

## Persons

**Question:** What is the relation between a person and her life?

### Lecture 1: Persons and Lives

**1. Basic distinctions** What is it to have a life? Person (thing) / living (process) / life (product); Richard Wollheim, *Thread of Life*, p.2.

The simplest way of putting the matter, which is not to be taken as a metaphysical claim, is this: There are persons, they exist; persons lead lives, they live; and as a result, in consequence—in consequence, that is, of the way they do it—there are lives, of which those who lead them may, for instance, be proud, or feel ashamed. So there is a thing, and there is a process, and there is a product. The thing, which is a person, is extended in space, and it persists through time. Being spatial, it has spatial parts, but it does not have temporal parts. The product, which is a person's life, is extended in time, and it can be traced through space. Being temporal, it has temporal parts, but it does not have spatial parts. The process, which is the leading of a life, occurs in, though not necessarily inside, the person, and it issues in his life. The life is his life, uniquely his, but others are not excluded from it. Others, leading their lives, lives that are uniquely theirs, may nevertheless participate in his, just as he, unless he is an unsung autochthonous stylite, will participate in theirs. There are innumerable ways in which this can happen. They can think about each other, act upon each other, and make each other's lives better or worse, as well as cause them to be or not to be.

**2. Are persons things?** Do we have a good grip on what *we* are (e.g. Hume). Some think we have a better grip on our persistence conditions.

**3. Are lives products?** Is your life a product? Isn't having a person + the process of leading a life enough?

**4. Living the life of a person** Wollheim: the way a person lives is fundamental in understanding what a person is. How could that be (pillar-saints, patients in near-vegetative state)?

**5. Persons belong to person-species** *We* are human beings. Could members of other species be persons. Perhaps. But only person-species. What is a person species? A species the members of which typically live the way a person does. Isn't this circular?

**6. We are alive** So far we have encountered some controversial assumptions. But what we can take from this discussion: we, persons, are essentially alive.

**7. Borrowing from Descartes** Descartes (*Meditations*): I can see clearly and distinctly that I am a thinking thing. Conceivability argument for the necessity of being alive. Would 'life after death' threaten this conclusion?

**8. Cotard syndrome** Some people claim that they are not alive.

“He was convinced that he had died, which he found by strange and terrifying. He felt his insides were rotting and that nothing was functioning. He also thought that his mother, uncle, and aunt had died and, although still walking about, they were actually doubles or had risen from the dead. He asked Dr Stolk whether he (Stolk) had ever experienced being dead. He was very anxious and repeatedly tried to commit suicide. He recovered after a few weeks and was profoundly puzzled by his experiences.”(Young & Leafhead 1996, 148).

Does their condition prove it is conceivable that some people are not alive?

**9. The nature of a person, personal identity** If we know that persons are essentially alive, we know something about what persons are (i.e. living beings). We also know something about person persistence (i.e. death ends persistence).

**10. The role for psychology** What role is there for *having a psychology* in an account of the persistence conditions of persons?