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WHAT IS IT TO BE A PERSON?

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ABSTRACT. I will deal with the synchronic question of persons to clarify the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person. Having reflexive self-consciousness is both the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person. I discuss the relationship between having reflexive self-consciousness and the other properties which uniquely belong to persons 'i.e.,' being a moral agent, being a rational agent and having free will. A problem arises when one defines a person based on having reflexive self-consciousness. "Is a sleeping human being still a person?" To resolve the problem, I will appeal to Aristotle's distinction between first and second potentialities.

Key words: *Person, Reflexive self-consciousness, Criterialism, First potentialities, Second potentialities*

Introduction

In the realm of contemporary philosophy, there have been many debates concerning the problems of personal identity and how persons are related to their bodies. As a matter of fact, there are some important philosophical questions the answers to which depend on our understanding of what it is to be a person. Firstly, if I am a person, then what is the relationship between 'me' as a person and my body? Are persons identical to their bodies? Secondly, there has been a lasting question regarding the problem of personal identity over time. What makes it the case that one is the same person who existed at an earlier time and will exist at a later time? What is it for me as a person to persist from time, t_1, to time, t_2, especially if, as it does, my matter is constantly changing through replacement of parts? The question is directly related to questions about the resurrection, which have been at the core of the doctrines of many religions world-wide. If, as those doctrines say, I can survive death, then how can I continue as 'me' rather than someone else after death?

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In short, with regard to persons, we face two main philosophical questions; a synchronic question and a diachronic question. The synchronic question deals with the fundamental question: "What am I?" It is a question about the identity of a person at a time. In virtue of what conditions, is something a person at a given time? But the diachronic question deals with personal identity over time: "In virtue of what conditions is a person P_1, at t_1, the same person P_2, at t_2?" Any effort at finding a solution for the problem of personal identity over time must have already dealt with the question: "What makes me the person I am?" Answering the diachronic question is not possible unless we have already dealt with the synchronic question. What is it to be a person? This is the question I intend to deal with in this paper.

According to Brian Garret, the question "What is a person?" can have two different meanings: one is, "What conditions does *x* have to satisfy in order to be a person?" Garret calls this question as 'satisfaction question.' The other meaning of the question is "Of what kind of stuff are persons composed?" For example, we might think that persons can only be made by organisms. But one may think that persons are made by both organisms and silicon chips. Garret calls the latter question the 'nature question.'[2] To answer the nature question, we need, first, to answer the satisfaction question. In order to know which kind of things can compose persons, we need to know what the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person are. In this article, I will deal with the satisfaction question to clarify the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person.

Firstly, I argue that being a person is not equivalent to being a member of *Homo sapiens*. Being a person and being a member of *Homo sapiens* are two different things. Then to start our investigations about the conditions of personhood, I suggest looking to the characteristics which uniquely belong to persons. Having self-consciousness, being a moral agent, being a rational agent and having free will are those features which are uniquely ascribed to persons. I examine if any of those characteristics can be considered as the core of personhood. I argue that having the reflexive form of self-consciousness is both the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a person. To argue that having reflexive self-consciousness is the core of personhood, I discuss the relationship between having reflexive self-consciousness and the other properties which uniquely belong to persons. Finally, I will propose the definition of a person as an entity who has the reflexive form of self-consciousness. To propose the definition, I will appeal to Aristotle's distinction between first and second potentialities. This helps me to propose a solution for a very serious problem which occurs when one wants to define a person based on having a form of self-consciousness. "Is a sleeping human being still a person?" We can find a solution for this problem in Aristotle's distinction between first and second potentialities.

[2] Brian Garrett, *Personal Identity and Self-Consciousness*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 3.

What is Personhood?

To start our investigation to find what personhood is, we need to focus on those distinguished features which we normally ascribe to a person. As a starting point, I will consider the properties which come to minds when we talk about persons in everyday life. Obviously, what comes to mind might not be definitive. So, whenever I claim any property as a necessary or sufficient condition for being a person, I will argue why I take the property as a necessary or sufficient condition. But it is noteworthy to mention that, in order to start discussing of personhood, we need to start from the properties with which we are familiar. The thing which qualifies as a person exemplifies some properties by means of which we distinguish it from non-persons. In what follows, I examine if any of the unique properties which we ascribe to persons can be considered as the core of personhood.

Normally, what comes to mind regarding persons is the idea that persons are conscious beings which have properties like self-consciousness, rationality, free will and being a moral agent. First of all, there has been a consensus about the fact that persons are conscious, sentient beings. Only conscious beings can be persons. The aforementioned properties only can be found in conscious beings, but we need to clarify what we mean by 'conscious being.' By a conscious being, I simply mean any entity which is aware of something. To be conscious, is to have awareness of something. It is clear that such a definition implies that the being must be a subject of some or all of the following things: sensations, emotions, experiences, and thoughts. Hence, according to this definition, a broad range of beings qualify as conscious beings. We know that a frog is capable of experiencing pain and a shark is capable of being aware (smell and taste) of even the smallest amount of blood from more than a mile away. So, there are a vast number of living things which can be considered as conscious beings.

In discussing consciousness, we need to consider the recent distinctions made by some philosophers about the notion of consciousness. One of the important distinctions is related to the difference between intransitive and transitive consciousness. Sometimes, 'conscious' is just another word for being awake. For example, when I am in deep sleep—and I am not dreaming—I am not conscious. A being which has intransitive consciousness is simply awake as opposed to asleep, but a being which has transitive consciousness is a being which is capable of being aware of such and such.[3] A conscious being has consciousness in the transitive sense, when it is capable of perceiving of something. As mentioned, by conscious being I mean a being which is capable of being aware of something. For our purposes, the relevant notion of consciousness is transitive consciousness.

