

ABSTRACT

Made in God's Image: A Multidisciplinary Study of Personhood and Faith

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The question "what is a person?" haunts countless disciplines and debates, from theology to neuroscience, abortion to artificial intelligence. For Christians to engage meaningfully in such areas in a way consistent with their religious ideals, they must have a carefully considered perspective on personhood. In this project, I present a model of how to consider such a challenging topic. I first establish a biblical anthropology consisting of twelve principles of personhood derived from Scripture. I next present three different perspectives on personhood – traditional theological, emergent, and reductionist – which originate from the disciplines of theology, sociology, and neuroscience, respectively. I analyze the compatibility of these three perspectives with the established biblical principles of personhood. From this, I conclude that the traditional theological perspective is most compatible with Scripture. However, I more significantly argue that one should adopt the perspective on personhood that bears the greatest consistency with both Scripture and other forms of knowledge, while giving priority to Scripture. I ultimately conclude that the traditional theological perspective is the most consistent of the three perspectives with Scripture and the wider body of knowledge.

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For the Lord gives wisdom;
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 2:6, New International Version

INTRODUCTION

Socrates once claimed that “The unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ An essential component of human self-examination is defining what it is to be a person and what this implies for how one should live life. Nearly every human has a conception of his or her own personhood, and society at large seeks to define personhood through many different lenses, from religious to philosophical to scientific, and has done so for millennia. In recent years, scientific models of personhood have come to supplant traditional theological ones. This shift has significant implications for society, from the consideration of human rights to debates over personhood of fetuses and artificial intelligence.² In light of this significance, it is important for the Church to examine competing perspectives on personhood and to consider their compatibility with a biblical model of anthropology. It is the aim of this project to examine three major perspectives on personhood – traditional theological, emergent, and reductionist – and to examine in what ways they may or may not be compatible with this biblical anthropology. Through this examination, it is hoped that readers will gain greater clarity on the distinctions between the perspectives and how they may or may not be reconcilable with Christian

¹ Plato, “Apology,” trans. Benjamin Jowett, The Internet Classics Archive, accessed August 1, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html>.

² Kate Greasley, *Arguments about Abortion: Personhood, Morality, and Law* (Oxford University Press, 2017), <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198766780.001.0001/acprof-9780198766780>; K. E. Himma, “A Dualist Analysis of Abortion: Personhood and the Concept of Self qua Experiential Subject,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 48–55, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.2002.000828>; “Abortion: Moral Personhood,” accessed February 9, 2019, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/philosophical/moralperson.shtml>; Rowan Cruft, “Two Approaches to Human Rights,” ed. James Griffin and David Bilchitz, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 60, no. 238 (2010): 176–82; Max Tegmark, *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (New York: Knopf, 2017); Janosch Delcker, “Europe Divided over Robot ‘Personhood,’” Politico, April 11, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-divided-over-robot-ai-artificial-intelligence-personhood/>.

Scripture. Furthermore, it is hoped that this project will serve as a model for how one might first establish what is known from Scripture about any topic and then use that knowledge to compare perspectives on said topic and to discern whether they are compatible with Scripture. It is my belief that it is only once this baseline compatibility with Scripture has been established that a perspective on any topic should be considered for adoption into one's own beliefs. Once a viewpoint has been determined to be compatible with Scripture, it can be evaluated for compatibility with other fields, such as science. Suggestions for approaching this more universal assessment process will be discussed in the conclusion of the project.

In order to clarify what this project *is*, it must first be clarified what this project is *not*. First, it is not a defense of one perspective on personhood as definitively correct. In fact, I will make no claims as to which of the three perspectives on personhood being considered is "correct," but rather only which is the best of the three options, if that becomes manifest. It is not possible from this project to determine that one of these perspectives is correct because these are only three possible ways to view personhood among many, and possibly not even the best three; they are simply representative. This project seeks to determine which elements of the three perspectives on personhood presented are compatible with Scripture and which ones are not.

Next, this paper is not an attempt to reconcile different perspectives on personhood with one another; in fact, the perspectives that will be presented are inherently irreconcilable with one another in many ways. Furthermore, this project will make no specific claims about the compatibility of these perspectives with any fields outside of biblical anthropology, other than raising representative concerns to illustrate

that compatibility with other fields (and not just Scripture) is a relevant consideration. In other words, the intent of this paper is to determine compatibility of the perspectives with biblical anthropology, regardless of whether the perspectives on personhood can be defended from other academic disciplines. That is a realm for future research and debate.

Finally, this project cannot address all perspectives on personhood and for the sake of space has been restricted to consideration of three. Theological, emergent, and reductionist perspectives on personhood will be considered because they are prominent and represent well a variety of disciplines, from theology to sociology to neuroscience and physics. The works evaluated as representative of the theological, emergent, and reductionist perspectives may not represent them universally, as there is much diversity of opinion even within these perspectives. However, it is hoped that the works chosen will help readers to understand basic ideas behind the theology of persons, emergence, and reductionism, and thus be more aware of these perspectives on personhood when they encounter them in the world. This being said, there may be other views that are, in fact, more compatible with Scripture and with the human grasp of reality as a whole. Ultimately, it is hoped that the approach used in this project to evaluate these perspectives on personhood in light of biblical anthropology will be useful for similar evaluation of other perspectives on personhood and various challenging topics in the future.

