

*History of Philosophy  
История на философията*

## SUBSTANCE VS. MANIFESTATION: SOME PAGES OF “PERSON’S” HISTORY

**Kateryna Rassudina**

*Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine)*

**Abstract.** There are two ways in which a concept of “person” can be considered: substantial and demonstrative-relative ones. The former is based on the apprehension of the person as a being, on the search for the ultimate reasons of its existence. The latter refuses to consider these issues, thus describes the person as a phenomenon, a process of changing the states of consciousness. The danger of demonstrative-relative approach is that, examining only person’s manifestations, we risk not seeing the essence under poorly visible phenomena. Contemporary philosophers therefore should use substantial conception, despite the fact that it may seem ancient and old-fashioned.

*Keywords:* consciousness; manifestation; person; substance

### **I. Introduction**

From the point of view of ordinary thinking, a person is a thing that exists among other things of the world. But this thing is definitely exceptional, because it contains consciousness, mind or spirit. This thing does not just exist, but refers to itself in certain, specific way. Anyone who thinks about the person more deeply notes also that daily experience shows us the paradox of personality structure. On the one hand, by person we mean the “root” of our being, to which we attribute all the acts defined by us as “our own”. On the other hand, acts of our consciousness appear to us as single film frames, fragmented and unstable.

If we consider person in the light of natural science, we face, first of all, the complexity of explaining the interaction of human consciousness with human body (so-called problem of “mentality-brain” correlation). Different theories, for example, emergentism, try to describe and explain this interaction. But now we are interested in another question.

In light of philosophy person can also be treated differently. The most widely we can distinguish two ways of their understanding: substantial and demonstrative-relative ones. Their overview, comparison and evaluation is the topic of the report.

## II.

Substantialist conception of the person was the first in the history of European philosophy; it was formed already in antiquity. The foundation for it was ontology, which Aristotle laid; and many other thinkers developed it over the centuries. All that exists was divided by Aristotle into substances and accidents. At the same time for the substances, he describes them in different ways: as specific individual things (so-called primary substance), abstractions or Plato's ideas, or individual ideas, i.e. individual forms which show in things what lies beneath their properties. In the first, main meaning of the word, substance is a self-existent thing which needs not for its existence any other thing; substance is something complex, changeable, and at the same time it preserves its identity and integrality (Aristotle, 1963: 71 – 77).

The last is exactly the meaning in which the specific human being is a substance. All changes therein do not violate the identity, because, as in regard to any other substance, there are not only substantial, but also accidental changes, when something accidental for the person is destroyed. Reason is the substantial form of the body, thanks to which human being is a special living being. This peculiar substantial form causes special – rational – activity; however, the way of expressing this activity is accidental too. It only indicates the type of substance, but does not exhaust it: human being can use his or her reason or not use, but does not cease to be human. So, according to Aristotle, a form – a mind, a reason – is the principle of the continuity of each substance (that continuity is created, in fact, by the form as an entelechy of the body, and the body is animated by it). However, such attention to rationality does not imply that the person, in order to remain themselves (Maryniarczyk, 2003: 97 – 98), must intimate all their mental events in the sense that when One looks at something, One must realize this act (Bremer, 2014: 137 – 138).

As for personal individuality, Aristotle points out, rather, those characteristics that are accidental for them, which they share with other persons. First of all, it concerns their material element in which “human form is actualized, also place and time of this actualization, from birth to death” (Bremer, 2014, 138). An individual is something sporadic, definite, it is impossible to say anything about it. Therefore, it cannot be comprehended by the mind, only by the senses, and we mustn't be interested in it since it is a matter of substance.

Eight hundred years after Boethius used the concept of substance to determine the concept of person. In his work *De persona et duabus naturis* he researched the problem of nature to which personhood is inherent, and based on the premise that this nature resides exclusively in substances. At the same time Boethius says that person is an individual substance of a rational nature. And nature, including rational one, is a specific property of any substance. Boethius speaks of a person as a specific, existing through itself (*per se*), independent and self-existent being, subject for accidents.

