

# Ferdinand Pelikán: The Philosophy of Personality as a Cure for Fictionalism

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## Part One: The “Fictionalism” of Modern Philosophy

I decided to devote my paper to a major figure of Czech philosophy, one of the co-founders of the journal *Ruch filosofický*, Ferdinand Pelikán. Of all his works, we should first mention his 1929 text called *The Reign of Democracy in Philosophy (Vláda demokracie ve filosofii)*.<sup>1</sup> As we shall soon see in this study, Ferdinand Pelikán could very well be taken for an individualist, despite the word “individualism” itself being rarely used in his works. I believe the reason for this elusion is that Pelikán wanted to avoid accusations of radical individualism, like those raised by Masaryk against Stirner.<sup>2</sup> Pelikán thus formulates his individualism rather warily, as he definitely does not want to be taken for an opposing force to Masaryk; that in itself would contradict the idea of the reign of democracy in philosophy.

And it is Pelikán’s attempt at democratisation of philosophy which is, in fact, the undeclared topic of this paper. As I intend to show in the conclusion, the idea itself stems logically from Pelikán’s lifetime work. However, I shall not get ahead of myself now and shall save this explanation for the concluding part of the article. For now, let us turn to Pelikán’s habilitation thesis titled *The Fictionalism of Modern Philosophy, Particularly in Kant and Hume*

1 Pelikán, F., *The Reign of Democracy in Philosophy and Other Essays (Vláda demokracie ve filosofii a jiné essey)*. Praha, Unie 1929.

2 “I take every radical individualism to be folly. Simply because no man, no ‘I’, can ever exist on its own. Stirner’s thought is false in its radicality. Man is not a god. How could he be, if every single one is born into a family and raised by society?! [...] To be only an individual without any relation to other individuals is simply impossible. There is no ‘I’ on its own. Radical individualism fails both morally and theoretically in that it posits the ‘I’ as equal to god.” Masaryk, T. G., *Humanistic Ideals (Ideály humanitní)*. Praha, Domov 1919, p. 30.

(*Fiktionalismus novověké filosofie zvláště u Kanta a Huma*),<sup>3</sup> for it is here, in the concept of fictionalism, that all philosophical work begins.

If we were to say in a simple way what fictionalism means in Pelikán's work, we could safely say that it is a rejection of the "thing-in-itself". In his habilitation thesis, Pelikán describes how modern philosophy progresses and culminates in the works of I. Kant and D. Hume. However, he calls this progression the advancement of fictionalism. According to Pelikán, Kant crowned this whole process by denying man access to the thing-in-itself. Due to this, all post-Kantian philosophy is an expression of decadence and Pelikán proclaims that the time is now ripe for making a stand against fictionalism. This is possible, he says, through a democratisation of philosophical thinking. As the name of this paper suggests, the main method of this process of democratisation will be Pelikán's philosophy of personality.

## Part Two: Pelikán's Affective Theory of Personality

Pelikán claims that all hitherto understanding of the concept of personality, i.e. the subject, has been deficient. Contemporary psychology, he claims, puts an emphasis only on the organic and pathological sides of personality. Historico-philosophical theories are effectively in the clutches of fictionalism. Against all other theories, Pelikán puts forward his own *affective theory of personality*, although he does not tell us exactly what it consists of. Rather than explicitly describe it, he illustrates it in three distinctive moments, or, shall we say, pillars of personality. He builds these pillars without any further explanation and so, for now, we can do nothing but to simply list them:

- 1) The I is the evaluating principle of all our mental states.
- 2) Emotions and affects are the basis of human personality.
- 3) Personality is understood dynamically since it is subject to constant evolution.<sup>4</sup>

These three statements conclude Pelikán's book *Fictionalism in Modern Philosophy, Particularly in Kant and Hume*. In order to understand what the author is hinting at here, i.e. what the three crucial moments actually mean, we need to look into his previous work and unravel the knowledge that led him to and formed his *affective theory of personality*. I will therefore move on from the habilitation thesis to an earlier work, an article serially published in the