CHAPTER ONE

Traditional Biblical Anthropology and the Concept of Personhood

Introduction

To begin to address different perspectives on personhood in light of biblical anthropology, one must first explore the notion of biblical anthropology itself. The purpose of this first chapter is to introduce the concepts of traditional biblical anthropology and personhood. Traditional biblical anthropology will be defined, and then basic principles of personhood will be outlined based on Scripture. Note that the biblical anthropology principles may not directly define a “proper perspective on personhood,” but rather will provide a framework within which a compatible perspective on personhood should fall. Next, a brief history of the concept of personhood will be outlined, the three perspectives to be considered in this paper will be introduced, and the significance of the problem of defining personhood will be explained. Finally, the complication of defining the types of personhood being considered (ex. humans, angels, God) will be addressed, as the last two perspectives on personhood (emergent and reductionist) only allow for human personhood.

Biblical Anthropology

Defining Biblical Anthropology

While biblical anthropology may seem like a straightforward concept to define, an online search produced few relevant results. Two, however, are worthy of consideration. First, according to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, “Christian anthropology” is “the

branch of theological study that investigates the origin, nature, and destiny of humans and the universe in which they live.”¹ The primary concern of this paper is purely the nature of human persons rather than their origin and destiny, though these may be intertwined at times. Furthermore, “Christian anthropology” deals with these considerations from a Christian theological perspective, not just a Christian scriptural one. Thus, this definition is a bit too expansive. *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* indirectly defines biblical anthropology as “the field that seeks to address what human beings are from a biblical perspective.”² This definition seems most in line with the scope of this paper and the etymological meaning of “anthropology:” anthropos- + -ology, “the theory of that pertaining to man or human beings.”³

Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology warns of the difficulty of creating a systematic biblical anthropology. First, the Bible does not seek to provide an “encyclopedic treatment” of anthropology, but rather handles it in an incidental way. Second, there are myriad terms in Scripture relating to personhood, including body, heart, soul, and spirit. The relation of these words to one another is difficult to define because Scripture often uses them interchangeably. Translation provides yet another barrier to systematizing biblical anthropology. In the Septuagint, for example, translation of the

¹ “Christian Anthropology,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (The Gale Group, Inc., 2003), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/christian-anthropology>.

² Carl Schultz, “Person, Personhood,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/person-personhood.html>.

³ “Anthropology,” *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Douglas Harper, 2001), <https://www.etymonline.com/word/anthropology>; “Origin and Meaning of Prefix ‘Anthropo-,’” *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2001: Douglas Harper), accessed August 1, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/anthropo->; “Origin and Meaning of Suffix ‘-Logy,’” *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Douglas Harper, 2001), <https://www.etymonline.com/word/-logy>.

Hebrew Old Testament into Greek required careful choice of words to reflect the cultural meaning of the original Hebrew. Ancient Greek philosophy may have impacted the New Testament understanding of personhood and the Septuagint translation of these words.⁴ Furthermore, it could be added that translation into other modern languages could complicate understanding of the original text. Finally, any person reading the Scripture will approach it from a certain cultural lens. Despite the inerrancy of Scripture, it is impossible to eliminate all cultural bias in the study of Scripture or in the study of its past translations. Thus, it would seem that any attempt to define a systematic biblical anthropology in this thesis would be inherently biased and somewhat futile, especially given the author's lack of expertise on the subject. A general overview of truths about personhood that can be pulled directly from Scripture will have to suffice.

A couple of notes regarding the author's approach to biblical anthropology: first, this argument will seek to address some of the complications presented by scriptural translation and interpretation by holding as true that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the best model of human personhood. That is, the humanity of Jesus as presented in Scripture and particularly any words said by Jesus regarding the human nature and/or interpretation of Old Testament texts about it will be given special authority. Second, it should again be noted that the biblical anthropology presented in this argument should not be taken to be exhaustive. Rather, it is a carefully considered collection of truths about humanity pulled from Scripture as directly as possible. Controversial interpretations have been avoided as much as possible for simplicity and minimization of bias, though they are not completely avoidable.

⁴ Schultz, "Person, Personhood."

Principles of Biblical Anthropology

The following section of this argument will establish basic principles of biblical anthropology. Each principle will be supported by one or more Scripture references; in some cases, the Scripture itself will be provided and analyzed within the body of the argument. The claims will be written in a numerical list to simplify references to them in later evaluation within the project.

- 1) *Humanity was made in God's image and likeness.* This claim is established by Genesis 1:26-27, which reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."⁵

One important aspect of this claim is the meaning of "image." The term "image," as used in this passage, is a translation of the Hebrew word *tselem*. The term could be properly translated as "image" or "likeness of resemblance" in this context. It is used sixteen times in the Old Testament, often in the context of idols (empty "images" of gods).⁶ The claim that mankind is "made in God's image" is often cited within Christian theology,⁷ but contrary to some interpretations, there is no certain contextual indicator of

⁵ Gn. 1:26-27 New International Version, 1984 Edition (NIV84)

⁶ Francis Brown et al., "Tselem," *Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon - King James Version*, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/tselem.html>.

⁷ Kenneth Hensley, "Made in His Image and Likeness," *Catholic Answers*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/made-in-his-image-and-likeness>.

the way in which mankind has been made in the image of God. Thus, no particular claims to interpretation will be made here.

