DO YOU BELIEVE THE QUESTION OF PERSONHOOD COULD BE SATISFACTORILY ANSWERED**?**

What would be a satisfactory answer to this question?
   a. We should be able to explain what *personhood is* and provide some means of applying the concept. For instance, by offering a classification criterion whereby one might tell who is and is not a person.
   b. To do this, we must consider what kind of answers are possible and investigate whether such answers align, extend or contradict each other.
   c. We should ask ourselves of what value a coherent concept of *personhood* would be to us. How would it help us? Can we do without?

The current state of affairs:
   ad a. For centuries philosophers have tried to define what personhood is. Big names such as Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hume, Piaget, Vygotsky, and more recently Taylor and Dennett having written on this matter (Rowlands, 2019), (Higgs & Gilleard, 2016), but no consensus has been reached.
   ad b. There is much discussion between the academic disciplines of philosophy, psychology, biology, sociology, psychology, law and anthropology about relevant contexts.
   ad c. In society at large, there is a debate about the rights of old people, mental patients, unborn children, refugees, transvestites, animals (including our nearest relatives, the chimps), criminals, legal persons such as companies, dead people and robots. the question of women, children, slaves, red-hairs, albinos and heretics was settled fairly recently in history: they are persons after all.

In all cases above, not being classified as a person means forfeiting the rights that persons have. Hence, the first question we must ask is, whether we **should** provide an account of *personhood*. The consequences of getting it wrong, are huge. For that reason Bert Gordijn (Gordijn, 1999), argues that we should abandon the 'troublesome concept' of *personhood* altogether and focus instead on moral status. Yet, if we were able to provide a metaphysical account which is prior to and independent of moral and legal features a person might have (Rowlands, 2019), we could clear up the current debate. Having established objectively that someone is a metaphysical person, would serve as a firm basis to accord moral and legal status. Moreover, the use of an objective criterion would make us feel better about ourselves in cases where we must decide that some being is not a person.

Returning to question a), of how to characterise *personhood*: from its long history in philosophical discussions, we know that *personhood* is intertwined with other psychological notions: consciousness, cognition, mental states, selfhood and identity; all of them problematic (Olson, 2019). This is an unsatisfactory situation which some have tried to salvage. For instance Mark Rowlands: he created a set of characteristics of *personhood* so general that everyone might agree on them: 'consciousness', 'self-awareness', 'other-awareness' and 'cognitive abilities' (Rowlands, 2019). However, by these criteria, many animals would be classified as persons, but not foetuses, demented pensioners, dead people, comatose patients and retards. Such an outcome does not give us a better grasp of *personhood*.

This leads us to question b): if we want a clearer view of *personhood*, what contexts should we investigate? Traditionally, Western philosophers have focussed on characteristics possessed by individual beings. The underlying assumptions are that persons are born, not made; that being a person is not dependent on external factors; that there cannot be degrees of *personhood*.

However, this view is not universal. For instance:
- in the African view it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory (Motsamai Molefe, 2019), (Menkiti, 1984)
- for the Mapuche (Chile), "to be considered a true person, or *che*, means you have to have both proper human physicality and proper human sociality. Beings which possess human bodies but fail to demonstrate proper human sociality, like infants and drunken people, are not considered to be *che*" (Cathrine Degnen, 2018).

In societies such as these, *personhood* is developed through social connections and standing in society[1] and in relation to life-events. Sometimes referred to as 'dividual' (as opposed to individual), *personhood* is not static nor determined by cognitive characteristics.

To sum up, can philosophy come up with an account of *personhood*?
- Current failure to do so has resulted in a heated public debate, much confusion and injustice. Our account should be suitable for building a moral and legal status on. If we cannot do that, we had better be silent.
- We should not just be looking at individual characteristics or restrict ourselves to a mental or psychological approach. We must also explore a normative approach and investigate how the social fabric, in a cross-cultural context, comes to define a person.
- Given that ever more empirical data[2] is becoming available on both approaches, this bodes well for a coherent conception *personhood*, although it may well be a different *personhoo*d than we imagined so far.

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[1] Note that a society may be populated not just with humans but also with other animated beings, such as animals, land, spirits and ancestors, all of which interconnect as persons. We find such animistic views deeply embedded in modern social life. Japanese popular culture, for instance, routinely makes spirits, robots and animals co-habit the world in ways that ignore boundaries between the human and extra-human realms (Miguel Astor-Aguilera & Graham Harvey, 2018).

[2] For instance, on how to recognise cognitive processes and mental states, such as in chimps and cetaceans (Vincent, Ring, & Andrews, 2018); or anthropological evidence (Cathrine Degnen, 2018)