

## ***What are persons? Attempt at a normatively-neutral ontological account***

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Beginning with Robert Spaemann's (and Romano Guardini's) *dictum* that persons only exist in the plural,<sup>1</sup> and also guided by the assumption that living individuals, insofar as they are persons, are persons *by nature*, that is born persons, but not *in virtue of* their nature, I arrive at four pivotal propositions (P1 to P4), each of which – not only according to my opinion, but following widespread intuitions and, as I think, not an uncommon usage of the word – is necessary, and which together could, in my view, count as even sufficient for calling something a person.<sup>2</sup>

It is my aim to show that although persons can each be *identified* with a living individual (or, if you want, an animal of higher kind) it is rather their common 'form of life' in an assembly of many of them, which qualifies them all as *persons*. A *form* that is realized by the biographic conduct of most, but not necessarily *all* associates in the ensemble. This kind of *form* that is not instantiated as a feature of the individual but rather of the assembly as a whole – although not all members of the association need to share its specific requirements of implementation – is in this regard similar to life-forms in the sense of Michael Thompson's "natural historical judgments"<sup>3</sup>. Except that the respective judgment like "Man lives the life of a person" is, according to my thesis, just not a *natural* historic judgment, but at best, a *vivento-historical* judgement. And I also do not consider the depicted personal life form from primarily a logical point of view as a special kind of *judgment*, but as an ontologically real form<sup>4</sup> that builds on living associations under certain circumstances that I want to specify in more detail in what follows.

Before beginning, I want to say something about how to understand the ‚plural‘ that is necessary for the existence of persons according to my thesis (which is inspired by Spaemann and Guardini).

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Spaemann: *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'*, Oxford 2006, p. 9; 77; 232. Similarly Romano Guardini: *Welt und Person*, Würzburg 1952, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Here I can only present the propositions for discussion in a sketchy form, and explain their respective sense. I have argued for both positions at greater length at another place: See Thomas Buchheim, *What Are Persons? Reflections on a Relational Theory of Personhood*, in: Jörg Noller Hg.: *Was sind und wie existieren Personen? Probleme und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung* series „ethica“, ed. by Julian Nida-Rümelin, Dieter Sturma and Michael Quante) Münster (Mentis) 2018, 31-55.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Thompson, *Life and Action. Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, Cambridge Mass. (Harvard UP), 2012, p. 56-73.

<sup>4</sup> Even Thompson concedes that our judgements („natural historical judgements“) need, if they are true, a grounding in some matter of fact, since life forms in his sense are phenomena "bene fundata" (p. 76)

I take this plurality of persons as a conceptual but not a factual requirement. This means that even if there did not exist, by actual circumstances, more than only one natural living individual of personal life-character, it would still remain a person. To be a *person* requires *conceptually* (not factually) to be one among a multiplicity of them, although the relationship between the concept of a person and its multiplicity is neither essential (like for example the concept of a natural number) nor a merely accidental one (like for example the concept of a twin). *What is* a number in general could not be conceptualized without being a particular one out of many, whereas *what* a twin is could very well be understood without the twin. Being a twin is a mere accident for living individuals like twins. This is, however, not the case in terms of persons: Neither is, what any single person is, impossible without a plurality of persons; nor is it negligible for the living of each to exist in the plural. Aristotle would have described the conceptual entanglement of “person” with the plurality of cases as an accident *kath’ hauto*: It belongs to a person *per se* to exist among a plurality of cases, like a planet is *per se* one of many orbs in a solar system. But unlike the planet, a person would remain what she is as a person, even if the pluralistic system ceased to exist some time. Whereas the planet would not be a planet anymore if one removed it from the solar system it belongs to. We shall immediately see why this difference occurs when we get into the explanation of the four pivotal propositions.

I want to present them at the beginning as a kind of overview (see my handout), in order to explain each of them progressively on the basis of the preceding one:

(P1) The basis of the existence of persons is the tradition or communication of a *common heritage of life* to a *plurality* of living individuals of accordingly similar nature (= association by filiation).

(P2) The persons’ common heritage of life is ethologically highly complex (a non-primitive life): this means that we must distinguish with regard to all members of the association by filiation between the *biography* of life, which turns out in highly multifarious ways for different individuals, and the naturally or biologically *pre-given burden of life*, which permanently determines the life of all in a similar way (= differentness of life-biography of variant cases and commonly shared biology of life).