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3 Pelikán, F., *The Fictionalism of Modern Philosophy, Particularly in Kant and Hume (Fiktionalismus novověké filosofie zvláště u Kanta a Huma)*. Praha, Fr. Borový 1929.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 187–189.

journal *Česká mysl* between 1915 and 1917. The article bears the name *Fichte on the Problem of Freedom* (*Fichte o problému svobody*). For it is J. G. Fichte to whom Pelikán turns for support in his stand against fictionalism. The problem of freedom is of particular interest to him. I will now cite a section from the appendix to the aforementioned article published in 1915 in *Česká mysl* bearing the name *Fichte. The Centenary of his Death* (*Fichte. Stoleté výročí úmrtí*).

“On January 27 of this year we celebrate the centenary of the death of one of the most modern and currently most relevant of Kantians, Johann Gottfried Fichte, who put forward a philosophy of a truly new kind and who, through a powerful synthetic force of spirit, solved a question most pressing for man, that of moral conviction – which he established as a foundation of science. He was the first to show that all analysis must be preceded by synthesis and that we must stand by its result with our whole personality if it is to be true, i.e. if we are to be convinced of its truthfulness. By this, he emphasised the importance of the individual and of personality for the originality of thinking, where every act of conscience is to be an act of true reinvention of morality, and thus also of thought – a true rebirth in which, freed from external influences, we stop merely reproducing the opinions of others and begin to think for ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

From these words, we can see that Fichte’s work represented a cardinal influence on the formation of Pelikán’s thought. Let us now focus on one specific sentence from the appendix:

“He was the first to show that all analysis must be preceded by synthesis and that we must stand by its result with our whole personality if it is to be true, i.e. if we are to be convinced of its truthfulness.”

For Pelikán, this means the first step in taking a stand against fictionalism – the recognition of the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason. According to Pelikán, Kant merely hinted at this. True recognition comes later, with Fichte. However, Pelikán is not alone in acknowledging Fichte’s edge over Kant. The recognition of the primacy of practical over theoretical reason is generally accepted as a crucial turning point in the history of German idealism. In his philosophy, Fichte emphasised and thoroughly

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5 Pelikán, F., Fichte. The Centenary of His Death (Fichte. Stoleté výročí úmrtí). *Česká mysl*, 15, 1914, No. 1, p. 109–110.

developed Kant's idea of the primacy of practical reason, as Břetislav Horyna describes in his *History of the Early Romantic Period (Dějiny rané romantiky)*:

“In Kant, the primacy of practical over theoretical reason is more of a result of mathematical calculation where the ‘practical’ is added to the ‘theoretical’ and is completed by it; in Rheinhold, such primacy is already partly constitutive of the whole system; in Fichte, the primacy of practical reason is a fully constitutive part of his philosophy of the subject.”<sup>6</sup>

In order for Fichte to perform such a recognition, he must also, according to Pelikán, reformulate one more concept, or rather faculty of the intellect – that of judgment. Pelikán's opinion is that Kant ends his project with his *Critique of Judgment* and Fichte follows up on it and brings it to a new level. I will now cite from Pelikán's article *Fichte on the Problem of Freedom*:

“For he was not content with a mere analysis of man's psychological functions, he wished to understand why the general function of reason manifests itself only in those three aspects of reason, emotion, and will, and thus explain the total organisation of the human mind = Kant's ‘Bewusstsein überhaupt’. He therefore assumed the purely teleological position of Kant's third *Critique* and sees the most important function of the human mind, its true nature, in reflection, in the ability to assume a stance, to voice one's judgment, one's opinion, to subjugate the whole of nature, inner and external, to one's judgment according to the absolute principle of purposefulness.”<sup>7</sup>

Acknowledging the primacy of practical reason over theoretical is only the first step, however. That is merely the path away from the decadence of fictionalism. If we are to understand human personality, we must move further, according to Pelikán, to analysing the faculty of judgment. Kant managed to achieve one thing. In his *Critique of Judgment*, he successfully localised subjectivity, which was a formative moment for both Fichte and Pelikán. It is in the faculty of judgment that Kant discovers the reflective principle constantly reflecting upon all sensations. And it does that in such a way that it

6 Horyna, B., *The History of Early Romantic Period: Fichte – Schlegel – Novalis (Dějiny rané romantiky: Fichte – Schlegel – Novalis)*. Praha, Vyšehrad 2005, p. 66.