- 2) *Humanity was created with a purpose.* Ultimately, humanity – along with all of creation – was created for God’s glory. The reflection of God’s glory by His creation is evidenced by such verses as Isaiah 6:3, in which the angels cry out that “...the whole earth is full of his [God’s] glory!,”⁸ and Psalm 19:1, which claims that “The heavens declare the glory of God.”⁹ The affirmation that humanity was made “in God’s image” in Genesis 1:27 serves as a reminder that humanity’s very existence reflects, and thus glorifies, God. Furthermore, Isaiah 43:7 affirms that the children of Israel (and, by extension, all those who are saved) were “created for my [God’s] glory.”¹⁰

Not only was the creation of humanity (and all of nature) for God’s glory, but humanity was created to glorify God through worship and good works. That humanity was created to glorify God through worship is affirmed in Revelation 4:10-11, which reads, “the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power...’”¹¹ The purpose of humanity to glorify God through good works is affirmed, for example, by Ephesians 2:10, which

⁸ Is. 6:3, English Standard Version, 2016 Edition (ESV)

⁹ ESV

¹⁰ Is. 43:7, New International Version, 2011 Edition (NIV)

¹¹ NIV

reads “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”¹²

Another role of humanity is to rule over other creatures. This claim is rooted in Genesis 1:26-30, in which God commands mankind to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to rule over the fish, birds, livestock and all the earth.¹³

Finally, humanity is created to love God and to love others. This is affirmed by the greatest commandments, according to Jesus Christ himself. In Matthew 22:37-39, he tells the Pharisees that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The second greatest commandment (v. 39) is to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁴

- 3) *The creation of humanity was very good.* This is stated immediately following Adam and Eve’s creation in Genesis 1:31, which reads “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”¹⁵ This assertion suggests that human nature was not initially fallen, but that rather God was pleased with it.
- 4) *Humans were created to be in relationship with God.* In Genesis 2:16, God begins talking with Adam shortly after his creation. God brings animals to Adam (v. 19) and then shows concern for him by creating a woman for him so that he is not alone (v. 18). God is in relationship with numerous humans throughout Scripture, including Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, Isaiah,

¹² NIV

¹³ Gn. 1:26-30, NIV

¹⁴ NIV

¹⁵ NIV

Jeremiah, the twelve disciples, and Paul (just to name a few). In the New Testament, Jesus makes a promise before his ascension in Matthew 28:20:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”¹⁶

5) *Humans were created to be in relationship with one another.* In Genesis 2:18,

God deemed that “It is not good for the man [Adam] to be alone” and then made a “helper suitable for him” because none of the other creatures were suitable (v. 20). It also seems significant that the second greatest command, according to Jesus, is to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁷

6) *Humans are bodies in both earthly life and eternal life.* In Genesis 2:7, God

forms man (Adam) “from the dust of the ground.”¹⁸ This points to his physical nature. Both the earthly “natural” body and the eternal “spiritual body” are directly affirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:42-45, which reads, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”¹⁹

7) *Humans are “spirit” and/or “soul.” These words are found throughout*

Scripture, and their meaning is hotly contested.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for soul is “*nepes*” and the Hebrew word for spirit is “*ruah*.” *Nepes* is found 755 times in the Old

¹⁶ NIV

¹⁷ Mt. 22:39, NIV

¹⁸ NIV

¹⁹ NIV

Testament, and 42 different English terms in the King James Version are used to translate it. Of these English terms, “soul” is used as the translation 428 times, and “life” is used as the translation 177 times. Though *nepes* can mean “soul,” it does not contain an implication of immortality. It is simply understood as the “life principle” or as a “living being.” In this sense, animals are *nepes* in the same way that humans are. *Nepes* can also be used to indicate an individual (translated as “self” or “I/me”) or even a dead body. It can be connected with body parts and functions, will or yearning, and emotion. Overall, the Old Testament points to an understanding of a person as a “unified being, but one that is profoundly complex, a psychophysical being.”²⁰

Ruah is used 389 times in the Old Testament, in so many contexts that *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* notes that “its varied use almost defies analysis.”²¹ The basic meaning is “wind” or “breath,” and it is translated 113 times this way in the King James Version. When applied to persons, *ruah* tends to mean “vital powers or strength.”²² It can also have to do with feelings²³ or will.²⁴ One instance in which *ruah*, spirit, is used as distinct from body is in Ecclesiastes 12:7, which reads, “...and the dust

²⁰ Carl Schultz, “Soul,” ed. Walter A. Elwell, *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/soul.html>.

²¹ Carl Schultz, “Spirit,” ed. Walter A. Elwell, *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/spirit.html>.

²² See, for example, Pr. 18:14 and Ps. 34:18.

²³ See, for example, 1 Ki. 21:4 and Ec. 7:8

²⁴ See, for example, Ez. 1:5, Nu. 14:25, and Ps. 51:10.

returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”²⁵

In the New Testament, the Greek word for soul is “*psyche*” and the Greek word for spirit is “*pneuma*.” *Psyche* is not found in the New Testament nearly so often as *nepes* is found in the Old Testament. This is possibly because *nepes* is used frequently in the poetic literature of the Old Testament and because the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament focus more on *soma* (body) and *pneuma* (spirit) than *psyche* (soul). *Psyche* can be translated as soul, life, person, or self. It can express emotion and seems to be tied to the natural world.²⁶ Sometimes, *psyche* is placed in contrast with the body. This can be seen in Matthew 10:28, which reads: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”²⁷ This verse suggests that there is a metaphysical distinction between body and soul.²⁸

Pneuma, or spirit, is used less often than *ruah* as “breath” or “wind” and more often in reference to an “incorporeal, feeling, and intelligent being.”²⁹ Its use in Luke 1:47 (“and my [the Virgin Mary’s] spirit rejoices in God my Savior”) and in John 11:33 (“When Jesus saw her weeping...he was deeply

²⁵ NIV; Schultz, “Spirit.”