This train of thought we observe in the works of Thomas Aquinas, however, with some elaborations. As we can see in his definition, Boethius considers rationality to be the perfection through which a substance is called “person”. In contrast Thomas considers that perfection to be the way of existing inherent to person: there are not only individual substances; but, separating from other beings, every person maintains, in addition, a special internal unity (transcendentalia of unity and separateness), despite the complexity of their structure. As we know, according to Aquinas, two incomplete substances, soul and body, unite; what is more, the soul as substantial form gives to the body the act of its being. However, the uniqueness of person is determined not only by this internal unity, but also by the power over their actions (freedom) and the ability to act for itself (*per se*). The actions of the person can be free because they are not always determined by human nature and pursue not only the ends of the species, but also the individual ends. Hence, we have quite Kantian conclusion that persons exist for the implementation themselves (for themselves – *propter seipsum*), and are not only a means to an end of someone else.

Thus, all substances, according to Thomas (100 – 101), are the beings in themselves, but at the same time the person is a being for themselves; due to their freedom their individualization is more perfect. Of course, a human is able to act freely by virtue of his rational nature. However, not rational nature is the most perfect principle in him, but the existence in such a nature. Rationality is important for understanding of personality, because it makes freedom possible: through the intellect, a person has a concept of the good, to which they seek as to an end, as well as they can compare the different individual goods.

Speaking of the person as a substance, being *in se*, we risk leaving unexplained so necessary for them social relations. Moreover, the Christian identification of God with love, as well as the dogma of the Holy Trinity will remain incomprehensible. But only if one looks at the medieval tradition in retrospect and identifies the person with the modern individual. Speaking of God in the categories of the Trinity, the Christian does not mean the existence of several substances in it, but the fact that in a single and indivisible God there is a dialogue in the form of love. The relation, thus, ceases to be an accident (as Aristotle said), but turns out to be the primary form of being on a par with substance (Ratzinger, 1990: 181 – 183).

As we see the person is both a substance and a pure relation to anything (com. the relationship between the Father and the Son, who is not always by Himself, but always is connected with the Father). To call oneself a person in this sense means to recognize that one’s self does not belong to him or her. The most proper, that, in fact, belongs only to us, is at the same time the least proper. That which exists in itself, the substance, must realize that it becomes itself only when it leaves itself and finds its true primacy as a relation (Ratzinger, 1990: 188). Accepting their dependence on God, at least through the fact of their creation, understanding the significance of

the relationship, Christians can no longer isolate themselves, believing themselves to be impregnable fortresses, but to realize their existential dependency they must go to God and their neighbor.

### III.

Modern philosophy of 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, though it did not yet reject the concept of substance, often referred to it when defining human person. So, Descartes used this term in relation to a person, but his dualism undermined the theory of the person as integrity. In addition, neglecting body as a mechanism, requiring its objectification for the better understanding of the human person, and associating their identity with the thesis *cogito ergo sum*, Descartes shifted the center of gravity within the meaning of person to their mental characteristics.

According to Descartes, mind and body are two different substances, and mind can think without reference to the body. “Saying ‘I exist’ Descartes means the existence of a continuous subject of experiences or his self. The subject in this sense is a non-material substance” (Bremer, 2014: 143). Wherein all mental facts are self-intimating, thinking is self-intimating. The subject is always aware of his consciousness’s content; he does not need to realize it. Sensations are also functions of this thinking: we use this word for indicating something that seems us to be such (Descartes, 51 – 57). However, we cannot attribute physical properties to ourselves. Although Descartes represents human person as a close unity of the immaterial mind and material body, because they are able to influence one another, it is the *res cogitans* that creates the basis of person’s consciousness and their identity.

But it was John Locke who has mostly influenced the formation of the modern conception of person. First of all, I mean the following definition, which he gave (1690, 304): “person is a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it”.