(P3) Because of (P1) and (P2) there exists a *universal isotopy* of all members of an association-by-filiation – in the sense of a general *perception of the twofold identifiability* of each abstract-arbitrary member of the association, which manifests itself in all biographies (be it actively or passively): (a) identification by its relationally determined, but nonetheless in principle *interchangeably occupied place* within the respective association; (b) identification by its descriptive (naturally inherited and biographically acquired) properties (= isotopy by means of perception of the twofold identifiability of each member).

(P4) As a manifest consequence of (P3), the highly variant biographies of the members of an isotopic life-association bear throughout a significant *uniformity* in terms of a situative pattern of *representation* in the behavioral structure of most of the members: A pattern according to which each member that is *able to represent herself* has to *co-represent* the other members of her field of awareness (= biographical pattern of representation).

### ***1. Whatever is a person exists by filiation of life into a multiplicity of living individuals***

(P1) *Association by filiation.* The basis of the existence of persons is the tradition or *communication of a common heritage* of life to a *plurality* of living individuals of accordingly the same nature.

By “basis of existence” I mean not only a necessary condition in the common philosophical sense of the word, but more specifically such a condition insofar as it is also a *constituent* of what is conditioned by it and therefore belongs to it. According to this first pivotal proposition it is clear that nothing would be a person which was not alive, and likewise nothing which, as a living being, existed on its own, that is which would be the solitarily sole instance of its animation (*Lebendigkeit*) as long as it exists. Rather, life must be transferred or communicated in a *plurality* of cases of its own instantiation. To speak with Aristotle: The respective life must have a *natural essence – physis* as *eidōs* – that develops *synonymous cases*, not only be a continued growth without individuating self-limitation like for example a tumor.

It is not important for the respective living condition of persons in terms of (P1) whether life is organic, naturally or technically produced or even whether it operates on the basis of matter at all. Rather, I follow John Locke, who – like Aristotle did before – argued that the condition of individuality of living identity does not result from the matter on which life operates, but

from the individual closure of life in each instance of its occurrence. I quote a passage from Locke:

„animal Identity is preserved in Identity of Life“ (II 27, §12 [p. 337] „the same Animal, as we have observed, is the same continued Life communicated to different Particles of Matter, as they happen successively to be united to that organiz'd living Body“ (II 27, §8 [p. 332 f.]

According to the position, I want to defend, persons are always *individual* lives in the sense of Locke's definition, but – and in this regard contrary to Locke – something is the same person as long as its numerically individuated life continues, which corresponds most likely to the position of *animalism*. For Locke argued that it is not the *same life* which, besides the living individual, accounts for the same person, but rather the same consciousness. According to Locke, even *different* living beings could, in principle, be the same person if they only shared the same consciousness – whatever Locke thought consciousness would be:

„we must consider what *Persons* stand for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places.“ (ibd. 335)

In this I do *not* want to follow Locke. Rather, it is essential for my following propositions that the identity and the existence of a person does not rely on the question of her potential or actual self-consciousness. In my opinion there can be *persons* that do not have self-consciousness at all. Furthermore, I think that it is not helpful to assure that a living organism which has at least potentially self-consciousness or a „first-person-perspective“, be *thereby* a person although this is a common argument in the contemporary debate of the matter. For first of all it is very unclear under which actual circumstances something or someone has *potentially* self-consciousness or a first-person-perspective, and under which not. And because of this it is, secondly, difficult to decide by means of clear criteria whether an individual – if potentially self-consciousness is granted – is or is not already actually a person or likewise only *potentially*. Here again I agree to the radical position of Robert Spaemann's, who has categorically argued that “[t]here are no potential persons.”<sup>5</sup>

In what I have tried to explain it remains open what it means that life as such can have individual closure and therefore numerical identity. I presuppose this as acceptable and assumed wherever it would concern persons. Also it remains open what *kind* of individually self-contained life can justify that it is not only the life of brutes – or in Locke's words – “animal life”, but the life of *persons*. For, of course, it is obvious that not all individually self-

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<sup>5</sup> See for example R. Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'*, Oxford 2006, p. 245.

contained life which is inherited or communicated in a plurality of instances, is already personal life, and that the members of such an inherited association by filiation are already *persons*.

The following three pivotal propositions shall answer the second question: What kind of communicative association of the same heritage of life for a plurality of living individuals provides the characteristics of personality? (Regardless of whether artificial or biological ways of communication are chosen and whether it is a materially bound life or not.)