[3] Peter Carruthers, "The Evolution of Consciousness," *http://faculty.philosophy.umd.edu/pcarruthers/Evolution-of-consciousness.htm.*

Although persons are conscious beings, merely being conscious cannot be considered sufficient for being a person. As mentioned, one of the properties which we ascribe to persons is the property of being a moral agent. If we accept that merely being conscious is sufficient for being a person, then we must commit to the conclusion that all sorts of conscious beings are moral agents. While it is possible to argue for the idea that among non-human animals there are some beings that are persons, so moral agents, I do not think that one can argue that all conscious beings including possibly some invertebrates and all vertebrates are moral agents. Therefore, being conscious is only a necessary condition for being a person. To know what the sufficient conditions for being a person are, we need to look to the other properties which in terms of required cognitive abilities are more complex than being merely conscious. These properties are having self-consciousness, being a rational agent, being a moral agent and having free will.

It is a commonly held view that the above-mentioned properties uniquely belong to the members of *Homo sapiens*. This view motivated some scholars to presuppose that to be a person is to be a member of *Homo sapiens*. As I shall discuss shortly, there are some theories which presuppose that 'being a person' is 'being a member of the species, *Homo sapiens*,' but to assert this, we need to provide a convincing argument. 'Being a person' and 'being a member of *Homo sapiens*' are not synonymous. There may be some members of *Homo sapiens* who do not qualify as persons, and vice versa. For example, it is hard to say that a new born infant is able to show all properties which are ascribed to persons. So, it is clear that although we usually take human beings as persons, being a person is not merely being a member of *Homo sapiens*. The term 'person' does not mean exactly the same as the term 'human being.' Moreover, logically speaking, "*x* can be the same person as *y* without being the same human being as *y*."[4] So, being a person is not the same as being a member of *Homo sapiens*. There may be some philosophical or scientific reasons to state that no conscious being can develop into a person except a human being. But no one from the beginning of her investigation, without providing any reason, can reasonably claim that to be a person is to be a member of *Homo sapiens*. Putting aside the presupposition that to be a person is to be a human being, we need a criterion to distinguish persons form non-persons. But before entering into this discussion, I need, first, to discuss the view that we should put aside any effort to find a criterion for distinguishing persons from non-persons. As shall be shown, such a view presupposes the idea that to be a person is to be a member of *Homo sapiens*.

[4] David Wiggins, "The Person as Object of Science, as Subject of Experience, and as Locus of Values," In *Person and Personality: A Contemporary Inquiry*, ed. Arthur Peacocke and Grant Gillett, 57 (Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

The idea that having a special property (or special properties) can be considered as the criterion to distinguish persons from non-persons has been dubbed as 'criterialism.' Some have argued against the idea that one (or some) specific properties can be considered as characterising the core of personhood. I do not share this attitude. So, before looking for criteria, I need to show that criterialism is more acceptable than its rival idea, 'speciesism.' Speciesism is a label for any theory of persons which commits to the idea that to be a person is to be a member of *Homo sapiens*. In addition to the problem mentioned above, these kinds of theories of personhood face another serious problem. I will outline this problem in discussing one such theory.

An anti-abortionist philosopher Francis J. Beckwith has recently proposed a theory of persons according to which proposing a criterion for knowing what a person is has a serious problem. The problem, he argues, is that the criterion cannot tell us what a non-person is.[5] According to him, what is morally crucial is being a person, and whether something is able to perform the functions associated with being a person at any given time is not morally important. He writes:

A human person does not come into existence when human function arises, but rather, a human person is an entity who has the natural inherent capacity to give rise to human functions, whether or not those functions are ever attained.[6]

He argues that, morally and legally speaking, abortion is a form of killing person because a foetus is a person even if its personal functions have not been attained at the time when it is in foetal condition. From the time of conception what comes into existence is a person. He bases his idea on a view proposed by a theologian John Jefferson Davis who says having the properties which normally are ascribed to a person is based on personhood, not vice versa.[7] Therefore, for Beckwith, even a human foetus is a person. In fact, his theory is based on the idea that to be a person is to be a member of *Homo sapiens*, that is, his theory is one of speciesism. As mentioned, speciesism is a theory which from the beginning presupposes that only the members of a special species 'i.e.,' *Homo sapiens* can be considered as persons.[8]Although the proponents of speciesism—'e.g.,'Beckwith—reject criterialism,

[5] Francis J. Beckwith, "Abortion, Bioethics, and Personhood: A Philosophical Reflection," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no.1 (2000): 18.

[6] Ibid., 20.

[7] Ibid.

[8] In the literature of moral philosophy, sometimes speciesism is used to describe the idea according to which only human beings are entitled to the fundamental moral protection. According to this idea, non-human animals, morally speaking, have inferior status and the protection granted to them is minimal. See Paola Cavalieri and Catherine Woollard, *The Animal Question: Why Non-Human Animal Deserve Human Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69-70.

they provide with us a criterion to distinguish persons from non-persons. This criterion is 'to be a member of *Homo sapiens*.' But, the problem with speciesism is that this is an arbitrary criterion. The main problem with speciesism is that it neglects the similarities between human beings and other primates which are our relatives in the evolutionary journey. Why can't a chimpanzee be considered as a person while it has a nervous system which is similar to ours?

