**Philosophical Essay on Personhood**

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Course

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**Personhood**

It is a given that people will eventually figure out what it is that differentiates them from other creatures. Humans are all the same; we have the same genetic code, have the same characteristics, and only interact with other humans (generally). However, when you include in personhood, you find that things get more complicated. Does a person convicted of a crime deserve the same respect as a citizen who lives their life following the law? What about the developing fetus? Is it entitled to the same protections as the woman carrying it? In this article, I will discuss many distinct viewpoints on what it means to be a human being, how those view-points compare and contrast with the teachings of the Bible and ideas from some philosophers on how all of this has influenced my personal opinions.

**Theories of Personhood**

According to Young (2019), there are five major accepted perspectives on personhood and how it differs from humanity. These perspectives are as follows. The first is what is known as the genetic prerequisite for personhood, which can be summed up in two words: DNA and genes (Sofronas et al., 2018). When we consider that our DNA is present in the dead skin cells we shed every day and that these cells may reside in our vacuum cleaner, it becomes clear that this loses its capacity to create personhood. This gives rise to complex speculations about the relationship between humanity and individuality. The five defining features of a human being are included under the cognitive requirements. These capabilities include the capacity to think independently, act on one's initiative, communicate clearly, and be aware of one's awareness (Sofronas et al., 2018). Making an effort to satisfy all of these prerequisites at the same time might prove to be rather difficult. According to this definition, a younger kid would not be considered a person since they cannot yet be conscious of themselves. Or someone who lost consciousness and is in a vegetative state would also not be a person, despite the ability to wake up from a said coma. This then leads to the social criterion of personhood, which states that one is a person if they are cared for by someone (Sofronas et al., 2018). The situation can also be debunked relatively easily as we should not deny personhood to someone who may live their life more reclusive or may not have anyone who actively cares for them. The next theory is the sentience theory which states that personhood is the ability to feel pleasure or pain (Sofronas et al., 2018). This theory tends to bring personhood into something too broad. Do we assign personhood to a cow because it can feel pain? If so, we should all stop eating meat immediately. Although this writer does ascribe some level of personhood to animals, it is not at the same level which should be ascribed to humanity. The last theory seems to attempt to get around the arguments against the first four theories; the gradient theory. This theory states that personhood is present on a gradient, and we slowly lose or gain personhood depending on what state we are in, what point of life we are in, and any acts against humanity we have committed (Sofronas et al., 2018). This theory best stands up to scrutiny as contested beings such as fetuses and criminals can be assigned a gradient for which their personhood is still intact. Despite this theory standing up well to scrutiny, it does not quite match what the Bible teaches us. In this next section, this paper will discuss scripture and personhood.

**Scripture in Personhood**

According to the Bible, God made us in his image, and everything he made is good. The Bible also teaches us to respect and acknowledge others' humanity (Naudé 2022). However, there are some present contradictions, especially in the Old Testament, about humanity and personhood. There are also contradictions present in how religion handles some of these issues. Namely, the treatment of the LGBTQ population in religious areas. If we are created equally and in God’s image, why should these people be ostracized in such a fashion? Many people derive their ethical beliefs and view of personhood from the Bible. However, because of these contradictions, other sources should also be considered.

**Personal Reflection**

Before this assignment, I had not thought much about what makes a person a person and not just another human being. However, I have some core beliefs that sway my personhood logic.

I have worked many clinical hours in subacute centres where patients are in chronic vegetative states. This sways my thought process in personhood as I have always been able to recognize their personhood despite their cognitive function. Despite this present personhood, I have always believed that keeping them alive takes away their dignity. If their entire existence will continue on a ventilator with little brain function aside from brain stem functions keeping their hearts pumping, what level of life is that? I see their personhood, but I do not see their dignity. I also support legislation such as the right to die bill.

Secondly, I have always been very pro-choice. The gradient theory of personhood fits very well into this belief. The fetus has some level of personhood, which I believe should be acknowledged. However, the mother has a ‘larger’ amount of personhood and her bodily autonomy, in my opinion, surpasses this level of personhood. Years ago, I read an essay about a woman in Texas who needed an abortion as she would not have survived another pregnancy. Despite this being an acceptable reason for an abortion, she had to jump through many hoops to get lifesaving treatment. She did not want the abortion, she needed the abortion, and restrictive legislation made it difficult and even more traumatic of an experience for her. I do not believe the unborn fetus's rights should have caused this woman so much extra pain.

**Conclusion**

Being human and having our personhood are related; however, they are not mutually exclusive. Because of this, we need ethical thought processes to find differences between the two. This paper discussed personhood and the five currently accepted theories on personhood. This paper then discussed how personhood is shown in scripture and finally ended with some personal thoughts on the subject matter of personhood.

**References**

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