Before I proceed to the next proposition, I would like to add something more to the first one, which I consider to be typical for persons, which is why I think that it is necessary that persons are *living* beings. For whatever is a person, if the first proposition is true, it can only act *due to* and *within the limits* of its own being alive. The basis and the limits of all its life-manifestations or activities necessarily belong to the *same* individual case of life, like the individual living activity or action which is produced on this background of being alive. This means: For each activity or action of a person, her living nature is an *associated condition* which she cannot preempt by her activity or action.

This holds for persons in a general way. This means, even if God or some purported deities existed that were to be understood in terms of *persons*, they would be characterized by a prerequisite living nature, even if they could exist entirely in accord with it in their actions, that is if their nature be always reassured by their responsible manner to act. This is a conceptual thought which Schelling had claimed in the philosophical debate: God, if He exists as a *person*, could not be *a causa sui* in this sense that he would gain his very existence through his action. Rather, conversely, Her action takes on the characteristics which are fully in accord with her natural distinction.<sup>6</sup> With this conception, I oppose to certain emanation theories (like for example Spinoza), but also radical voluntaristic positions, according to which God's action is either not bound to any prerequisite nature whatsoever (voluntarism) or has no traits to dispose of at all (emanation theory). For persons of all sorts it would therefore be conceptually important that their life partly manifests traits not to their own disposition and partly is biographically disposable.

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<sup>6</sup> What this means is that the case of a divine person would behave differently in one respect than the cases of the human person, for example: While these, as I said at the beginning, are persons by nature, but not thanks to their own nature, the divine person would still be a person by virtue of his (fully acquired) nature. One could express this difference in such a way that human and generally finite persons are not naturally sovereign persons, while a divine person in the naturally sovereign sense would be person.

This short – and sole – digression with regard to what a non-finite and possibly immaterial but nevertheless, as living, not less *concrete* person would be leads us immediately back to finite persons which at least we all are. For what I have just explained by means of a thought experiment of a divine person is precisely a main argument of the second pivotal proposition about the essence of persons that I want to argue for.

## ***2. The difference between biographical and biological (naturally given) life***

From the explanation of the first pivotal proposition we can see what it means that whatever is a person is a person *by* nature in a given and unavailable way. But not – and this is expressed by the second proposition – also *thanks to* this nature which is given to her, but rather thanks to what persons make of their life, if they have it at all. I want to call the latter, which individually and variably disposes a living being thanks to its aliveness, its *biographical* life. Whereas the former be called their *biological* life which, as a mere being-alive, is given to the person by nature (or by some technical means which is impossible to preempt for any thereby existing person).

From what we know as varieties of life on earth, it seems to be obvious that this difference between biographical and biological life is not expressed in all kinds, but at least in many of them, even apart from the human kind. According to my second thesis, we can only consider such assemblies of inherited aliveness as possibly consisting of persons if their individual *biographical* lives are clearly distinct and situationally highly variable compared with a merely biological life or being-alive. Therefore, living beings such as sardines or ants would not qualify for persons according to P2, but living beings of high biographical significance, like for example dolphins or primates exhibit, which are ethologically highly complex living beings. With reference to the variety of cases within an association of bearers of a similar heritage of life, it follows the second pivotal proposition:

(P2) *Differentness of life-biography and commonly shared biology of life.* The persons' common heritage of life is ethologically highly complex (a non-primitive life): this means that we must distinguish with regard to all members of the association by filiation between the *biography* of life, which turns out in highly multifarious ways for different individuals, and

the naturally or biologically *pre-given burden of life*, which permanently determines the life of all in a similar way.

The most important point which follows from this distinction for the essence of persons is the one that I have stressed at the very beginning, namely that persons are, what they are, not *thanks to* their nature or *in virtue of* their being biologically alive, but only thanks to their biographical, although highly diverse life, which notwithstanding the varieties is alike, as we shall see, in certain *formal* regards. *That* they are *persons*, and not non-personal living beings, is due to their biographical life, what means that they are not actually *persons* simply *thanks to* their biological nature.

