

Personhood

Opinion

“A person is an individual substance of rational nature/essence” (Thomas Aquinas 1.29.1) derived originally from the Fifth Century Christian philosopher Boethius. Other definitions range from the gene based “a person is anyone who is a human being” to the simplistic “only those human beings who can think and choose are persons” (Lisa Sowle Cahill: “The Embryo and the Fetus: New Moral Context” Theological Studies 1993, 54, 124-143). Others press “personhood” onto non-humans as in “Rethinking Life and Death” by P. Singer (The Text Publishing Co., Noble & Co. 1994) which applies “thinking” and “consciousness” to all creatures thought capable of some degree of awareness. Actually, these **limited** concepts of consciousness and awareness blur the concept of personhood because they do not go far enough.

It is not mere “consciousness” or “awareness” or “thinking” or “choosing” which constitutes the basis for personhood. To the contrary, it is “consciousness of consciousness” or “awareness of awareness” or, what I prefer, C² (Consciousness squared) which determines the higher being state of a genuine “person” (Read my book, *Happy Ending*).

When an individual substance has C², there exists a rational species specific process entitling it to personhood because with C² is a positive awareness of the species and a potential transcendental life. At conception, C² is a biochemical awareness of the species from fertilization confirmed by the natural pro-self, pro-species development of the creature (If it does not develop naturally, it probably does not have enough biochemical C² or awareness to warrant the “person” label -- but it does deserve its natural chance to develop). C² not only applies to the individual substance alone but to all of us. Self aware, C² embraces and protects our species by the “awareness of being aware” of our C² species itself (an act which conveys dignity, unity, integrity, individuality and spirituality).

Basically, a “person” is an individual substance of a species capable of being positively aware of species specificity enabling transcendental life. It is the potential awareness and conscious protectiveness (which is the transcendental life) of the species by C² which elevates the creature to personhood.

The “personhood” question devolves as to whether the individual substance transcendently supports his species thereby rendering himself to be a person. Personhood is an individual process of C² for the species which can only be accurately discerned by the absence of anti-species activity. I neither know, nor do I have to care, about the personhood of another until he demonstrates his “unperson”-ness by being against the species. I neither know, nor do I have to care, about the personhood of the unborn because that unborn substance will “decide” his own species specific support by proceeding in his own personal development. However, I do have the right to make judgment about members of my species who obviously do not protect the species... because they are not persons any longer having lost the only proof of C².

In summary: a “person” is a child of God, a body-soul composite of transcendental process aware of himself and his species (C², which,

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Samuel A Nigro M.D

Retired, Assistant Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, USA

Correspondence: Dr. Samuel A Nigro M.D., Retired, Assistant Clinical Professor Psychiatry, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, 2517 Guilford Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118, USA, Tel 216 932-0575, Email sam@docnigro.com

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fundamentally, is being “made in the image and likeness of God”). The actual individual (*ens*) is the total specific being in existence. The individual substance is the working genome (the *res*, the matter) of the creature. The creature’s identity (*aliquid*, the form) is its rational nature and rational essence by C²’s pro-species transcendental stance minimally in terms of not being against the species and (to add what else C² enables) for the transcendentals of truth, oneness, good and beauty.

Humans are the only Conscious of Consciousness Capable Creatures (C²CC). As in my book *Happy Ending* (Pg. 330), human relationships (interactions between C²CC’s), especially matrimony, are defined by consciousness of consciousness (C²). Like human cerebra, folding back on themselves, man has the ability for consciousness of his own consciousness. This C² gives partial freedom from biological evolution by virtue of reflective thought manipulating matter in the sequential priorities of Life first, Liberty second, and the Pursuit of Happiness third. When C²CC’s engage, human beingness is enhanced by transcendental expansion achieving community with all other C²CC’s ever anywhere in the universe but especially in the marital union. In the physical order, the principle of human (C²CC) interaction is one of *uncertainty* in that all accuracies are not known, and, therefore, there are many *unknowns* in human relationships! These unknowns of C²CC’s interactions embrace *liberty* which needs to be limited by *temperance* with moderation and self control for all the relationships. (All this is in nascent form in *Happy Ending*).