7 Pelikán, F., *Fichte on the Problem of Freedom II. Evolution of Fichte's philosophy (Fichte o problému svobody II. Vývoj Fichtovy filosofie)*. *Česká mysl*, 16, 1915, No. 1–2, p. 11. See also I. *Česká mysl*, 15, 1915, No. 4, 10. 3., p. (337ff).

expresses our relationship to the representation of the object from which the sensation comes. Judgment is, according to Kant, “the capacity to think the particular as contained under the universal”.<sup>8</sup> But how can it achieve such a thing?

Kant claims that the faculty of judgment is actually of a dual nature. First, it is the determining judgment which is itself determined by the understanding, and which thus subsumes the particular according to the general laws of nature. Second, it is the reflective judgment which merely reflects the particular and is supposed to be subsumed by determining judgment. The faculty of judgment thus does not impose law on the external world, but only on itself. What becomes universal here is pleasure and displeasure, which is nothing else than “my relation to the object”.

“Our relationship to the object” is what makes every sensation ultimately subjective. In other words, we do not process raw data in the synthetic unity, but rather information already filtered through the faculty of judgement. We always assume a stance towards every reality, and we cannot know reality otherwise. The faculty of judgment is thus something absolutely fundamental for the understanding of the human personality. Both Fichte and Pelikán realise that.

Fichte made the decision to attempt to bring Kant’s thought to its conclusion and to locate the grounding of subjectivity. However revelatory Kant’s localisation is, Fichte feels that it is far from finished. I believe that it is precisely for this effort of trying to discover where human personality stems from that Fichte became Pelikán’s role model par excellence. Together they strive to figure out how the faculty of judgement fulfils its function. On what basis the relationship towards the subject is determined and how it differs from the faculty of knowledge or reason. I shall now cite from a section of the same article that appears on the following page.

“Thus, there exists a function of this reflecting principle which is wholly different from the two others and which is dependent, as was already hinted above, upon the capacity to judge natural phenomena according to their purposefulness, in the capacity to remember, to ponder, to have insight (Einsicht) into one’s own spiritual nature.”<sup>9</sup>

Along with Fichte, Pelikán then calls this “an insight into the absolute content of knowledge”. Both thinkers seek the absolute together and both find

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8 Kant, I., *Critique of Judgement*. Introduction IV, 5:179. Transl. W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing 1987.

9 Pelikán, F., Fichte on the Problem of Freedom, p. 12.

it here. Absolute knowledge is the well from which the faculty of judgment draws during the process of subjectification of all sensations. It is a kind of “totality of inner knowledge”, which is partly being incessantly forgotten and partly held metaphorically in regard. This totality serves the faculty of judgment as a tool for never-ending assessment of all phenomena. And Pelikán goes even further by proclaiming that this insight into the absolute content of knowledge is actually an insight into the totality of one’s own “I”. The “I” is thus meant to be the original criterion of the faculty of judgment.

One perceives this assessment to be integral, one does not reflect upon it, but rather experiences it and this experiencing is what Ferdinand Pelikán ultimately call an “affect”. Hence the name *affective theory of personality*, since the analysis of this reflecting principle is the main part of this theory. Let us now return for a brief moment to the aforementioned three pillars of Pelikán’s conception of personality. We now see the reasoning behind his first pillar: “The I is the evaluating principle of all mental states.”

