1. Introduction
2. What is the central research problem?
3. What is the topic of study related to that problem?
4. What methods should be used to analyze the research problem?
5. Why is this important research, what is its significance, and why should someone reading the proposal care about the outcomes of the proposed study?

*Current Affairs Regarding the Personhood of Artificial Agents*

It is unclear when the argument first arose proposing legislation be created detailing the right/authority of entities other than humans. Though it seems reasonable to assume that in legal texts it follows the construct/creation of personal property and in many ways has been developed to manage a more complex variety of state and personal property. The goal being generally to establish some legal and judicial precedence for these constructs. This list of non-humans entities is large and now consists of items such as ships who have standing not only as an item of state or personal property but one with a distinct set of laws governing any person aboard. Ships even have a precedence of pronoun preference, being referred to as *‘her’* practically as a manner of procedure. Corporate bodies also have unique legal stature. Since 1868 they have been regarded as persons in the eyes of the law, with rights nigh comparable to that of a genuine person.

I point these out to emphasize a question, one raised by Christopher Stone in his research, *Should Trees Have Standing?—toward legal rights for Natural Objects.*Stone observes that throughout legal history extensions of rights to new entities has always been met with some level of bewilderment. And indeed a question those just entering the conversation will ask of these odd situations in legal history is: how can it be, that a ship, or a corporate entity have a standing in our legal system comparable to that of a man or woman? And in Stone’s case, historically speaking, how was it that those of the empowered class came to agree to confer such rights to those considered so long to be sub-persons, I refer to Women and African-Americans particularly. James Boyle responds to this in his own work, *Endowed by Their Creator? The Future of Constitutional Personhood,* stating that in his own seminars, when questioning individuals who initially felt that personhood should be confined to “living, breathing, humans”, these participants continued to feel that way after being introduced to arguments in favor of extending full personhood to artificial intelligence systems, (specifically, HAL, a hypothetical computer system which has been developed to evolve into a general intelligence system, essentially a system with intellectual capabilities similar to that of a human, able to solve a broad array of problems, a priori), despite also being told our laws already give limited personhood to institutions such as corporations. This news was met with some confusion and yet the arguments on behalf of our AI were still ineffective in moving these participant’s positions on the matter.

Boyle is convinced however, that history provides us with hints as to how this debacle must eventually resolve. He refers to a “deep subconscious moral anxiety” which he observes is rooted in our history. Periods of high social contention and strife precede these moments where we “curtail…the boundaries of legal personhood.” Boyle makes another very interesting claim: that the profound debate being had about the personhood of a fetus and that of a corporation will also differ drastically to the one of the AI. This is because the process of arguing against the alleged existence of consciousness (to some an essential quality to individual persons) will change critically, in that, at some point we may see these machines, themselves, arguing and pleading for acknowledgement of their own personhood, and in such a case a swift dismissal of these pleads, as Boyle asserts, may not be so easy.

There is one theory of personhood from, *Artificial Intelligence & Personhood,* by Robert K. Garcia, that seems to agree with Boyle in this idea and which offers some further insight as to why this might be true. Garcia proposes a vision of personhood which relies on the idea that persons are, in essence, things that stand in a particular functional relationship. This vision is not concerned with any inherent physiological qualities this thing possesses or does not possess, and is solely concerned with this functional relationship. Though Garcia’s argument eventually attacks the argument in defense of personhood for artificial intelligence (for reasons apart from the ones I will mention here), his

proposed definition for persons suits the thinking of Boyle well, in that if a certain set of social functions are met, humans may well be predisposed to sympathize with any entity, irrespective of their physical makeup or their mental condition. Garcia also makes note that many individuals we call persons have physical and mental disabilities, and yet they too are considered persons. If we consider that there are a multitude of functions that we search for before believing something to be a person, some perhaps of a more convincing nature than others (something likely related to how essential we see each of these functions in the quality of being a person). When enough of these are met or when one function with a strong enough connection to our own conception of a person is met we find ourselves sympathizing more than we would otherwise.

In the end, I find myself in agreement with the conclusion Alan Turing provides in his own article musing on the argument against recognizing AI via consciousness in communication (Essentially, that building a conception of meaning in a machine run by algorithms is impossible): That how we assign consciousness, (to machines or otherwise), and moreover, personhood, more strongly reflects the confines of our own liberality, rather than our ability to reason for or against these beings.

Cited:

1. Turing Test and Machine Intelligence, Peter Bradley (<http://www.mind.ilstu.edu/curriculum/turing_machines/turing_test_and_machine_intelligence.php>)
2. Endowed by Their Creator?: The Future of Constitutional Personhood, James Boyle (<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0309_personhood_boyle.pdf>)
3. Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects, Christopher D. Stone (<https://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic498371.files/Stone.Trees_Standing.pdf>)
4. Artificial Intelligence and Personhood, Robert K. Garcia (<http://philpapers.org/archive/GARAIA-2>) <- This is new, I’m reading it this week.