According to Beckwith, a person is an entity which has the natural inherent capacity to give rise to the functions of personhood. What is the 'natural inherent capacity?' As we know, biologically speaking, there are considerable resemblances between human beings and chimpanzees and monkeys. Why don't chimpanzees and monkeys have such a capacity? According to him, when a human sperm combines with a human ovum a person comes into existence. But why can't we say that a combined chimpanzee sperm and chimpanzee ovum form a person? As a matter of fact, any theory which simply presupposes that only human beings can be considered as persons faces a problem in explaining why the other primates are not capable of developing into persons. Considering the problems of the theories which entail speciesism, it is now time to provide the criterion of being a person is. By means of discussing the properties which are central to being a person, I will try to clarify what personhood is. I examine whether any one of the properties which are central to personhood might alone be considered as the core of personhood.

In the philosophical literature, some properties have been mentioned as the properties which are central to being a person. For example, Mary Anne Warren notes that persons are closely tied up with six central characteristics. According to Warren, to be a person is to have the following capacities: 1) the capacity of being conscious; 2) the capacity of experiencing emotions; 3) the capacity of communicating (by whatever means); 4) having self-consciousness; 5) having reason which is the capacity to solve problems; 6) being a moral agent.[9] (Warren notes that an entity needs not have all mentioned capacities to be a person, and none of them is absolutely necessary.)[10] Other philosophers including Peter Strawson and Harry G. Frankfurt have provided us with other properties as the properties which are central for being a person. (I shall discuss their views shortly.) As shall be discussed soon, Frankfurt argues that having free will is the central property to being a person. The provided list by Warren includes all properties—except having free will—which are normally ascribed to persons. However, some of the properties which have been suggested by Warren are properties that can be ascribed to many conscious beings.

[9] Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," In *Ethics in Practice,* ed. Hugh La Follette, 76 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).
[10] Ibid.

For example, the property of being conscious is a property which can be ascribed to all conscious beings. The property of being able to communicate, by whatever means, is the property which all conscious beings are capable of having. As mentioned, merely being conscious cannot be considered as the sufficient condition for being a person. This is because there are a broad range of conscious beings which they do not exhibit some characteristics that are crucial to being a person. For example, there are many conscious animals which are not moral agents while being a moral agent is one of the important characteristics of persons. If we take the core of personhood as being conscious, then the definition of person will be too inclusive. I will deal with one such theory shortly, but before discussing this kind of theory, I need to discuss the capacity of feeling emotions.

The capacity of feeling emotions, also, can be ascribed to a broad range of conscious beings. We see some animals that show kinds of behaviours which can be considered as the signs of feeling some emotions 'e.g.,' sadness, anger and joy. Moreover, there have been some scientific studies according to which many nonhuman animals are capable of feeling emotions. For example, it has been said that mammals and some birds feel emotions.[11] So, it is too difficult to state that the capacity of feeling emotions is not shared with many conscious beings. Marc Bekoff —a biologist who has conducted research on the capacity of feeling emotions in animals—writes:

It is bad biology to argue against the existence of animal emotions. Scientific research in evolutionary biology, cognitive ethology, and social neuroscience supports the view that numerous and diverse animals have rich and deep emotional lives.[12]

However, one may argue that nonhuman animals are not capable to feel emotions in the same way as humans. I am not endorsing this view here, but if this is the case, then we need to divide the capacity of feeling emotions into two different kinds: one which is shared by a broad range of conscious beings and one which is uniquely belong to human beings. Even if this is true, the capacity of feeling emotions (in the general sense) should be considered as a shared capacity by a broad range of conscious beings. We have no reason to state that a broad range of conscious beings are not capable of feeling emotions. Now, if one maintains that to be a person is to have the capacity of feeling emotions in the way that humans do, then one commits to the idea of speciesism, which, as argued above, is not acceptable. So, feeling emotions is also a shared characteristic by many conscious beings which normally are not considered as persons. Hence, the capacity of feeling emotions is not the

[11] Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy-and Why They Matter*, (Navato; California: New World Library, 2007).
[12] Ibid., XVIII.

sufficient condition for being a person. Moreover, the capacity is not the necessary condition for being a person too. It is logically possible to think that there is a person who is unemotional. For example, one of the *Star Trek* characters, Mr Spock lacks the capacity of feeling emotions while he is sentient being, a moral agent and has self-consciousness.[13] Having said that, now it is time to discuss the definition of person proposed in the philosophical literature.

A definition of person will be too inclusive, if according to this definition we can consider some conscious beings as persons while they lack some or all of the properties which uniquely are ascribed to persons. As an example of such a definition, we can mention the definition of person proposed by Peter Strawson in his *Individuals.* He defined personhood based on having both mental and bodily characteristics. According to Strawson, a person is a kind of compound subject which is made by combination of two different subjects: a subject of experience and a subject of corporeal attributes. He writes:

What I mean by the concept of person is the concept of a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation, are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type.[14]

But, Strawson's definition is too broad; there are some conscious beings to which we can ascribe both predicates ascribing state of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal attributes while they lack the property of being a moral agent and the property of self-consciousness (at least we are not sure that they have those properties.) For this reason, Strawson's definition of a person is far too inclusive. In regards to Strawson's definition, Frankfurt writes:

It does violence to our language to endorse the application of the term 'person' to those numerous creatures which do have both psychological and material properties but which are manifestly not persons in any normal sense of the word.[15]

We need to focus on those properties which in terms of required cognitive abilities are more complex than being merely conscious. The following properties must be considered as the central properties to be a person: 1) self-consciousness; 2) being rational agent; 3) being a moral agent; 4) free will. However, we may face another problem when we try to avoid proposing an overly inclusive definition of person. We may propose an overly narrow definition of person. A definition of this type has been proposed by Frankfurt who takes the property of having free will as the property of being a person.