²⁶ See, for example, 1 Co. 15:42-50.

²⁷ NIV

²⁸ Schultz, “Soul.”

²⁹ Schultz, “Spirit.”

moved in spirit and troubled”) suggests that the spirit is separate from the body and related to feelings. Mark 2:8 (“Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts...”) implies that the spirit has the capacity to know. Romans 8:16 (“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”) suggests that the human spirit has the capacity to relate with God via the Holy Spirit. Several passages suggest that there is a distinction between spirit and body. One such passage is Mark 14:38, which reads, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³⁰

One last relevant point to note is that it is unclear whether spirit and soul are the same or are distinct. The two are sometimes used in parallel poetic structure and appear to be the same, as is the case in Luke 1:46-47. However, in 1 Corinthians 15:45-46, the *psyche* of the first Adam is contrasted with the “life-giving” *pneuma* of the last Adam (Christ). Adam’s *psyche* is said to be natural, while Christ’s *pneuma* is spiritual. Furthermore, Hebrew 4:12 claims that the word of God can divide “soul and spirit, joints and marrow.”³¹

From the complicated use of spirit and soul in the Old Testament and New Testament texts, the author has concluded that there does appear to be a spirit and/or soul distinct from the body, but the metaphysical nature of that spirit and/or soul remains unclear. If there is a distinction between spirit and soul (my interpretation of Scripture suggests there is), it would seem that the soul

³⁰ Schultz.

³¹ NIV

is common to humanity and animals, while the spirit is unique to humanity and allows for “dynamic relationship with God.”³²

- 8) *Although the creation of humans was “very good,” it is also true that humanity is now fallen, and the world is subject to sin.* This truth is affirmed in Genesis 3, which describes the fall of humanity into sin and its consequences for humanity and creation. These consequences include enmity with the devil,³³ pain in childbirth,³⁴ difficulty and hard labor in working the land,³⁵ and death.³⁶ Scripture further indicates that sin affects everyone, as is evident in Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:23.
- 9) *Humanity has moral accountability.* One verse that points to this is Deuteronomy 11:26-28, which claims that God will bless humans for obedience to His commands and will curse humans if they disobey and follow other gods. Another relevant verse is 2 Corinthians 5:10, which reads, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”³⁷

³² Schultz, “Soul.”

³³ Gn. 3:15

³⁴ Gn. 3:16

³⁵ Gn. 3:17-19

³⁶ Gn. 3:19

³⁷ NIV

10) *In general, humans have a capacity for reason to an extent that other animals do not.* Speaking of false teachers, 2 Peter 2:12 compares men who “blaspheme in matters they do not understand” to “unreasoning animals,” thereby suggesting that lack of reason is beneath their given nature.³⁸ This separation from humanity and animals by reason seems to follow from Genesis 1:26-28, in which humanity is created separately from the rest of the animals and tasked with ruling over the other living creatures. Furthermore, many verses seem to assume that humanity has capacity to reason. These include 1 Peter 3:15, Isaiah 1:18-19, Isaiah 43:26, Acts 17:1-3, and Luke 14:28-32.

11) *Humans have a limited lifespan in part due to sin and in part as an act of grace from God.* This is suggested by Genesis 3:22-23, which reads, “[The man] must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever. So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.”³⁹ Because Adam, and by extension humanity, has “knowledge of good and evil” and the corresponding ability to sin, God has prevented humanity from also having the ability to live forever.

12) *Humans are everlasting, both in terms of body and spirit, even though the body will go through an interruption physically through death.* Principles 6 and 7 have established that humans have both physical and spiritual natures in

³⁸ New International Version (NIV)

³⁹ NIV84

earthly life. 1 Corinthians 15:44 claims that humans have spiritual bodies after the resurrection. The bodily form of Jesus Christ after his resurrection points to a physical resurrected body as well; this is evidenced by John 20:24-27, in which the doubting disciple Thomas touches the resurrected Jesus' hands and side. The everlasting nature of humanity is pointed to by 1 Corinthians 15:19-20, which affirms the resurrection of the dead: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."⁴⁰ Acts 24:15 clarifies that this applies to both the righteous and the wicked. Overall, these passages point to humans of both physical and spiritual nature who have resurrection of the body into eternal life.