### **Part Three: Intuition, Freedom and Creativity**

The word “affect” in the name of Pelikán’s theory of personality is thus an expression of how man experiences the never-ending act of assessment from the inside. If the I is the faculty of judgement, then all reflection, and therefore also all judging is affectual since it is directly dependent on the affect. What is important about the nature of this act of judging is that it happens randomly to a certain degree. How so? Pelikán claims that it is because we simply reflect on whatever we want. In other words, the combination of factors leading our affectual reflection is so complex that the result is in many cases completely random.

Consider this example. While I am standing here, the primary thing that is affecting me are my organic needs, such as if I am feeling well or ill, if I have slept enough or am tired, if I am depressed or happy. Secondly, there are things that are exerting an influence on my speculative knowledge, such as that I know I am at a conference right now, what speaking at it means for me, and what I am talking about. Last but not least, there could be factual factors, such as if the room lighting was too bright and was bothering me, or if a man suddenly burst into the room with firearms in his hands, then I would primarily reflect on that. All this complicated, unpredictable tangle of factors causes a randomness that is inherent not exactly in the manner in which one reflects, but rather in what is reflected.

Pelikán claims that if we want to find the origin of the absolute starting point, if we want to discover the inception of free will, we must look for it precisely here, in the principle of reflection. Only in this way can something

original and authentic come into existence. Only in this way can a new way of thinking arise. How? Through intuition.

“Pelikán considers the first and fundamental characteristic of the Slavic way of thinking to be a certain naivety, emotionality, naturalness, and intuitiveness of the Slavic spirit, and in intuition, which he understands along with Bergson as intellectual sympathy, he sees the main discovering and progressive tool of knowledge, but refuses to identify it with mysticism.”<sup>10</sup>

From this citation taken from a book by Pelikán’s contemporary, Josef Král, we can see that Pelikán’s understanding of intuition is indeed very specific. Although we have worked mainly with Kant and Fichte so far, our author now turns to Bergson. However, let this not confuse us, since Pelikán’s interest in Bergson was certainly great. It is thanks to Ferdinand Pelikán that we can read *Creative Evolution* in Czech.<sup>11</sup> Just like Bergson, Pelikán sees intuition as a faculty, as a kind of intellectual privilege of man, an enrichment of instinct and intellect without which man would not be man. For comparison, I add the following quote from Bergson’s book:

“But it is the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us to – by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely.”<sup>12</sup>

Let us return to Pelikán, however. For him, intuition is the yearned-for source of the new and the authentic. He uses these words to designate a situation in which all external and internal motives of reflection in man are silenced and the reflecting principle reflects upon itself for a single moment. In such a situation, the I which is reflecting upon itself can act in one way only – a way that leads “somewhere else”. In what way? In such a way that the I expresses its own originality through its act. It will act in such a manner that will completely distinguish it from everything which it is not. The will in this moment becomes a full defiance of the world! The I becomes a negative – not-I –, and thus creates a new I. The faculty of judgment is not at this moment determined by an external stimulus, because it determines itself. Every individuality is thus a negation of reality and a creation of a new re-

10 Král, J., *The Czechoslovak Philosophy: An Outline of Development by the Disciplines* (Československá filosofie: nástin vývoje podle disciplín). Praha, Melantrich 1937, p. 242.

11 Bergson, H., *Creative Evolution* (Vývoj tvořivý). Transl. F. Pelikán. Praha, Jan Laichter 1919.

12 Bergson, H., *Creative Evolution*. Transl. A. Mitchell. New York, Random House 1944, p. 194.

ality. The fact that each person is different than the other is precisely what constitutes our freedom, what constitutes the sheer possibility of originality of thinking and acting.