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[13] Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," 77.

[14] Peter Strawson, *Individual: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, (London, Mehtuen, 1955): 101-2.

[15] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and The Concept of Person," *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no.1 (1971): 5.

Frankfurt, firstly, argues that persons are entities who are able to form 'second-order desires.'[16] Non-human animals and human beings all have the desires to do or not to do such and such. He has dubbed them as 'first-order desires.' To be a person, an animal must also be capable of having a desire about the first-order desires which is formed by a 'reflective self-evaluation' of the first-order desire.[17] But in order to have a second-order desire, the animal must want "a certain desire to be his will."[18] He dubbed this as 'second order volition.' According to Frankfurt, it is logically possible that an agent has second-order desires, but it does not have the volitions for fulfilling them. He notes that there is a difference between the two creatures. One that simply wants a certain desire—having a second-order desire of first-order desires—and one that wants the certain desire—the second-order desire —to be effective. Frankfurt calls the former creatures 'wantons.' A wanton is a creature that has second-order desire, but it ignores the question what its will is to be.[19] Only the former creatures deserve to be called persons. Therefore, a person is an entity who has second-order volitions.[20] But those creatures which are capable of having second-order volitions are the creatures which are capable of having free will. "It is only because a person has volitions of the second order that he is capable both of enjoying and of lacking freedom of the will."[21] Hence, the core of personhood for Frankfurt is having free will. What is having freedom of the will? Frankfurt writes:

The statement that a person enjoys freedom of the will means (also roughly) that he is free to want what he wants to want. More precisely, it means that he is free to will what he wants to will, or to have the will he wants.[22]

A drug addict may have a desire to use a drug (first-order desire), but since he has a free will, he can have a second desire to extinguish the desire to use the drug. In contrast to Strawson's definition, the problem of Frankfurt's definition is that it is too narrow. Frankfurt's account of person requires too much. We normally take a three-year-old child as a person while he may lack such a kind of freedom of will.[23] In fact, Frankfurt's account of freedom of will is an overly strong one. Frankfurt's sense of free will is stronger than the ordinary sense of the term which comes to our minds when we talk about free will.

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[16] Ibid., 6.
[17] Ibid., 7.
[18] Ibid., 10.
[19] Ibid., 11.
[20] Ibid., 10-11.
[21] Ibid., 14.
[22] Ibid, 15.
[23] David DeGrazia, "On the Question of Personhood beyond Homo Sapiens," In *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*, ed. Peter Singer, 41 (Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

As Eleonore Stump argues, Frankfurt's sense of free will might be called 'complete freedom of will.' "It encompasses and exceeds the ordinary sense of free will as absence of external obstacles to willing what one wants."[24] The difference between Frankfurt's sense of free will and the ordinary sense of free will can be clarified, if we consider the distinction between two notions: freedom of actions and freedom of will. What we mean by the ordinary sense of free will is actually freedom of actions which is different from Frankfurt's sense of freedom of will. "Freedom of action is the absence of obstacles to doing what one wants to do; freedom of will is the absence of obstacles to willing what one wants to will."[25] An agent enjoys freedom of action, if there are no external and internal obstacles to doing what the agent wants to do, and there are no external obstacles to willing what the agent wants to will. But in order to enjoy freedom of will, in Frankfurt's term, there must be an additional condition. In addition to the above conditions, there must be no internal obstacles to willing what the agent wants to will. To enjoy free will, in his sense, there must be no internal compulsive behaviour.[26] A drug addict might have two first-order desires. He may want to take the drug and at the same time he may want to avoid the drug. Then, he forms a second-order desire to want to be driven by the desire to avoid the drug. So, he wants the desire to avoid the drug to be effective in action. But, finally, he will be driven by the desire to take the drug. The behaviour internally is compulsive. As Robert Kane notes, in this example, in Frankfurt's sense, the addict lacks freedom of will "because he cannot secure the conformity of his will [first-order desires] to his second-order volitions. He does not have 'the will he wants to have.'"[27] But, the addict has a free will in the ordinary sense of free will. He has the freedom of action in the sense discussed above. Therefore, having free will—in Frankfurt's sense—cannot be considered as a necessary condition for being a person, though it might be a sufficient condition. If we define personhood as having free will in the above sense, then our definition will be too exclusive.

In order to know what a person is, I suggest looking again to the properties that are uniquely ascribed to persons—'i.e.,'self-consciousness, being a rational agent and being a moral agent, and having free will in the ordinary sense. Which one can be considered as the core of personhood? Historically speaking, self-consciousness is the property which has been considered as constitutive of being a person. This idea has been derived from Locke's definition of persons. In contemporary philosophy, the

[24] Eleonore Stump, "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's concept of Free will," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85, no. 8 (1998): 398.
[25] Ibid., 397.
[26] Ibid., 399.
[27] Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 62.

idea has some notable defenders including Peter Singer. In a famous passage of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke defined person as an entity which is aware of itself as itself. Locke writes:

A thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it.[28]

Following Locke, some contemporary philosophers believe that the core of personhood is self-consciousness. Michael Tooley and Brian Garrett think that self-consciousness is the core of personhood.[29] Peter Singer is also a defender of this view. Singer states that Locke based the definition on two characteristics; self-consciousness and rationality. According to Singer, a person is an entity which has self-consciousness and rationality such that the other capacities which are ascribed to persons follow from these two main capacities.[30] Singer notes that an entity has self-consciousness provided that it is aware of itself as a distinct entity with a past and a future.[31] In what follows, I will argue that self-consciousness is what grounds of being a person.