Introduction to Personhood and Perspectives

A Brief History of the Concept of Personhood in the Church

The concept of person within the Church finds its origin in the questions "what is God?" and "who is Christ?" As the early Christians sought answers to these questions, the word *prosopon*, the Greek equivalent of the Latin *persona*, came into use. In the original ancient Greek, *prosopon* meant "role," as in the role (or, more literally, the mask) of the actor. In Greek dramas and poems, events were expressed not simply as author narration, but via the words of characters engaging in dialogue. This dialogical approach

⁴⁰ NIV

gave life to the narrative. Ancient Greek scholars defined and examined this use of *prosopon*.⁴¹

Early Christian scholars found this understanding of *prosopon* to be useful in studying Scripture. Scripture, like the ancient Greek narratives, contains events in the form of dialogue. Of particular interest to early Christian scholars was that God seemed to be in dialogue with Himself, as evident in Genesis 1:26: “Let *us* make man in our image, in our likeness...”⁴² Such early scholars, including Justin Martyr (early second century), interpreted this passage to mean that God had different *prosopa*, or roles. These scholars differed from the ancient Greek scholars, however, in that they interpreted these divine roles as realities and not just literary devices. Thus, the notion of divine persons was born.⁴³

By the end of the second century, Tertullian developed the notion of *prosopa* (in Latin, *persona*) into a definition of God as “*una substantia*” and “*tres personae*” – i.e. one substance and three persons. Over the next two hundred years, the understanding of God as three persons continued to mature. In the late fourth century, St. Augustine and his contemporaries expanded the understanding of personhood to include the inherent relationality of the divine persons.⁴⁴

By the fifth century, the concept of *persona* became significant again in answering the question of “who is Christ?” Theologians of the time concluded that

⁴¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17.3, no. Fall 1990 (1990): 439–54.

⁴² NIV

⁴³ Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition.”

⁴⁴ Ratzinger.

Christ had two natures – human and divine – and one person – purely divine. Questions of the nature and personhood of Christ led to debate over the definition of personhood, and theologian Boethius devised the definition of person as an “individual substance of a rational nature.” This definition would remain significant within the Catholic Church for centuries. It was further refined in the early Middle Ages by Richard of Saint Victor, and again in the mid-thirteenth century by St. Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁵ The definition of personhood devised by these three theologians will be further considered in Chapter 2.

Perspectives on Personhood

The remainder of this project will be concerned with describing three different perspectives on personhood – traditional theological, emergent, and reductionist – and comparing each to the biblical principles of personhood established earlier in this chapter. Chapter 2 will focus on the traditional theological perspective on personhood, specifically considering the contributions of theologians Boethius, Richard of Saint Victor, and St. Thomas Aquinas to the traditional theological understanding. Chapter 3 will focus on an emergent perspective on personhood, as presented by sociologist Christian Smith in his book *What is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good from the Person Up*. Chapter 4 will present several reductionist accounts of personhood, as developed in the writings of scientists Francis Crick and Antonio Damasio and neurophilosopher Patricia Churchland. Finally, Chapter 5 will assess the compatibility and potential points of conflict between these perspectives on personhood and the biblical principles of personhood.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger.

Types of Personhood

Before continuing on to the body of this project, the types of personhood being considered must be clarified. Unless they have a specialized knowledge of the topic of personhood, many contemporary readers may consider the words “human” and “person” to be synonymous; in fact, even modern scholarly works, such as Christian Smith’s *What is a Person?*, often assume that the only persons are human persons. However, this understanding is in direct contradiction with the early development of the term “person” to describe what there are three of in God and one of in Christ. According to the traditional theological understanding of personhood, there are different types of persons: namely, God, humans, and various types of angels.⁴⁶ Thus, the understanding of theological personhood explored in Chapter 2 will rely on the need for the compatibility of any definition of personhood with not only human personhood but all forms of personhood. In contrast, modern emergent and reductionist models of personhood do not account for non-physical personhood. They are, in fact, by their very natures generally limited to consideration of human personhood because they do not take as a presupposition the existence of non-physical persons (i.e. God and angels) like traditional theological personhood does. Christian Smith’s emergent perspective on personhood, for example, cannot apply to angelic persons who lack physical bodies because it is reliant on natural biological mechanisms to produce, at an emergent level, the qualities that allow one to be a person.⁴⁷ The only type of persons outside of human persons that the

⁴⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum000.htm>. Ia, qu. 33, art. 1, obj. 4; Ia, qu. 54.

⁴⁷ Christian Smith, *What Is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 61.

emergent or reductionist perspectives might give consideration to are the hypothetical personhood of artificial intelligence or aliens; such questions of personhood have become popular in science fiction and other cultural works. For the purpose of this project, human personhood will primarily be considered, with a bit of consideration of non-physical personhood in the traditional theological personhood section. This is justified by the project's focus on biblical *anthropology*, the study of *humans*. The failure of certain perspectives on personhood to account for the existence of non-physical persons is a legitimate concern and may be deemed a significant weakness in some perspectives on personhood. However, this is a matter for future research and debate. The primary concern is that perspectives on personhood allow for the existence of non-physical beings.

Why Does Personhood Matter?

One last topic for consideration in this chapter is why the topic of personhood matters in the first place. From a secular perspective, Christian Smith observes that our science does not align with our sense of the significance of our personhood, and that we have an obligation to amend this so that science is useful.⁴⁸ Such a perspective privileges the sense that there is something significant about personhood beyond the physical realm. This perspective is also in line with a more explicitly Christian perspective on the significance of personhood. As described in the section on biblical anthropology, humans have been “made in God’s image.”⁴⁹ This concept remains common in contemporary Christian belief. If Christians are going to make claims about personhood,

⁴⁸ Smith, 1–4.

⁴⁹ Gn. 1:27, NIV

it is important that they understand what those claims mean and what consequences they may have.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, personhood is used as the basis for many “inalienable rights” within modern philosophy. Differing understandings of personhood have relevance to debates over unborn fetuses; civil rights of individuals of different race, gender, and creed; physician-assisted suicide; genetic modification; capital punishment; treatment of animals; treatment of other hypothetical alien species; and, more recently, treatment of artificial intelligence. Because of the urgency of these many issues, a biblically sound definition of personhood is of central relevance. In fact, theological orthodoxy depends on one.

