Personhood over Time

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**Introduction**

Human being is the most prestigious creation of God. It has been created as the most superior creature in the universe and has been blessed with the most number of abilities among all the creation in this universe. The most important and the most powerful ability, with which, the humans have been blessed is the wist or wisdom. Every person has been blessed with a separate identity. He or she has their own characteristics, their own traits, their own qualities. No two individuals are the same. This difference or uniqueness is known as "personhood" (Graham, 2016).

Scientist, experts, and researchers have done a great amount of work on the subject have discovered the various aspects of personal identity on the basis of the concept of personhood. The experts in the area philosophy have laid special emphasis on the subject and many great philosophers have present notable pieces of research and theories on the topic of personhood. Some of the most prominent names among these philosophers were John Locke and Thomas Reid.

**Discussion**

The concept of “personhood” is very controversial in not only in the avenues of philosophy but in the field of law as well. The term “personhood” refers to the state of being a person, a complete, breathing, person with the ability to think rationally and possessing complete rights (Noonan, 2019). The definition of "personhood" is closely linked to the concepts of legal and political ideas of citizenship, liberty, and equality. In the eyes of the law, only a person possessing the status of a natural person or a legal personality is entitled to have rights, privileges, protections, legal, liabilities, and responsibilities.

Fundamental to the concept of personhood (at least in the philosophical sense) is thought, and most likely consciousness. Philosopher John Locke, whose ideas inspired the American Declaration of Independence (The Influence of John Locke's Works), describes in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1984) a person as a "thinking intelligent being". Essential to this thinking is self-consciousness - the ability of "perceiving that [one] does perceive". Hence, the fundamental criterion for any entity to be considered a person, according to Locke, is that the entity is aware of itself and its actions (Reid, 1975).

An alternative approach is Bundle Theory, supported by David Hume. Bundle Theorists reject the notion of personhood altogether or regard it solely a grammatical concept. Instead, they focus on the mind and what defines it. Hume described the mind as being "a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations" (A Treatise of Human Nature, 1956), these relations being ones of resemblance and causation. A single mind is one where thoughts and perceptions are connected in time and affect each other. Arguably, the Bundle Theorists' idea of the mind is less restricted than Locke's of personhood. Therefore, minds (with this definition) can be possessed by many other organisms than humans.

In short, animals, extraterrestrial life and computers could, and might with regards to Bundle Theory already, satisfy philosophical criteria for personhood. If and how these entities are granted human rights, I do not know, but it is a question I would gladly read more about. A person (opposed to people or a human being) is an entity to carry rights and duties. To have a right, you need to be able to make a decision about that right and carry the consequences of that decision.

So, a person needs to have something inside itself (not meant dehumanizing to human persons) being able to make decisions. So for an adult healthy human, it is easy. We have a working brain. But also a company can be considered a person (often called a legal person) Here the board of directors can do the decision. This is important because otherwise, a company couldn't own property. So humans have a big working brain able to make rational decisions. This distinguishes us humans from other animals (there are people, who think humans can be single-celled organisms, a completely illogical idea). Here personhood is easily defined.

A bit more complicated are cases where the human is still in development or damaged somehow, so that brain function is limited. The answer is, that society usually limits the scope of personhood. If you can't be expected to properly make that decision and carry the consequences, you don't get that right. This goes down to details, like licensing, where you increase your personhood, by getting the right to do a special job or so. The basic (human) person rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This is true worldwide. But even these three are limited for children (Schouls, 2018). Even life is not to be decided by the little ones, as small children might kill themselves if they are not taken care of. Life includes also health, do you consider it a good idea to ask an infant if he or she wants to be vaccinated?

**Conclusion**

Hence, there is personhood, be able to make a decision and carry the consequences. Philosophers, psychologists, legal experts, and researchers have long been debating over this controversial issue and have given different theories about the perspective of being a person. John Locke and Thomas Reid have also contributed a significant amount of work to the subject and have presented contrasting views over the theory. Locke treats the personal identity as an integral part of the personality, while Reid treats the “personhood” of a person in a sense of episodic memory.

**References**

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