This means furthermore: The concept ‘person’ is according to my thesis not a natural concept and does not designate a *species* or *natural kind*. By contrast, the membership of an association by filiation of all empirically accessible persons implies, according to my *first* proposition, that they always belong to a species of a natural kind, insofar they are not artificially created persons. But even if they were artificially created, they would be several ones of the *same* life-heritage and therefore, if not exemplars of a *natural kind*, after all exemplars of an *artificial kind*, which is prerequisite to each of their individual lives.

So to be a person is, according to P2, in any case a *biographical achievement*, not a biological matter of fact. I speak of an achievement, if the result of a behavior does not occur on its own, like for example perspirations, but has the character of a performance; a performance, however, which is not the objective or purpose of the respective behavior, but goes along with it involuntarily. This is similar e.g. to the fact that knowing to orient oneself in an area goes along with visiting a place frequently. It is specific to the case of being a person as a biographical achievement that the respective involuntary performance goes along with *any* variant biographical conduct, as we shall see.

Since it is a certain biographical achievement in this highly general sense, it is by no means essentially the matter of one *particular* species to bring about persons, whereas all other species would be left with nothing. The charge of “speciesism”, that is the unjustified privileging of members of the *human* species as persons against all others, is from the outset prevented by the second proposition which I hold. Hence, it does not depend on our species, and it is not a case of arbitrary self-preference or “speciesism”, that we humans take ourselves

to be persons, but exclude until today all other species that are known to us from it. Rather, we as human beings have, so to speak, earned this privilege over all other natural species by means of our biographical way of life for reasons that still need to be made explicit.

As I have already suggested, the shared biological life within an association by filiation provides (unlike the biographically highly variable life of each single member) something like a *common burden* or condition for the biographical life of each individual. This imposes upon all members of the respective association a certain inaccessible *equality* of their life and their staying-alive with others which cannot be escaped. Thereby certain corridors are opened to the variability of the biographical life of each member of the association, whose borders are not sharply determined but cannot, as zones of tolerance, be biographically transcended by preserving their life. Therefore, personal life, wherever it occurs, is biographically inaccessibly equivalent to other lives under a similar burden at many other positions within the association. This leads to the third pivotal proposition that I want to argue for:

### ***3. The biographically realized isotopy of personal life***

According to the next step of my argument, the naturally grounded equality of the biological life of many consistently manifests itself as a basic situation of each individual also in the *biographical* life of all. This is expressed by proposition (P3), which is, for reasons that I will explain soon, complicated and which gains a specific *personal*, not only natural or biological profile when being split into two branches or aspects.

(P3) *Isotopy by virtue of the twofold identifiability of each member.* Because of (P1) and (P2) there exists a *universal isotopy* of all members of an association-by-filiation – in the sense of a general *perception of the twofold identifiability* of each abstract-arbitrary member of the association, which manifests itself in all biographies (be it actively or passively): (a) identification by its relationally determined, but nonetheless in principle *interchangeably occupied place* within the respective association; (b) identification by its descriptive (naturally inherited and biographically acquired) properties.

The word “isotopy”, as I take it, is used in literary studies and means something like “the same topic or *topos* at many places in a text”. In this way, according to the first two

propositions, the biographical life-situation of each person is necessarily constituted, no matter to which species they belong. A biographical life-situation is not to be identified with the subjective consciousness that someone has of such a life-situation. The isotopy reaches further than only to these members of the filiative association that are conscious of their situation.

How a certain biography goes in a singular case, which biographically individually variant life is being lived does not only depend on the subjectively made dispositions and behaviors that an individual manifests. Rather, it depends on the kind of objective or co-existential situation in which a life proceeds. For this reason, *all* members of the filiative association are biographically concerned by the existing isotopy, and not only those which perceive this subjectively.

The typical and, according to my thesis, purely *formal* characteristic of the prevalent isotopy that is independent from the special nature of the respective species as well as from the biographic variability of life consists in the fact that each equal member of an association by filiation can be identified in two independent ways: *Either* the identification (a) by means of its position or place within the isotopic association of biographic coexistence. *Or* the identification (b) by the descriptive properties that it has due to its natural quality and because of its biographical acquirements. Whereas the identification (b) by descriptive properties does not require any special explanation, the identification (a) by the place within the isotopic association has an internal complexity which one could call a “biographical situation”. For on the one hand it is always composed of the place of origin in the course of the filiation or tradition of the life-heritage (which in the case of us humans is fixed by the *name* and often by a birth certificate), and on the other hand of a biographically actually occupied place in relation to other isotopic members of the life-association, whose *trace* always biographically reaches back to the first mentioned place of origin.