CHAPTER TWO

A Traditional Theological Account of Personhood

Introduction

This portion of the thesis seeks to explore the history of the classic theological understanding of personhood through examining the writings of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, Richard of Saint-Victor, and St. Thomas Aquinas. First, the definition of personhood by Boethius will be presented and explained. Next, its modification by Richard of Saint-Victor to better suit the Trinity will be explicated. Finally, Aquinas's further alterations to reconcile earlier definitions with the Incarnation will be explored, as well as his clarification of the importance of Richard of Saint-Victor's work on personhood.

In order to have a proper foundation from which to consider these theological writings, an introduction to basic Aristotelian categories and theological terminology is necessary. Though Aristotle's categories are not sufficient to ground all Christian concepts of personhood, they form the underpinning from which Boethius first establishes his Christian understanding of persons, and from which Richard of Saint-Victor and Aquinas later work as well. Each of these theologians modifies these Aristotelian categories in different ways, in accordance with Christian usage in their time, and thus readers must be hesitant to apply the following definitions consistently to usage of these terms throughout this chapter. Rather, the terms will be redefined in light of the usage of the writer being examined. In addition to definitions directly from Aristotle's

writings, a few other general definitions of theological terms will be provided as a background for the reader.

Aristotle's Categories and Theological Terms: A Brief Introduction

In Section 1, Part 5 of *Categories*, Aristotle lays out definitions of primary and secondary substances, from which can also be implicitly derived a definition of accidents. Aristotle defines a primary substance as “that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject.”¹ He gives as examples an individual man or horse. To be predicable is to properly be the verbal compliment of a subject. Neither an individual man nor an individual horse is predicable of a subject, nor is either present in a subject, but both are rather subjects in their own right. Aristotle extends his definition of substance to secondary substance, which includes those things within which the primary substance is included, and which conveys knowledge of primary substance, i.e. species and genera and their definitions. Secondary substances can be predicated of their primary substances, e.g. Bob (an individual man and primary substance) is man (species, secondary substance). Genera can also be predicated of species, e.g. Man (species) is an animal (genus). From all this, accidents can then be defined as all other things which are predicable of a subject or present in a subject but are ‘accidental’ to the definition of the subject.² An example of an accident might be “six feet tall” in the sentence “Bob is six feet tall.”

¹ Aristotle, “The Categories,” trans. E.M. Edghill, The Project Gutenberg, October 23, 2008, 2a14, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2412/2412-h/2412-h.htm>.

² Aristotle, 2a11-4b19.

In addition to the Aristotelian understanding of substances and accidents, it is important to distinguish between the Greek terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*. For much of early Christian history, the two terms were taken to be synonyms and to indicate “something that subsists.” However, controversy in usage spurred debate over their synonymy, and in the mid-4th century, Gregory of Nyssa clarified that *hypostasis* refers to “what is said proper to the individual” and that *ousia* refers to “what is common and uncircumscribed.”³ Thus, *hypostasis* can be taken as a Greek term for primary substances and more particularly persons (as will be argued later on), and *ousia* can be taken as a Greek term for secondary substances.

Personhood according to Boethius

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was a philosopher and theologian of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. whose work was heavily influenced by Aristotelian principles, logic, and the work of Greek Neoplatonists.⁴ In the work *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*, Boethius writes on the definition of personhood and its distinction from other similar terms. His aim is to address a debate over the natures of Christ between the Eutychians and the Catholics and to reconcile apparently contradictory definitions of personhood within the Greek and Latin languages.⁵

³ Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford University Press, 2002), <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199246122.001.0001/acprof-9780199246120>.

⁴ John Marenbon, “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/boethius/>.

⁵ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H.F. Stewart and E.K. Rand (London: William Heinemann, 1918), 73–77, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.3210107773974>.

Boethius's definition of personhood is best explicated by a careful examination of its origin from *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*. Boethius begins by attempting to distinguish between and define the various types of nature. He claims that nature can refer to bodies alone, substances alone, or everything that can be affirmed, but he does not ultimately conclude which usage of "nature" is the proper one for theology.⁶ After a brief discourse on nature, he transitions to discussion of the term "person."

Regardless of the type of nature that is most appropriate for theological usage, Boethius concludes that nature is categorically above person because it is a term of broader scope; namely, every person has and is dependent on nature. Boethius further asserts that persons must be either substances or accidents, as these are the only possible categories. But, persons cannot be accidents because accidents cannot exist independently, and persons must. Therefore, persons must be of substantial nature.⁷

Now that it has been affirmed that persons are substances, it must be determined what kind of substances they are. Persons can be corporeal or incorporeal in nature. If they are corporeal, they can be living or non-living. If they are corporeal and living, they can be sensitive or insensitive. If they are sensitive, they can be rational or irrational. On the other hand, if persons are incorporeal, they can be rational or irrational. If they are rational, they can be immutable and impassible, or mutable and passible. From all these categories (see *Figure 1* for a diagram), Boethius seeks to conclude in what category persons of all types should appropriately fall.⁸

⁶ Boethius, 77–81.

⁷ Boethius, 83.

⁸ Boethius, 83–85.

