development as a free spiritual being: it aims to "the development of the environmental conditions that bring the people to a level of material, intellectual and moral life that corresponds to wellbeing and peace for everyone in such a way that every person is positively assisted in the continuing conquest of a complete personal life and spiritual freedom" [11]. In these terms, man is not a "lonely island", separating himself from other people. It is the duty of everyone to co-pursue the goals of the communities to which one belongs.

On the other hand – the "person" is a "whole", an object of dignity and should always be a goal of action – never should be a means to achieve particular goals [12]. A notion of dignity, fundamental both for the personalism as a philosophy and for contemporary theories of human rights, focuses on each person's incomparability and uniqueness [13]. French philosopher perceived the human being as a universe with the spiritual nature, having freedom of choice and being thus an entity independent to the rest of nature. Neither the state nor the nature could have access to that "universe" without his permission and even the Creator respects his freedom [14]. Political community exists for its members, not the other way around. They participate in their community freely, accepting commitments and obligations on a voluntary basis [15]. The community's duties must never violate human freedom. Maritain took in this context Saint Thomas' principle, that man is not ordained to political society as a whole and concerning all that is in him [16]. In other words, person never should be completely annexed to the social whole in the way that one will no longer exist except for the city [17].

Concept of human dignity and autonomy presented above, influences directly a perception of widely defined development. Thus, each kind of progress: economic, technical or social, ought to focus on human being. In the opinion of the French philosopher, it is not the political community that will lead a person to spiritual perfection full of autonomous freedom, however, because of the terrestrial goal itself, the political community is destined to develop environmental conditions that will lead the human community to such level of material, intellectual and moral life, which would be proper to the common good and peace. Thanks to that every person will get an adequate assistance to gradually acquire a life of person and spiritual freedom [18].

## **3. Emmanuel Mounier**

Human development was also particularly emphasized by Emmanuel Mounier. A point of departure of his philosophy was a conviction that the continuing economic and political crises of the second quarter of the twentieth century had "reached a turning point", a crisis of civilization, resulting in a devaluation of the human being [19]. French personalist especially criticized a so called "bourgeois" capitalism, which, in his view, was the result of the growing individualization of society since the Renaissance, which gradually perverted spiritual values. Human beings without love or meaning, solely driven by a desire for property and comfort, were the consequence [20]. Mounier blames individualistic capitalism for the worst evils: dehumanization of the econ-

omy by accepting the dominance of the profit motive and disrespect towards the dignity of the worker. The individualist “bourgeois” mentality corrupts public and social life by promoting self-interest in all spheres of human activity and “caused Western man to lose contact with God, nature, and mankind” [21]. Philosopher was convinced, that human needs in modern societies was subordinated to the “primacy of economics”, the mechanisms of the market, profit, and production since the eighteenth century. Capitalism’s inherent feature would be “to ignore the person and to organize itself for a single quantitative and impersonal goal, profit” [22].

As an answer to this modern crisis of humanity, Emmanuel Mounier saw a necessity of a social revolution, “new Renaissance” rejecting materialist and determinist theories of human action [23]. He underlined a concept of free and responsible human being. His own theory of action was based on three pillars: without freedom, action is stuck in fatalism; isolated, action is fruitless in light of the pursuit of truth and justice; without a value pattern, action is directionless, resulting in arbitrariness. Therefore, action presupposes freedom, cooperation and a horizon of values if it is to avoid insignificance [24]. What is more, leader of *Esprit* drew attention to the need for constant commitment, dynamism and creative approach to the world. Thanks to the spiritual sphere, intelligence and freedom that belongs to every man, he can both develop himself and shape the world around him. One should strive for perfection, transgress himself [25]. Personhood is essentially characterized by the positive liberty to discover and pursue one’s own vocation in life [26].

In the Mounier’s personalism theory several types of human action are distinguished, including economic one, which is to shape the world [27]. He reckoned, that this kind of activity could not provide satisfaction if one could not find dignity, friendship and higher purpose in one’s labour. Ethics must be present also in the economic sphere and relationships between men cannot be reduced to technical grounds [28]. Technology should therefore have only a servile role for the human person. Active action, often boiling down to work is a human right and duty, but it must be inclined to the good of the whole environment – its life and development. Human activity has to be accompanied also with respect for natural rights [29].

Personalist economics subordinate economics to persons, being focused on labor, not capital. It rests on the fact that human work is the one and only agent that is productive in economic activity [30]. Mounier claims, that labor is a core human activity that partly completes the person: “But in order that labor may thus develop its human riches without avenging itself upon the integral nature of man or of society, it is indispensable that the conditions which surround it be human <...> [31]”.

French philosopher saw the state as the only actor providing success of his new, human-centered economy. The personalist state will encourage personal initiative and various types of social cooperation, promoting autonomous bodies in matters of business and education [32].

#### **4. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**

An original theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is well known for trying to adapt the theory of evolution to the Catholic Church teaching by settling the human being in the context of nature. Teilhard recognized the importance of bringing the Church into the modern world, and approached evolution as a way of providing ontological meaning for Christianity, particularly creation theology. For Teilhard, evolution was “the natural landscape where the history of salvation is situated” [33]. He viewed it as a process that leads to increasing complexity. From the cell to the thinking animal, a process of psychical concentration leads to greater consciousness [34]. The emergence of Homo sapiens marks the beginning of a new age, as the power acquired by consciousness to turn in upon itself raises humankind to a new sphere. French Jesuit describes humankind as evolution becoming conscious of itself [35].

Evolution did not stop after the creation of human being. French personalist claimed that the whole reality is dynamic and evolutionary, going from the Alpha point to the Omega point, symbolizing God, with its beginning and the end. The supreme goal of humanity and the world is spiritual unity [36]. In Teilhard’s opinion this “spiritual” development is accompanied with technical one. He was particularly interested in new technologies, which would provide global economy with resources and energy. However, technical development, in his conviction, should aim to both economical and spiritual growth: the technology has no value in itself, but it is supposed to raise humanity to a higher moral level [37].

Progress of humanity will be also visible in economy. Teilhard was convicted about the necessity of global, “supra” economic system [38]. Future global government or a union of governments, will have to cooperate in order to remove wealth inequalities between regions [39]. French personalist emphasized also in his works, that humanity had to realize its commitments towards the universe in different areas, including environment [40].

#### **5. Conclusions**

The analysis of the French personalists’ views leads to some conclusions. Firstly, one can observe in Maritain’s, Mounier’s and Teilhard’s reflection a certain concept of human and social development. In general sense, it claims, that every kind of progress: economical, technological or social ought to focus on the person and its dignity. Secondly, all of these philosophers agree, that human development is only possible and effective in a community and its role, on the other hand, is to support progress of its members. Then, one can notice, that each of those thinkers settled a person in the context of more wide reality: universe, humanity etc. Finally, the French personalists showed above emphasizes activity, dynamism and constant need for commitment of human being, its vocation to change the world in better way.

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