Let us go over what we have covered so far. An individual affectually reflects on his surroundings and bases his acts on the result of this reflection. The phenomena offering themselves to reflection are, however, many. There are so many that we actually omit the majority of them. In order to know which phenomena we are going to reflect on primarily, we let ourselves be carried away by either an internal motive (I am hungry, I feel ill, I have nothing to lecture about) or an external motive (bright light, an armed man). But the tangle of the motives grows ever more complex and so, after a certain time, one gets into a situation where one cannot simply subject oneself to a given motive, but one still has to act, nonetheless. And that moment is precisely when the reflecting principle grasps onto absolute knowledge, i.e. to the totality of all internal knowledge, i.e. to itself, thanks to which the individual ceases to act in a pre-determined way and starts acting intuitively. This totality of internal knowledge is, however, incessantly being forgotten, remembered, and reminded of, just like the totality of external knowledge (i.e. the knowledge of speculative reason). The subjective experience of this process is then what Pelikán calls an affect. That is why the second point of his theory of personality states that: “Feelings and affects are the basis of human personality”.

#### **Part Four: Back to the Affective Theory of Personality**

Let us move on. One more point of the author’s affective theory of personality remains: “Personality is understood dynamically since it is subjected to constant evolution”. In the first cited extract of my paper (taken from the appendix to the 1915 issue of the journal *Česká mysl*), Ferdinand Pelikán claims the following:

“By this, he [Fichte – A. V.] emphasised the importance of the individual and of personality for the originality of thinking where every act of conscience is a act of true reinvention of morality, and thus also thought – a true rebirth in which, freed from external influences, we stop merely reproducing the opinions of others and begin to think for ourselves.”<sup>13</sup>

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13 Pelikán, F., Fichte. The Centenary of His Death, p. 109–110.



In Pelikán's philosophy, every act of conscience is not only supposed to be "a true rebirth", but it indeed must be one! If the basis of personality is a changeable affect and an evaluating principle of all mental states, which is forced to constantly regulate our actions, then there is no other option than to understand personality as subject to constant evolution.

And if personality is subject to change, if it is dynamic, then it must fall under the same laws of evolution as the individual and his body, which are subject to change in the same way. In other words, it needs to learn, grow, flourish, but also wither and age. Every act of conscience, every affect stemming from it, every act, every newly acquired piece of knowledge is a rebirth of personality, a never-ending updating of the totality of inner knowledge.

We have thus covered all three basic pillars of Pelikán's *affective theory of personality*. In it, the I is the evaluating principle of all mental phenomena. Such an I is undergoing constant evolution on the basis of everything it has experienced so far and through affectual reflection it provides practical reason with, figuratively speaking, material for the formulation of practical judgements. This affectual reflection is constantly underway, since action, too, is constantly underway. It finds itself in the grip of randomness caused by the complexity of all of the motives for reflection. At the moment when it is completely engulfed by this randomness, the reflecting principle of the I turns to itself, i.e. to the totality of itself, i.e. to the totality of all inner knowledge, and precisely at this moment the individual acts intuitively, and therefore freely and originally. The will becomes a defiance of the world and the world becomes something completely anomalous to the I. In this mechanism of free volition, Pelikán sees the essence of human freedom. And not only of freedom, but also of all human creativity. Since to create something new means here to create something that is one's own, and therefore original. What is unique here is unique not only in contrast to what is, but also to what was, and, as far as one can predict, also to what will be. Creativity, freedom, and intuition – these all make up the three sides of the same imaginary triangle.

## Conclusion

In the concluding part of this paper, I intend to devote some attention to the topic of the self-creation of personality. Since everything that makes up a personality is subject to change, then it follows that personality itself must also: just like all living matter it falls under the laws of organic development. According to Pelikán, this development can be called a "living evolution" (*vývoj živoucí*). This "livingness" is, however, rather a metaphor

for “liveliness” since it emphasises the wild dynamism that is characteristic for the development of personality. The aforementioned totality of all inner knowledge is not some kind of fixed library of ideas, but rather a changing process in which some things are constantly being forgotten, others remembered. Its every action is its own rebirth. Thus, through its own self-actualization, personality is also self-creating. However, its self-creation can never be completed. Throughout the whole course of its existence it is an incessantly unfinished book of a single human life. And because of its being incessantly unfinished, it always exerts its influence only unconsciously. Affect is thus the only way in which it makes itself accessible to us.