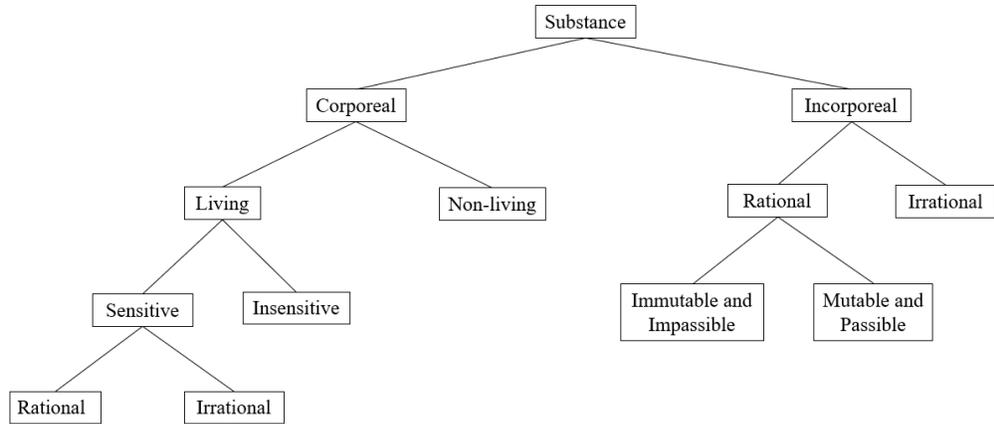


Figure 1: Boethius’s Categories of Substance

Boethius argues that non-living bodies and insensitive living things cannot be persons; even human experience can attest to the fact that persons have the ability to sense the environment and are alive. Next, Boethius argues that persons cannot be incorporeal, irrational substances because no being responds to that concept. Thus, it is possible for persons to be corporeal, living, and rationally sensitive or incorporeal and rational. Either way, persons must fall into the category of “rational substance;” so far, a person can be defined as a “substance of a rational nature.”⁹

Next, Boethius seeks to establish whether persons are universal or individual. He concludes that persons must be individual because it is impossible to conceive of universal personhood (at least outside of a Platonic ideal). In other words, any human person can be specified with a name, such as “Abraham” or “Sarah,” rather than merely a broader term such as “human” or “animal.” Although other animals can be specified with names and as individuals, they are still excluded from personhood because they lack

⁹ Boethius, 83–85.

a “rational nature.” Since it has been shown that persons are individual, Boethius arrives at his definition of persons as “individual substances of a rational nature.”¹⁰

In the second section of *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*, Boethius addresses remaining controversies about the definition and use of the word “person.” First, he addresses confusion between the terms “subsistence” and “substance.” Next, he seeks to unite Latin and Greek terminology for the concept of person.

As defined by Aristotle, a primary substance is “that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject.”¹¹ Boethius holds that substances are particular in nature and “substand” under other things, including accidents, serving as “substrates” that enable them to be. Boethius holds that subsistences, in contrast, are like substances but do “not require accidents in order to be” and “are present in universals but acquire substance in particulars.”¹² Subsistence essentially becomes a broader category which substance instantiates, but not every subsistence is concretely real. Boethius seems to use substance as Aristotelian “primary substance” and subsistence as Aristotelian “secondary substance.” Based on this understanding, Boethius claims that persons can be substances but not subsistences because they are particular and not universal. This usage of substance and subsistence may seem insignificant, but it became a source of criticism of Boethius’s definition of person in later centuries due to changing usage of the terms substance and subsistence. In fact, subsistence is used differently by St. Thomas Aquinas

¹⁰ Boethius, 85.

¹¹ Aristotle, “The Categories,” sec. 1, pt. 5.

¹² Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, 87–91.

in his *Summa Theologica*, and this difference will be significant in his discussion of persons later in this chapter.

Boethius also attempts to clarify extensively the use of Greek and Latin terminology relating to persons. In the process, he attends to the Greek word “*hypostasis*,” a word that had spurred great controversy between the Western and Eastern portions of the Church. Boethius sought to establish that *hypostasis* is more appropriately translated into the Latin term “*persona*” (i.e. person) than “*substantia*” (i.e. substance). In Boethius’s time, *hypostasis* was often translated to *substantia* because that was a literal translation (sub = hypo, stans = stasis). Boethius pointed out that *hypostasis* appropriately describes that which “stands under” accidents, and thus that which has “substance;” however, according to its usage within Greek theological thought, *hypostasis* was *only* applied to rational creatures. Thus, *hypostasis* is more appropriately translated as an “individual substance of a rational nature,” i.e. *persona*, rather than *substantia*.

Overall, Boethius’s writings seem to provide a structured outline of a categorical model for human persons. In the broadest sense, humans have *essentia* or *ousia*, a state of being. Within this category, they have *subsistentia* or *ousiosis* (i.e. subsistence), a quiddity (“whatness”) of being that might be called “humanity.” Next, humans can be categorized as *substantia* (i.e. substance), or individuals serving as substrate for things that do not have subsistence (viz. accidents). Finally, they can be placed as *persona* or *hypostasis* (i.e. person), individual substances that have a rational nature. A similar model could be provided for angels, persons with “angelic” *subsistentia*.