This multiple reference to the thinking, consciousness, reflection (this term corresponds to introspection in the current science), although it is quite consistent with the ancient definition of human as a rational being, modifies it, however, and alters it by deleting from it everything but the process of thinking. It should be noted that, like Descartes, Locke uses the word “substance” (as such he considers some things, including human, as well as the concepts, for example, the one of matter), but Locke does not agree with the opinion that identity of person requires a substance as a base, and easily replaces it with the notion of lasting memory, consciousness of my being-myself which always accompanies my thinking.

It is worth noting that Locke has distinguished between the identity of a person and a man. The second is no different from the identity of animals: “being the same man is a matter of continuity in its purely animal functioning”

(Bremer, 2014: 172), in an appropriately organized body. In the same time, it is consciousness that makes man a self for himself, and the identity of the person depends only on it, regardless of whether it is related to one individual substance (the Prince's person in the Cobbler's body remains to be a Prince).

Thus, Locke has enhanced the problem of Descartes, i.e. tendency of person's "disembodying", reduction of person solely to the processes that take place in their mind. Being a person for him is a state of consciousness, of subjectivity which perceives itself, otherwise it risks disappear as an object and as a subject (as in the case with a man who sleeps or loses consciousness). Locke's definition of personality does not apply to all human beings.

How such a concept of personality was established, we can understand by the definition of contemporary American bioethicist, a supporter of organ trade, Mark Cherry. Person, in his opinion, is a subject of actions who has sufficient cognitive abilities in order to understand himself through self-awareness and reflection (Cherry, 2005: 22). Hence he concludes that body is important only insofar as it contributes to the emergence of cognitive functions and maintains them.

Michael Tooley, a famous American philosopher, added the definition of Locke, pointing some more features and abilities that define personality. Some of them, for example, ability to feel pain and pleasure, are not mental in their nature. Tooley, however, identifies person with the functioning of the brain, and broadly – of the nervous system – i.e. he applies to person studies Locke's empirical method, complicating it by achievements of contemporary scientific progress. According to Tooley (1988: 100, 111), to be called a person someone must possess oneself as a subject of constant experience and mental states which follow each other, as well as know oneself as a separate individual.

Like Locke, Tooley has proposed a thought experiment in which he imagined the consequences of adult human brain reprogrammed in such a way that it gains experience – memories, beliefs, etc., – that differ from those he had previously. As Tooley writes (1979: 65), it will be a new person, even if they remain in the original body of the participant of the experiment.

Finnish researcher Tuija Takala also uses the definition of Locke looking at the person as an incessant self-consciousness. Her Australian colleague Helga Kuhse likewise defines person as a conscious being capable to act expediently, to notice the passage of time and to exist in the time (Kieniewicz, 2010: 153, 158). Following Locke, another famous Australian, Peter Singer, bases the identity of person on the continuum of consciousness, or rather on memory. That's why he believes that personal identity is not inherent to the individual in an unconscious state (e.g. before emergence of consciousness or in a state of coma).

I would like to note that even three hundred years ago there was a philosopher who outdid the definition of Locke. I mean David Hume who has refused the existence of *self* or a person. According to him, instead a person there is only a

dynamic stream of psycho-cognitive properties (variety of sensations, impressions, perceptions and their copies – ideas), a bundle of them. This theory does not lose popularity in the modern science (especially in analytic philosophy). Researchers, such as the above-named Kuhse, refuse to talk about any base for properties: what they cannot grasp empirically simply cease to exist for them. This is what we see on the pages of books. In reality, people “estimate” another people depending on the qualities of their cognition, will or even morality (e.g. according to autonomy level or participation in a moral community).

#### IV.

Demonstrative-relativist conception of person, the beginnings and flourishing of which I have just briefly presented, rejects to study human person as a being, to seek the ultimate reasons of its existence, i.e. to research anything that is a topic of metaphysics. By rejecting metaphysical problems, the philosopher can only describe human being as a phenomenon or an intersection point of public relations.