Back to the specific concept of “person”, one must recognize that a “person” is the consciousness-of-consciousness capable creature (C²CC). C² is the animating principle and is the human soul as it embraces the body like a transcendental sponge. Besides a positive transcendental affirmation of self and the species, C² enables matter, identity, truth, oneness, good and beauty to pervade the creature, absorbed and internalized as the creature. **This is the soul**, which is a transcendental organ enmeshing one’s being as one traverses through the space- time trampoline-like gauntlet of life. The fundamental ontological substrate of the person is his genetic substance. His identity is his transcendental intactness manifest minimally by a prospecies commitment. As the transcendentals (matter, identity, truth, oneness, good and beauty) provide the spiritual linkage for all humans through C², the human genome of *homo sapiens* is the genetic

basis for the human community. With personhood, equal respect for common humanity is demanded by our common genetic composition with C² protecting the species by dignity, unity, integrity, identity, and spirituality.

This definition of person is maximally free! It is intrinsic to the creature himself and depends on no one else. One does have the “right” (not really a “right” but an “opportunity allowed by human freedom”) to reject C² for the species and to reject the pursuit of transcendentals. But one still has the obligation to embrace C² for the species and to positively process the transcendentals reaffirming one’s personhood. Indeed, all spiritual life is to help establish and maintain C² and the transcendentals for the species.

Personhood does not depend on the actually observed capacity of expression for affirmation of the species. Affirmation is assumed for those genetically related unless there is evidence to the contrary. However, personhood is destroyed when the creature denies and does not affirm his species. Thus, “non-persons” are those who have rejected the species. Some examples include non-developing zygotes, abortionists, euthanasiasts, and those who would deny the right to personhood of other genetically related creatures. Actually, the failure to support one’s species (or the failure to embrace one’s personhood) is to request suicide, because one is only entitled to personhood as one professes it because rejecting C² for oneself or the species results in self-depersonalization.

A major problem confronting personhood today is the social depersonalization created by the press and media. The press and media depersonalize creatures by blurring, C² and replacing it with emotional fantasized unreality and non-being from which there is little confirmation or affirmation of substance or transcendental existence. C² seems to be lost by the press and media because the emphasis is on anti-transcendental, anti-common good, selfishness and self aggrandizement with anti-virtue. The press and media are most often unaware of C² and of the transcendentals except as transient, expedient exploitations. With any reading of the Apocalypse, the press and media can be vividly seen therein as the beasts of the Apocalypse.

C² for the species enables transcendental acts which forge forever in eternity, carrying one’s own being with these transcendental acts. As beautiful concert music, reverberating forever throughout space and the universe, one’s transcendental acts will timelessly carry one to and throughout eternity. This is to understand finally that “nothing unclean shall enter heaven” because nothing evil or sinful will ever be in eternity. This reminds of the ancient dictum of Socrates: “No evil

can come to a good man either in life or after death, and God does not neglect him. “ By following C² and living the transcendentals, one’s identified matter flows on a transcendental conduit of truth, oneness, good and beauty, to and through eternity. This eternal permanence of one’s existence is the promise of one’s immortal soul whose transcendental permanence is confluent with one’s transcendental activity. And its main manifestation is by C². One’s soul was created immortal, but it can be annihilated by anti-transcendental acts, just as it can be sustained by images of God within: truth, oneness, good and beauty.

When one violates the integrity of C² and perpetrates evil (anti-transcendental acts and willful entropy), one’s own *being* is annihilated as if one is stabbing one’s soul with an ice pick. With each sin occurs another puncture of the ice pick into one’s soul. By evil acts, one turns oneself into empty holes of non-existence because evil is a negation that exists in time only. For man, evil is a self-negating vacuum where we have violated transcendental existence and C². The evil one does converts oneself into many empty holes of negative nothingness. From an intact C² filled with transcendentals at birth, one becomes a ragged bag of macerated of non-transcendental non-being. But, thanks to the Sacraments, the holes in one’s soul can be refilled.

Personhood is an active concept for the creature who maintains his personhood by embracing C² living the transcendental life protecting the species. It is identical to genuine freedom which is choosing the transcendental existence as best as one can, because the tendency to choose other than transcendental life is usually automatic reflex conditioned behavior which one only *feels* is freedom but is actually a feigned freedom and a pseudochoice. When considering the personhood of others than oneself, personhood is passive. In a way, we cannot confer or take it away from the creature. But we can tell when a creature is no longer a person because their acts are against the species and anti-transcendental. We are non-persons when we are against the species and anti-transcendental. Instead, we ought to be C²CCs living the transcendentals.

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None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.