

What is a Person?

In this book, John M. Rist offers an account of the concept of ‘person’ as it has developed in the West, and how it has become alien in a post-Christian culture. He begins by identifying the ‘Mainline Tradition’ about persons as it evolved from the time of Plato to the High Middle Ages, then turns to successive attacks on it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then proceeds to the ‘Five Ways’ in which the Tradition was savaged or distorted in the nineteenth century and beyond. He concludes by considering whether ideas from contemporary philosophical movements, those that combine a closer analysis of human nature with a more traditional metaphysical background may enable the Tradition to be restored. A timely book on a theme of universal significance, Rist ponders whether we persons matter, and how we have reached a position where we are not sure whether we do.

John M. Rist is an Emeritus Professor of the University of Toronto. Author of more than a dozen books and over a hundred articles on ancient philosophy, patristics and ethics, he is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and an Aquinas Medalist of the American Catholic Philosophical Association.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-47807-6 — What is a Person?
John M. Rist
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

What is a Person?

Realities, Constructs, Illusions

JOHN M. RIST
University of Toronto



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-47807-6 — What is a Person?
 John M. Rist
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108478076

DOI: 10.1017/9781108784160

© Cambridge University Press 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2020

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Rist, John M., author.

TITLE: What is a person? : realities, constructs, illusions / John M. Rist, University of Toronto.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2019042097 (print) | LCCN 2019042098 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781108478076 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108746816 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781108784160 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Personalism. | Philosophical anthropology. | Persons. | Agent (Philosophy)

CLASSIFICATION: LCC B828.5 .R57 2020 (print) | LCC B828.5 (ebook) | DDC 126-dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019042097>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019042098>

ISBN 978-1-108-47807-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vii
Introduction	I
PART I CONSTRUCTING THE ‘MAINLINE TRADITION’	
1 The First Foundations: Plato and Aristotle	13
2 From Stoic Individuals and <i>Personae</i> to Christian Persons	22
3 Mixtures: Plotinus, Porphyry, Nemesius	35
4 Augustine’s <i>Personae</i> : Theology, Metaphysics, History	44
5 The Definition: Boethius and Richard of Saint Victor	56
6 Toward a Synthesis: Thomas Aquinas	62
7 Between Two Worlds: Duns Scotus	70
PART II NO GOD, NO SOUL: WHAT PERSON?	
8 Virtue, ‘Virtue’, Rights	79
9 Descartes on Soul, Self, Mind, Nature	91
10 Personal Identity from Hobbes to Locke	99
11 After Locke	108
12 Sympathy or Empathy: Richardson, Hume, Smith	117
13 Ambiguous Rousseau’s Soul and ‘ <i>Moi</i> ’	130
14 Kant’s Rational Autonomy	137
PART III TOWARD DISABLING THE PERSON	
15 Introducing the Five Ways	151
16 Assimilation and Homogenization	156

17	The Way of Prometheus	168
18	Whistling in the Humanitarian Wind	178
19	Virtual Morality: Propaganda as Social Glue	184
20	The Way to an Absolute Nihilism	193
	PART IV PERSONS RESTORED OR FINAL SOLUTION?	
21	Parfit and Heidegger	203
22	Strawson and Nagel	212
23	Personalism, Phenomenology, Edith Stein	216
24	God Made Adam and Eve	236
	Epilogue or Epitaph?	252
	Appendix: The World of Rights Transformed Again	259
	Bibliography	275
	<i>Index</i>	285

Acknowledgments

The immediate origins of this book lie in a course on persons I gave in the Graduate Faculty of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America, and I should like to thank Dean John McCarthy and his colleagues for giving me the opportunity to try out a few ideas I had been mulling over for some years – as well as for countless other acts of kindness. And I would also like to thank all the students in my course both for spotting weaknesses in what I said at that time and for enabling me to recognize various further holes in the argument which otherwise I would probably have missed. Special thanks are also due to Professors Robert Sokolowski and Arthur Madigan for various detailed and valuable criticisms of an earlier version of the written text. And finally, the structure I have produced has once again been scrutinized with the utmost care by Anna Rist who is well aware of how inferior it would have been without her patient assistance. On the more technical side I should like to thank the editorial staff of the Cambridge University Press, especially Beatrice Rehl, for their speedy and most obliging attention to the production of this book.

Cambridge, September 2019.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-47807-6 — What is a Person?
John M. Rist
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