To occupy such a place as a biographical situation within an isotopic life-association is indeed the case in non-personal life-associations as well and insofar generally independent from the descriptive characteristics of the respective species. It is, however, *not* equally independent from the nature of the species (although not necessarily committed to only one of them) that its exemplars normally and to a high degree *firstly* detect the disparity of those *two* ways of identification for members of the association and as it were biographically realize it in their

behavior; this goes along with a sense for the principally possible *interchangeability* of a descriptively determined setting at one and the same place, which exists in all circumstances of their life.

*Secondly*, that they are able to *abstractly* perceive that each *individual* (no matter which) that would hold any of the places that are in principle all neutral regarding their actual occupation would be an associated member of this life-association. Since the actual occupation of the place is, however, an identification that is independent from the descriptively identifiable properties, this abstract perception or idea carries a likewise abstract *extensibility* of the association with it that is independent from the specific descriptive properties of the members.

Because of this subliminally perceived *abstract extensibility* it is by no means necessary that each member of a *personal* life-association must, in occupying an isotopic place, also share the same affiliation of species. This is the case although the conditions for the isotopy of occupied places are objectively met by the mere factual belonging to a certain species (for example in the case of humans). For only factual traceability to an original place within *some* filiative association of personal character in general is necessary, which could, in principle, be an association of *another* kind of living beings. If for example extraterrestrial (or artificially created) living beings entered the stage that belonged, due to their own life-heritage, to a filiation of appropriate sort corresponding to the formal requirements of P1–P4, then also these beings would automatically occupy *isotopic* places within *our* human life-association in the sense of P3 (without having to ask for permission). How we would *deal* with such factual extensions of the universal isotopy according to P3, is another question, of course a primarily ethical-normative question, to which I do not have to say more from an ontological point of view. Thereby, however, it becomes clear that no descriptive species-properties that do not belong at the same time to the *form* of personal life, are involved in the identification in terms of (a) – namely the occupation of one of the isotopic places in the actual biographic situation.

In his book “Persons”, Robert Spaemann had called this presented isotopy a “relational system”, of which persons as persons would have to be part of,<sup>7</sup> or, alternatively, a “personal space”<sup>8</sup>, in which the biographical life of persons would basically be situated. The two biographical characteristics that find expression in the life of all members of the relational system are, as I said, the formal and abstract traits of *interchangeability* (of bearers of

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<sup>7</sup> R. Spaemann, *Persons*, for example p. 185: „They form a system of relations in which each is uniquely situated in relation to every other.“

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, *Persons*, e.g. p. 69 pp..

properties) at the same place that each person occupies, and the principally unfinished and open *extensibility* of the relational system.

***(4) The pattern of representation and its ethical-normative neutrality***

In doing so, we are approaching the fourth and last pivotal proposition on the general characterization of a *form* of the life of persons. This proposition tries to present a certain biographical pattern in the behavior of placeholders of an isotopic relational system that is sufficiently general to make a claim on *all* biographies within the respective system, and sufficiently specific in order to hold for a formal feature of associations of *personal* coexistence, independently from any special culture or cultural activity, but also regardless of a possible difference of the species-affiliation of its members. This biographical pattern takes into account the isotopy, which I have described in (P3), in various ways, but it is, contrary to it, not universal, that is it does not apply to all members of an isotopic life-association without exception at any time. Instead, it forms a standard for behavior for the normal case of biographical life *in all variations*, which *attunes automatically*.

*(P4) Biographical pattern of representation.* As a manifest consequence of (P3), the highly variant biographies of the members of an isotopic life-association bear throughout a significant *uniformity* in terms of a situative pattern of *representation* in the behavioral structure of most of the members: A pattern, according to which each member that is *able to represent herself* has to *co-represent* the other members of her field of awareness.

I want to understand the concepts “representation” or “substitution” in orientation of the basic operation that x does or could take the place of y. This operative concept demands that one distinguishes between the respective positions that x and y hold on the one hand, and their actual being filled in by x or y on the other. Furthermore it is implied that all positions that are held by some of the x or y, are isotopic in the above-explained sense and therefore there can be in principle *various* assignments of places to the x’s or y’s in their common biographical situations. I do not, however, want to imply that only an *executed* change of position counts as a fulfillment of the pattern of representation. Rather, it suffices if each x or y that satisfies the behavioral standard of the pattern, perceives itself as one case of filling in the occupation

(with possible others) of such an isotopic position, which, at the same time, is related to many other isotopic positions.