I should note that the substantialist concept also does not deny that a person has certain features through the manifestation of which we are able to distinguish them from the impersonal beings. However, for these conceptions denotation of “human person” is always the same as the denotation of “human being”, whereas demonstrative-relative conceptions distinguish them in such a way that not every human can be called “person” (and, on the contrary, they believe that it is possible to equate to the human person an animal, or even artificial intelligence). Usually they are linked to the thesis that the personal status is a question for ethics, whereas human status is one only for biology.

Such a position, at first glance, condemns the reductionism of those who see in a human being only matter or stable biological structure, inasmuch as it points to the mental, even spiritual qualities of a person and to dynamism as a crucial to their status. On the other hand, such a “crusty” biological structure is associated by its critics with unchangeable indestructible substance. Thus, opposing protagonists of substance, modern naturalists refuse primitive materialist approach to psychological and functional view. For such scientists, to be a person is to manifest the higher mental functions – consciousness, self-awareness, the ability for rational action, etc., i.e. properties required for the recognition of individual to be independent subject of interpersonal, ethical relations. In turn, protagonists of substance indicate that person is the existence that “exceeds its individual manifestations and empirical phenomena” (Hołub, 2010: 47).

It is easy to notice that even thinkers, who decidedly support substantialist conception, also referred to a series of properties that belong to a person. For example, the definition of Boethius, except person’s substantiality emphasizes such important characteristics as individuality, rationality, and autonomy (we can say

also: consciousness and self-awareness, the ability to generalizing, capacity for independent actions, creativity and so on).

As we see the medieval thinkers have emphatically distinguished in person their properties, even the most important ones, and the ontological foundation of these properties. But over time, the emphasis has been shifted to properties, insofar that now only they are in sight. This process culminated in the recognition that only those individuals whose moral consciousness actually functions can be considered as persons (Engelhardt, 1986: 121 – 127). How the person was replaced by their properties we can see in the example of the lists of indicators of humanhood, the most famous of which was the one proposed by Joseph Fletcher in 1972. There were 15 positive and 5 negative qualities which concern first of all the functioning of consciousness (Fletcher, 1972).

Focus on person's main characteristics, especially on consciousness and self-consciousness, has led to the identification of the person with these properties. Being deprived of consciousness, according to this approach, one cannot be recognized as a person. Some of the achievements of modern genetics (e.g. the question of identical twins) have put doubt on the claim that the genetic uniqueness is the basis for personal identity. In turn, another achievement of science, namely, the definition of death based on the criterion of brain death, has prompted the idea that, since the disappearance of brain activity means death, it is the appearance of this activity that must constitute a person (Kieniewicz, 2010: 155 – 156). The genetic material has been replaced by brain, and thus the search of basis of person in the field of psychology was justified. Neurological definition of person has joined with the psychological-functional one.

Personalistic approach implies that person's characteristics are only manifestations of their substance or – if you like – their essence, that the person is as such. As Polish philosopher Grzegorz Hołub writes (2012: 188), “a person would not be able to reveal and develop their specific features if they have not been endowed by that features potentially in the very structure of their being”. So, we cannot say that a certain entity ontologically becomes a person only at the moment of the first manifestation of their personality. This characteristic evidences the manifestation of the person in another domain – not ontological, but demonstrative-relative. After all, the person is not a state, but a being. It can also be said that “their changes and becoming are secondary for the person, in some cases they are the accidents” (Hołub, 2012: 189).

I would like to note that the personalistic approach seems to recognize some relevance of the demonstrative-relativist concept, not only the substantialist one. Of course, we notice a person due to certain specific features. But these features make visible the existence of the *a priori* ontological basis for personality, although it does not exclude becoming in demonstrative-relative dimension, when the person does not immediately appear to us in its fullness, but as if gradually unfolds before our eyes.



## **V. Conclusion**

For many centuries, a person has been spoken about in the terms of so-called classical philosophy: as about a substance. It was the way in which the identity of person in time was proved, as well as such person's features as self-dependence and freedom. Despite the fact that classical philosophy paid special attention to intelligence of a person, manifestations of intelligence did not exhaust the whole person, they were accidental to person. Such an important property as freedom does not exhaust the person too. Ability to pursue individual ends is a feature of person. However, we cannot conclude hereof that one who does not manifest such ends visibly is not a person. On the other hand, the very potentiality of such an action makes humans, no matter how helpless they seemed to be, the ends in themselves.

The philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries, undermining confidence in the understanding of human as an integral spiritual-corporeal being, transferred the center of gravity in the concept of person to mental characteristics. Since that times person has been understood as a state of consciousness (either a mental state, or a way of functioning of the brain), to which an individual must mature and which can be lost.

Later the understanding of person gets lost in the flow of mental-cognitive properties and functions. The main reason for such blindness is the empirical method of research, which does not catch anything, except sensory experience. All that is in the person, apart from this variable component, appears to be motionless, and therefore as if an invisible background for the object of investigation.

The danger of this approach is that, examining only person's manifestations, we risk not seeing the essence under poorly visible phenomena. Understanding person as a substance is necessary not to reduce them to something crusty, biological or otherworldly; but also in order not to make personal characteristics a cover, thrown over an empty space. Even if we present substance as a speculative category, it will protect us from tragic errors in practice.

## **REFERENCES**

- Aristotle (1963). *Categories*. J. L. Ackrill (Trans.) (pp. 71 – 112). In: J. L. Ackrill (Ed.). *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.
- Bremer, J. (2014). *Osoba – fikcja czy rzeczywistosc? Tozsamosc i jednosc Ja w swietle badan neurologicznych*. Krakow: Aureus, 2014. [In Polish].
- Cherry, M. (2005). *Kidney for Sale by Owner. Human Organs, Transplantation, and Market*. Washington DS: Georgetown University Press.
- Descartes, R. (1998). *Meditations on First Philosophy, in which God's Existence and the Distinction between the Human Soul and the Body*



- are Demonstrated*. D. M. Clarce (Trans.) (pp. 1 – 104). In: R. Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*. London: Penguin Books.
- Engelhardt, H. T. (1986). *The Foundations of Bioethics*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fletcher, J. (1972). Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man. *Hastings Center Report*, 3, 1 – 4.
- Hołub, G. (2012). Osoba ludzka: pomiędzy paradoksem a wieloaspektowością istnienia (pp. 185 – 205). In: Mazur, P. S. (Ed.). *Spor o osobie w świetle klasycznej koncepcji człowieka*. Krakow: Wydawnictwo WAM. [In Polish].
- Holub, G. (2010). Pacjent jako osoba (pp. 39 – 48). In: Chanska, W. & Hartman, J. (Eds.). *Bioetyka w zawodzie lekarza*. Warszawa: Wolters Kluwe. [In Polish].
- Kieniewicz, P. (2010). *Człowiek niewygodny, człowiek potrzebny*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL. [In Polish].
- Locke, J. (1690). *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Thomas Basset (Global Grey ebooks).
- Marynarczyk, A. (2003). Koncepcja bytu a rozumienie człowieka (pp. 73–122). In: Marynarczyk, A. (Ed.). *Biad antropologiczny*. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu. [In Polish].
- Ratzinger, J. (1990). *Introduction to Christianity*. J.R. Foster (Trans.). San Francisco: Communio Books, Ignatius Press.
- Simpson, P. (1988). The Definition of Person: Boethius Revisited. *The New Scholasticism*, 62 (2), 210 – 220.
- Thomas Aquinas (1922). *The “Summa Theologica”*. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Trans.). London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd.
- Tooley, M. (1979). Decisions to terminate Life and the Concept of Person (pp. 62 – 93). In: Ladd, J. (Ed.). *Ethical Issues Relating to Life and Death*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tooley, M. (1988). Defense of Abortion and Infanticide (pp. 83 – 114). In: Goodmann, M. F. (Ed.). *What is Person*. New Jersey: The Humana Press Inc.

✉ **Dr. Kateryna Rassudina**

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-6704-185X

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

3, 95, Rajduzhna

02218 Kyiv, Ukraine

E-mail: rassudina.k@gmail.com