In order to show that having self-consciousness is the core of being a person, we need to understand the relationship between having self-consciousness and having the other three aforementioned required properties 'i.e.,' being a rational agent and being a moral agent, and having free will in the ordinary sense. I argue that having self-consciousness is both the necessary and sufficient conditions for having the other three features which are central to being a person. To argue for this claim, firstly, I discuss a characteristic which lies at the heart of having the three mentioned properties. Then, I will clarify what I mean by the term 'self-consciousness.' This is because there are some ambiguities around the term self-consciousness in philosophical and scientific literatures. Then, I will argue that if any conscious being has a special form of self-consciousness, it has the mentioned characteristic which is central to have the other three properties. Therefore, having a special form of self-consciousness can be considered as both the sufficient and necessary conditions for being a person. First, we need to understand what moral agency, rational agency and having free will are.

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[28] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 448-9.
[29] Michael Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), 64; cf. Garrett, *Personal Identity and Self-Consciousness*, 6.
[30] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74.
[31] Ibid., 94.

Moral Agency, Rational Agency and Having Free Will in the Ordinary Sense

First of all, we need to clarify what being an agent is. If we define agency as doing things, then it follows that any kind of organism is an agent because all organisms do metabolic processes. Clearly, when we discuss moral agency and rational agency, we do not have such an idea of agency in our minds. A minimal account of agency is based on the ability to do actions. An action is a thing which—when performed—is adequately explainable only in terms of beliefs, desires and intentions of the doer.[32] Hence, an agent is a conscious being which is able to perform actions—things that can be explained in terms of beliefs, desires and intentions of the conscious being. In fact, this is a minimal account of agency. Such definition entails that in addition to human beings there are nonhuman animals which qualify as agents. The purposive behaviour of animals can be considered as action performed by an agent. For example, the behaviour of a beaver to make a dam can be explained in terms of its intentions. So, a beaver is an agent. Although there are a number of conscious beings which can be considered as agents, rational agency and moral agency requires much more than this minimal account. It is not the case that all agents can be considered as rational agents or moral agents.

Rational agency is typically defined based on decision making. Rationality can be understood on the ground of having all those capacities which contribute to reasonable decision-making. The capacity for being a rational agent is the capacity to make reasonable decisions about what to do.[33] In order to make a reasonable decision, one must have some desires and preferences and to rank the desires and preferences. A rational agent is an agent that has some desires to choose. A rational agent is an agent that is able to form second-order desires, because to be in a position to make a reasonable decision, one must be able to choose one of its desires, so it must form a desire regarding its first-order desires. The ability to form second-order desires is both the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a rational agent. First, if an agent is not able to form a second-order desire, it is not in a position to choose one of its first-order desires as a desire to satisfy. Also, the ability to form second-order desire is the sufficient condition for being a rational agent. If an agent has a second-order desire of its first-order desires, it is able to evaluate and rank its desires. If an agent has various first-order desires, and it is able to form a second-order desire of its first-order desires, then it will attempt to evaluate and rank the first-order desire because a desire is something that, by its very nature, "has an inclination to satisfy; otherwise, it would not be a desire."[34] Such a conscious being tries to rank its desires

[32] Lynne Rudder Baker, *Naturalism and the First-person Perspective*, (Oxford, U.K.; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 187-8.

[33] David Hodgson, *Rationality + Consciousness = Free will*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26.

[34] Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View*, (United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158.

in order to be able to satisfy one of them. Various desires normally conflict with each other. If the conscious being avoids ranking the desires, then, *per impossibile*, any attempt at satisfaction is committed to satisfying conflicting desires. Since a desire is a thing which has an inclination for satisfaction, an agent which has various conflicting first-order desires and is able to form a second-order desire, will attempt to rank the desires.[35]

Now, the question is by means of which ability is a conscious being able to form second-order desires? As discussed above, Frankfurt argues that any being which has the capacity of reflective self-evaluation has the capacity of forming second-order desires.[36] At the core of the capacity to form second-order desires—being a rational agent—is the ability to 'reflect.' Reflection, in Lockean sense, is an operation—an act—of the mind by means of which the mind takes notice of its own mental operation in itself.[37] By reflection a conscious being is able to conceive of itself as the subject of the desires and ask itself if the decision is suitable based on its preferences or not. If a conscious being is able to reflect on itself as the bearer of first-order desires and as the bearer of some preferences, it is able to form a desire of its first-order desires. Therefore, the ability to reflect lies at the heart of rational agency.

In regards to having free will, firstly, I wish to recall what was said above about the ordinary sense of free will. The ordinary sense of free will is, in fact, freedom of action. A conscious being has freedom of action if it is able to choose an action amongst various actions in the absence of obstacles to doing what it wants to do. As discussed above, to be free from internally compulsive behaviours is not a necessary condition for freedom of action (or freedom of will in the ordinary sense), though it is necessary for freedom of will in the complete sense (or Frankfurt's sense of free will.) The ability to form second-order desires is both necessary and sufficient for having freedom of actions. Any conscious being which is able to form second-order desires is in a position to make a decision to choose an action among various alternatives.[38] It is necessary because if a conscious being

[35] Ibid., 159.

[36] Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of Person," 7.

[37] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 124.