This pattern of representation in all variations of biographical behavior is not already to be understood *expressis verbis* as acting for or representing others and their interest. Rather, it is generally and often only implicitly an ethically-normatively *neutral* accompaniment of others at other places in relation to one's own, at which one behaves biographically as one does. It means to have an eye for the multiplicity of isotopic places in the field in which I myself behave. Accordingly, to being able to *represent oneself* in this sense means not merely to utter and pursue one's own interest immediately, but rather to pursue it *as* an interest of someone in my position or place. This place, however, is determined only in relation to many other isotopically occupied places in my environment. To *co-represent* these places in how I behave is insofar almost inevitable. This means that I '*have*' to represent the other relevant ones if I '*can*' effectively represent myself and my interest in general. A small baby has and utters interests as well, but does so immediately, not in terms of a pattern of representation, as the interest of someone at this place. But already small children switch *de facto* into this mode, and in my experience much earlier than one could think at a first glance: if a toddler protests that it has only received one scoop of ice cream although her older sibling has received two, and in similar situations, in which an interest is not only being uttered but also represented as the one of someone at a place which stands in relation to other places. For the pattern of representation as a standard of behavior fosters the biographical life of all participants, even if it can, in individual cases, equally be used for exploitation and especially egoistic goal pursuits, and is certainly often used in this way.

The propositions (P3) and (P4) taken together, that is the hold and widespread perception of the isotopy regarding all biographies and the biographical patterns of representation, which manifest themselves automatically at many places, amount to *the general form of life*, which is, according to my thesis, *ontologically*, that is *in* the thereby designated issue responsible for the fact that all isotopically living individuals in such a live-association *are* persons without exception. They *are* persons in virtue of this form of their life that arises by itself, given appropriate conditions, as described in the four propositions. It is a *form* that does not come into being in virtue of the *nature* of the individuals but in virtue of their biographical – but under the respective burden – arbitrarily varying life. The form is finally *exercised* by those who are alive. But they cannot cease and refrain from doing so – except perhaps by externally

induced interventions in their way of life. Furthermore, it is a form that cannot be instantiated by single individuals but only by certain life-associations of living individuals if the characteristic conditions of the four pivotal propositions are met. Therefore, persons only exist in the plural. This is – at least according to my intention – an *ontological* foundation of personhood that is *not* natural, and *not* ‘speciesistic’, but also *not* bound to the self-consciousness of each and every one who is a person. This means that persons are what they are indeed *by* nature but not *in virtue of* their nature, but due to what they always do in a formal sense, and as it were secretly – without being able to refrain from it.

Finally, I want to highlight some consequences of this ontological conception of personal existence for our own situation: It is clear that, following this, *all* human beings are persons, if humans live according to a general conviction in such a way that they meet P1 up to P4. That is, if for example an anencephalic child is born, then it is a person. It is, however, controversial which conditions need to be met to be able to speak of a complete *individual* case of human life. I do not have to say anything about that, since I have presupposed this for the entire conception. It is also clear that individuals that are *not* alive (like for example dead people) do not count as persons, except they would be considered alive. The question of whether there are actually non-human persons in our horizon according to the explained theory or not (e.g. certain primates) is in my opinion very difficult to assess, and according to what I have said consequently not to be excluded *a limine*. We would at least, where we had any cause of suspicion (even with artificially created beings), closely study the way of life of these beings if we did not want to go *wrong*. Is it a case of living beings at all? And is its way of life sufficiently biographically differentiated, and does it exhibit despite these differences certain prevalent conformities? Are the standard cases of those beings disposed in such a way that they deploy the necessary *abstract-general* perceptions in regard to their isotopic life-situation, and that they also realize them in all their behavior biographically? And so on. It is, however, not the task of a philosophical conceptual analysis to exclude the possibility to misjudge something very easily. Even we humans have often enough *mistakenly* denied ourselves to be persons. For my proposed conception, however, it is specific that one can do something *wrong* at all regarding this question, and that it is not, as a last consequence, a question of our choice and ethical-moral convictions. The question whether certain occurring beings are persons or not is, according to my explained conception, an ontological one, and as such a question that needs to be answered according to significant criteria, even if such criteria are not easily empirically or with absolute certainty accessible to us.