The reason why the self-creating moment of personality is so important for Pelikán is because it proves that man participates on the creation of his own character. Alongside that it also proves that will is not the “Schopenhauerian” ruthless and all-encompassing will to life, but rather that it is purely individual and stems from affect. According to Pelikán, Kant’s antinomies, due to which man loses himself in the relativity of all purposes, merely prove that speculative reason does not need clear evidence for positing its theoretical judgments. Yet practical reason, which acts on the basis of the faculty of judgment, always draws from absolutely clear evidence. This evidence is provided by emotion and affect, since it is precisely through inner experience of affectual reflection that we obtain it. We are internally convinced of the truthfulness of a given valuation and that is why we make it true and real.

Ferdinand Pelikán made personality the central point of his philosophy. His main goal was to promote a holistic understanding of personality which would account even for the “lower passions of the soul”, as he calls them, such as affect and emotion. I believe he strove to fulfil the meaning of the word “individuality” in the literal meaning “in dividere”, i.e. as an indivisible whole.

And as we have seen, this whole is constantly changing and evolving. As I understand it, Pelikán sees the central problem of his thinking as one of a long-term cultivation of this whole. If we were to ask him what the word “individualism” means for him, he would most certainly answer that it is the cultivation of the process of the creation of personality in its wholeness. We must cultivate our affectivity as well and not simply acquire knowledge. This standpoint is where Pelikán’s criticism of positivism stems from, I believe. The position which positivism assumes consists in a one-sided cultivation of knowledge and speculation. Emotion is meant to be side-tracked as something purely unscientific – and that is where Pelikán strongly objects.

If Pelikán’s main goal is the cultivation of personality in all of its aspects, then it is safe to say that the freedom of cultivation is of the same importance for him. In other words, if I am to educate my personality in a proper

way, it is necessary for me to be able to choose which type of education will be the best for me. And that is exactly what the reign of democracy in philosophy is supposed to secure. Because at the core of this thought of Pelikán's is nothing else than the desire for a plurality of theoretical approaches.

That is why Pelikán leads an open discussion not only with philosophers, but also physicians, psychologists, mathematicians, and other scientists. He actively publishes his theses. And not only that, he himself participates in their publication. He founds the journal *Ruch filosofický* in 1921 together with Karel Vorovka; and that is not the only journal to which he contributed. Active publishing is precisely the type of activity in which Pelikán sees the main way of democratizing philosophical thinking and of making a stand against the resignation leading to fictionalism.

Pelikán's philosophy of personality is the author's own way of overcoming the fictionalism that results from the approach purported by I. Kant. By accepting Fichte's conception of the absolute I, Pelikán breaks free from the rejection of the thing-in-itself, since he starts to view the I as constantly transcending itself through collision with the not-I. What Fichte illustrates for Pelikán is that we are actually much closer to the object than we think, that we even exist in an important, constitutive relationship with it. That is, however, only the first step. The second step is to accept Bergson's conception of intuition and affect. Fichte showed Pelikán what the relationship between the subject and the object is, but that is not enough, Pelikán is mainly interested in the way in which this relationship manifests itself in subjective experience. And this is where Bergson and his theory of affect come into play, since Pelikán most certainly adopts the conception of affect from him. This combination of philosophical positions then makes up the main creed of Pelikán's philosophy of personality.

Pelikán's goal is thus to re-examine the concept of personality and to show that affectivity is an absolutely indispensable component of it, and that it needs to be cultivated just as purposefully as our process of acquiring knowledge. And since every personality requires a different way of cultivation, a plurality in the possibilities of cultivation is of utmost importance. A democratisation of philosophical thinking is necessary. I believe that Pelikán was united in this opinion with Karel Vorovka. All of my research until now leads me to the conclusion that the founding of *Ruch filosofický* is a clear causal effect of this type of philosophical thinking.