[38] One might think that the definition of free will as the ability to choose a course of action among various actions is consistent with goal-directed behaviors which can be seen in some animals. Normally, we do not consider the animals that are able to do goal-directed behaviors as the conscious beings that enjoy freedom of will. I believe that considering the condition that the conscious being must be able to form second-order desire (the ability to reflect) helps us to rule out goal-directed behaviors as the behaviors which require free will. The ability to reflect is not required for goal-directed behaviors. A conscious being which is capable of goal-directed behaviors is an agent in the minimal sense, though not a rational agent.

has no second-order desire, then it is not able to evaluate the first-order desire to make the decision to act based on its preferences. Also, it is sufficient because, as argued in regards to rational agency, if a conscious being is able to form second-order desires by ranking its first-order desire, then it will do so since a desire to do an action by its very nature is a thing that begs satisfaction. So, again, the act of reflection which follows the ability to form second-order desires is both necessary and sufficient for freedom of action (free will in the ordinary sense). In other words, any conscious being which is a rational agent has freedom of action.

With regard to moral agency, we need to distinguish between 'being a moral agent,' and 'being a moral subject.' A moral subject is an entity that has entitled to be treated in a certain way, that is, it is entitled to moral protection. A moral agent is a conscious being that is responsible for its actions. Hence, an entity might be a moral subject without being a moral agent. [39] For the purpose of this discussion, we shall focus on the concept of moral agency. A moral agent is an agent that is able to make decisions based on its preferences (a system of moral values), and is able to take responsibility for the actions it performs.[40](However, we sometimes blame a person for his carelessness. In the case of negligence, one has a responsibility in regards to the actions which must have been done by him, yet neglected. In this case, 'refraining' or 'forgetting' can be considered as the actions of which the conscious being is responsible.) The definition shows that only rational agents are capable to be moral agents. To be a moral agent, the agent must be able of decision-making based on its preferences and values. This entails that moral agency requires rational agency. But in addition to being a rational agent, the agent must be able to take responsibility in regards to the actions it has performed. Again, the ability to reflect is at the core of moral agency. As argued, the ability to reflect is both necessary and sufficient for being a rational agent. The ability to reflect is both the necessary and sufficient for the ability to take responsibility for actions.

It is necessary because if the agent is not able to take notice of the operation of its mind, it is not able to appreciate the fact that it has performed some special actions. No conscious being is able to know that it (itself) has performed some actions unless it is able to conceive of itself as the subject of those actions. By means of the act of reflection a conscious being will be able to conceive of itself as the bearer of actions. Also, reflection is a sufficient condition for being a moral agent. If a conscious being is able to reflect, it is able to view itself as the agent that has performed the actions. So, it is in a position to be questioned and be called responsible about the actions done.

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[39] Shaun Gallagher, "Moral Agency, Self-consciousness and Practical Wisdom," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14, no. 5-6 (2007): 200.

[40] Baker, *Naturalism and the First-person Perspective*, 192.

However, one might argue that if determinism is right, then the agent is not responsible for its actions, even if it is able to view itself as the subject of an action and is able to recognise that it (itself) has performed the action. Determinism in this case means that the laws of nature together with the antecedent conditions completely determine my future decision to act. Here we need to clarify the term 'moral responsibility.' An agent is morally responsible if and only if it is able to evaluate the actions it has performed on the basis of a system of moral values. People are able to judge their own actions and to state whether an action is wrong or right. Whether or not I enjoy free will, other people and I can evaluate my actions based on a system of values. An agent is morally responsible for its actions if the agent is ready to endorse the desire upon which he had performed the action. Whether or not the agent has control over the factors that form its desires, it is able to endorse or refuse to endorse those desires. Even if determinism is right, the action I perform is my action which is done based on a second-order desire of my first-order desire. If I am ready to endorse my second-order desire, I am responsible for the action, even if I had no control on factors which contribute to form the second-order desire.[41] Therefore, if an agent is able to view itself, its actions, and its desires, then it is able to take responsibility of its actions. The ability to reflect is necessary and sufficient for being a moral agent.

To sum up; the ability to reflect is at the core of having free will (in the ordinary sense), being a rational agent and being a moral agent. Now the question is, 'Is having the property of self-consciousness the core of personhood?' To argue for the claim that having self-consciousness is the core of personhood, first, we need to clarify what we mean by the term 'self-consciousness.' This is because there is some ambiguity regarding the term 'self-consciousness.' The main issue centres on the concept of self-consciousness in the philosophical and scientific literature. In fact, there is a huge body of literature discussing the concept of self-consciousness in both major traditions of contemporary philosophy—logical analysis and phenomenology. Moreover, psychology and neuroscience literature is also filled with conflicting definitions of self-consciousness. The ambiguity which frequently arises is related to the idea that self-consciousness has different levels or different types. One reasonable question would be "Which form (or level) of self-consciousness is required to be a person?" If there are various forms of self-consciousness, then which one can be considered as the core of personhood? In order to answer these questions, we need to clarify the exact characteristic of self-consciousness which is sufficient for being a person.

[41] Ibid., 205.

The Reflexive Form of Self-consciousness is the Core of Personhood

Having self-consciousness is to have an inner awareness of myself. In order to have the property of self-consciousness, a conscious being must have inner awareness of itself. Having inner awareness of itself, however, is to be aware of itself in a special way 'i.e.,' an immediate way. To have the property of self-consciousness, the conscious being must have immediate direct access to itself. The difference between immediate and mediate access can be understood based on the difference between a first-person perspective and a third person perspective. (By a 'perspective,' I mean a point of view.) For example, if I have a pain in my leg, I don't need to rely on observation to know that I am in pain. I just know it. But someone else can know that I am in pain by relying on an observation or by being informed by me. Similarly, to know some information about myself, I can use a third person perspective. For example, I can know my date of birth by hearing it from others. Having self-consciousness is a matter of knowing myself from the first-person perspective. By having a first-person perspective of itself, a conscious being is able to refer to itself as a particular self such that the apprehension of itself is a part of the content of its thought without appealing to any name, description or third-personal referential device to identify which being is being referred to. Knowledge acquired by self-consciousness cannot be replaced by the knowledge acquired through any other device.

But what if there are various forms of self-consciousness? If there are various forms of self-consciousness, then can we state that possession of each one is sufficient to be a person? Or can only one form of self-consciousness be considered as the core of personhood. The idea that there are various forms of self-consciousness has some proponents among phenomenologists.[42] The distinction between various forms of self-consciousness overlaps recent analytic and continental philosophies. [43]

[42] For the phenomenologists there is a minimal form of self-consciousness which is always a constant feature of any conscious experience. This is the form of self-consciousness which has been labelled pre-reflective self-consciousness. Dan Zahavi calls this form of self-consciousness the quality of *mineness*. See Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Self-hood*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 16. In addition to pre-reflective self-consciousness, there is another form of self-consciousness exemplified in the moment in which one attentively reflects on oneself as the bearer of his experiences. This form has been dubbed reflective self-consciousness by the phenomenologists. See Dan Zahavi, "First-person thought and embodied self-awareness: Some reflection on the relation between recent analytical philosophy and phenomenology," *Phenomenology and The Cognitive Science* 1(2002): 17.

[43] Flanagan has distinguished between low-level self-consciousness involved in "experiencing my experience as mine" and a strong notion of self-consciousness which is the product of thinking on my own self. See Owen Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 194. José Luis Bermúdez has argued that there are various forms of self-consciousness including pre-linguistic self-consciousness, and linguistic self-consciousness. See José Luis Bermúdez, *The Paradox of Self-consciousness*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000).Alvin Goldman also notes that when a human being is thinking about some thing *x* there is a form of self-consciousness which is non-reflective. See Alvin I. Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 96.

Here, I merely want to make two points. Firstly, we know that human beings are able to be conscious of themselves attentively. Sometimes I think of myself such that I take notice of myself as myself and I am attentively aware of my beliefs and my deeds. However, according to some philosophers, this is not the only form of self-consciousness we find in conscious beings. It has been said that there is at least one other form of self-consciousness which is a non-attentive or a basic form of self-consciousness. Although I agree with this idea that there is a non-attentive form of self-consciousness, here, I do not intend to discuss this basic form of self-consciousness.[44] This is because the issue which is at stake here is which form of self-consciousness is the core of personhood. Only a form of self-consciousness acquired based on reflection can be considered as the core of personhood. Whether or not the basic form of self-consciousness (or, as phenomenologists say, pre-reflective self-consciousness) exists it is the intrinsic quality of a subject's consciousness of itself without needing reflection while attentive self-consciousness is the product of a subject's reflection on one's own mind. For the purpose of this discussion, I call the form of self-consciousness which is the core of personhood 'reflexive self-consciousness.'[45]

Reflexive self-consciousness is having the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself through the act of reflection. A conscious being which has reflexive self-consciousness is a being which is conscious of itself as the owner of its experiences.[46] Having reflexive self-consciousness is to have a perspective from which the conscious being can think of itself as an individual subject of experience and as a separated subject from any other subject of experience. To have such ability the conscious being must be able to conceive of itself as the owner of its thoughts. A being which has the property of reflexive self-consciousness must not only be able to recognize itself within the world from a first-person point of view, but it must also be able to conceive of itself as itself without any mediator 'i.e.,' a name, a description, or a third person

[44] To argue for the veracity of this idea, I use John Perry's idea of 'unarticulated constituents.' Based on the idea of unarticulated constituent, Perry explains the most basic kind of self-consciousness in which there is no concept of self. When I see a cup of coffee in front of me, I reach out and pick it up. During this time, I do not think of myself. Although I have no representation of myself explicitly, I can manage the activity. There is no need to have a self-referring constituent in my belief (propositional content). But there is a kind of knowledge of me in this kind of self-consciousness. See John Perry and Simon Blackburn, "Thought Without Representation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60 (1986): 138-151.

[45] To call the form of self-consciousness which is both necessary and sufficient for being a person, I have chosen the term 'reflexive self-consciousness,' used by E.J. Lowe. This is a proper term for the purpose of our discussion because, as argued, being a person depends on having the ability to reflect. For Lowe's discussion, see E.J.Lowe, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 264.

[46] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 14.

demonstrative. It must not only be able to express its thoughts by the use of 'I', but it must also be able to conceive of itself as the bearer of its thoughts.[47] In addition to the fact that it must be able to think of its subjective point of view as its own, it must have the ability to think of other organisms (other owners of subjective points of view) as having different subjective points of view from its own.[48]

The idea of reflexive form of self-consciousness has been famously pointed out by William James where he talks about two discriminated aspects of a subject that is conscious of itself. According to James, when I am conscious of myself I am conscious of, at the same time, something which is partly knower and partly known, partly subject and partly object. These are two discriminated aspects which can be labelled as 'I' and 'me'.[49] By having reflexive self-consciousness the conscious being is aware of itself such that it is exposed to itself, that is, it is able to view itself.[50] If a conscious being is able to view itself attentively such that the conscious being is exposed to itself it has reflexive self-consciousness. At the core of reflexive self-consciousness is the ability to reflect. A conscious being which is able to reflect on its own mind is the conscious being which is able to perform the act of conceiving of itself as itself, and is able to view itself as the bearer of its own desires and as the agent of its own actions. Any conscious being which has self-consciousness through the act of reflection has the reflexive form of self-consciousness.

As argued above, a conscious being which is able to reflect on its mind has those properties which are central to being a person; having freedom of action, being a rational agent, and being a moral agent. The reflexive form of self-consciousness—the act of conceiving oneself as oneself through reflection—is at the core of those three properties. Thus, any conscious being which has reflexive self-consciousness has all four properties which are uniquely ascribed to persons. It has self-consciousness and freedom of action. It is a moral and a rational agent.

If a conscious being has a form of self-consciousness which has not been acquired through the act of reflection, then the form of self-consciousness is not sufficient for having the three aforementioned properties. By merely having a low-level of self-consciousness the conscious being is not aware of its own perspective as its own. For this reason the properties which are normally ascribed to persons cannot be realized by merely having a non-reflexive form of self-consciousness. For example, in order to be a moral agent the conscious being needs to be aware of its actions

[47] Baker, *Persons and Bodies*, 64.
[48] Ibid., 66.
[49] William James, *Psychology*, (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1982), 176.
[50] Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self*, (New York, Toronto: The Free Press, Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992), 36.

(what it has done and what it intends to do) and of itself as the subject of the actions. If I have damaged a car in an accident of which I am guilty, I, as a person, am expected to accept the responsibility for what I have done. But in order to do so, I need first to be aware that I (myself) have caused the accident. To make such a judgment, I need to be aware of myself as a separate subject of actions and experiences from every other subject of actions and experiences in the world (for example, the one whose car has been damaged by me). I need to be viewed by myself and this can only be possible by having reflexive self-consciousness. Having a lower level form of self-consciousness does not provide me with the ability to view myself.

Thus, to be a person is to have the reflexive form of self-consciousness. Now it is time to turn back to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: "What is the definition of a person?"

The Definition of a Person

So far, it has been suggested that the property of reflexive self-consciousness defines what it is to be a person. But before settling on the definition one final point must be considered. It is not the case that persons always, at all times, exhibit reflexive self-consciousness. For example, sleeping and comatose persons do not exhibit reflexive self-consciousness. If we take having reflexive self-consciousness as the core of personhood, then is it the case that when a human being is asleep, she is not a person? Will she be a person again, when she wakes up? We can find a solution for this problem in Aristotle's distinction between first and second potentialities. In *De Anima* Aristotle discusses two different notions of potentiality. Aristotle writes:

We must now distinguish not only between what is potential and what is actual but also different senses in which things can be said to be potential…We can speak of something as 'a knower' either (a) as when we say that man is a knower, meaning that man falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge, or (b) as when we are speaking of a man who possesses a knowledge of grammar; each of these is so called as having in him a certain potentiality, but there is a difference between their respective potentialities, the one (a) being a potential knower, because his kind or matter is such and such, the other (b), because he can in the absence of any external counteracting cause realize his knowledge in actual knowing at will.[51]

Let's clarify the two distinct notions of potentiality by way of an example. A human being is capable of speaking English in two senses. First, he does not know English, but he is capable of learning to speak English. This is one potentiality. During

[51] Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, trans., W.D. Ross, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-52), 417a 20-30.

the time he is learning how to speak English, he actualizes this potentiality, so this is the first actuality. Now imagine that a man who has learned how to speak English is listening to his friend who speaks English. During the time the man is silent, he does not actualize speaking English, though he is capable of speaking English in a different sense with the first potentiality. He knows English and he is able to actualize speaking English whenever he wants. He has already learned English language, though at this very moment he does not speak English. This is a second case of potentiality.

Now consider a conscious being which has not acquired reflexive self-consciousness. This is a conscious being which cannot be considered as a person. If it has the first potentiality to acquire reflexive self-consciousness, it will actualize reflexive self-consciousness in the sense of first actuality, then it will qualify as a person. Imagine that it has acquired reflexive self-consciousness. When it is asleep, it does not actualize reflexive self-consciousness, but it does not follow that it is in the same situation of a conscious being which has not acquired reflexive self-consciousness yet. Once it wakes up, it can realize reflexive self-consciousness. So, this is not the case that when it is asleep he lacks personhood. Based on the notion of second potentiality, we can suggest the definition of person as follows.

An entity, *x*, is a person if and only if, at any time it exists, either it has actual reflexive self-consciousness or it could realize actual reflexive self-consciousness.[52]

Conclusion

What I have tried to show is that having reflexive self-consciousness can be considered as a foundation for the other properties which are uniquely ascribed to persons. No conscious being can be a moral agent and can be a rational agent without having reflexive self-consciousness. Having reflexive self-consciousness is both necessary and sufficient for being a person. The direct consequence of the above definition of person is a rejection of speciesism and its arbitrary definition of persons. According to the proposed definition, it is not the case that only human beings can be considered as persons. If any other conscious being has the reflexive form of self-consciousness, it qualifies as a person. So, the definition provides room for accepting the idea that there are non-human persons. To be a person is to have the property of reflexive self-consciousness. Any conscious being that has actual reflexive self-consciousness or it could realize actual reflexive self-consciousness can be considered as a person.

[52] There is a difference between the following statements: 1) $\forall t \Diamond$, for en entity, *x*, to realize self-consciousness; 2) $\Diamond \forall t$ an entity, *x*, realizes self-consciousness. Clearly, by the expression 'at any time it exists,' I mean the former statement.

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