The Trinitarian persons can also be categorized similarly, but with some important exceptions. First, God is *essentia* or *ousia*, i.e. He has being, and, furthermore, all forms of being proceed from Him. Next, God has *subsistentia*, i.e. He subsists independently from all other beings in his quiddity, “God-ness.” According to Boethius, God only has one *essentia* and *subsistentia*; this is another significant reason why *subsistence* cannot be used to define *person* (it might produce three subsistences in God). God further has *hypostasis*, in the traditional Greek sense, which can best be translated as substantial being or *substantia* when related to the Godhead. However, as a matter of convention, the Church holds that God cannot have three *hypostases*, as this term has often been translated to three “substances,” and God must have one united substantial nature. To accommodate for this traditional use of *hypostasis* and *substantia*, the word *persona* is the best term to describe what there are three of in God.¹³

Boethius elaborates on the categories of the personhood of the Trinity in another treatise, called *Whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Predicated Substantially of the Divinity*. First, Boethius establishes that the Trinity must have simplicity. While each person does have substance, together they only have one substance rather than three. From this, Boethius concludes that anything said of the divine substance must be shared by all three persons. Such statements regarding the Godhead’s substance are called “substantial predicates.” Some examples of these might be goodness or omnipotence. Furthermore, anything that is affirmed of only one person is not multiplied if it also applied to another person. Now, the names of the Godhead must be taken not as substantial predicates, shared by each member of the Godhead, but as “relative

¹³ Boethius, 87–90.

predicates” particular to each person but not independent. In other words, the Father must have a Son to be the Father, and the Son must have a Father to be a Son. Thus, the predication of the divine persons is appropriately said to be relative; this is a claim unique to divine personhood and thus not applicable to human personhood.¹⁴

Overall, regardless of the type of personhood being discussed, Boethius affirms that persons are “individual substances of a rational nature.”¹⁵ Each element of this definition is carefully chosen and defended by Boethius based on a mostly Aristotelian concept of the body and soul. At the same time, Boethius’s definition of personhood accommodates divine personhood and can be modified to explain the property of relative personhood that is particular to the Godhead. It is important that Boethius’s definition of personhood allow for this because the concept of personhood was developed early in the Church to define what there are three of in God.¹⁶

Personhood according to Richard of Saint-Victor

Richard of Saint-Victor is a twelfth century Scottish theologian who lived and worked in the monastery of Saint-Victor.¹⁷ In his book *On the Trinity*, Richard seeks to define and describe the concept of personhood in a manner that builds on yet challenges and refines Boethius’s classic definition of personhood.¹⁸ Richard accomplishes this in

¹⁴ Boethius, 33–37.

¹⁵ Boethius, 85.

¹⁶ Stephen Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 35.

¹⁷ “Richard of St. Victor,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1914), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13045c.htm>.

¹⁸ Ruben Angelici, *Richard of Saint Victor, On the Trinity: English Translation and Commentary* (Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2011), bk. 4, no. 21 (p. 162).

several regards. First, he draws attention to the importance of incommunicability of personhood. Next, he calls into question Boethius' use of the term "substance" in his definition and suggests that "existence" would be an alternative that would better account for the nature of Trinitarian persons. Finally, Richard strengthens the concept of inherent relationality among the incommunicable persons of the Trinity.

In *On the Trinity*, Richard is concerned with the ambiguity of the use of the word "person" during his time. Some of his contemporaries argue that it refers to substance, others to subsistence, and others to attributes.¹⁹ Richard is more specifically concerned with the confusion between the terms "substance" and "person," and this he seeks to address. Richard holds that persons and substances are different. Substance can indicate particular or general entities but does not imply rationality. Animals, for example, are substances, but are not necessarily rational. Person, on the other hand, indicates an "individual, singular, incommunicable property" that is rational.²⁰ In other words, a substance is a "something" and a person is a "someone."²¹ Richard's definition of a person is significant because it highlights a property that was not directly mentioned in Boethius's writings on personhood: incommunicability. This property indicates that one instance of personhood cannot be assumed by another. Though this quality may seem obvious or insignificant, its importance becomes more evident in discussion of the personhood of the Trinity.

¹⁹ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 3 (p. 143).

²⁰ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 6 (p. 146).

²¹ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 7 (p. 147).

Based on the conclusion that a substance is “something” and a person is “someone,” Richard argues that there are three persons in God but not three substances. Now, where there are three persons, there must, by definition, be three “someones,”²² each with its own singularity and identity.²³ Persons are incommunicable and individual, and thus different persons must have an “otherness” about them. This “otherness” is present within the Trinity in the form of Father, Son, and Spirit; thus, there are three persons in the Trinity. On the other hand, where there are three substances, there must, by definition, be three “somethings.”²⁴ To be plural, the substances must differ from one another. However, Richard holds that the Trinity has “the highest and supremely simple being in common.” Thus, there cannot be three substances in the Trinity. There are, rather, three persons and one substance in God.²⁵

Despite this apparent resolution of the question of the nature of divine personhood, Richard crafts a counterpoint to his argument, pointing to the Boethian definition of personhood. If persons are “individual substances of a rational nature,” then where there are multiple individual persons, it would seem there must be multiple individual substances.²⁶ At first, Richard seeks to address this concern via analogy to the human person. He claims that in human persons, there are two substances, body and soul, but that the multiplicity of substances does not hinder the unity of the person. In

²² *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 8 (p. 148).

²³ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 9 (p. 149).

²⁴ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 9 (p. 149).

²⁵ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 9 (p. 149).

²⁶ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 8 (p. 148).

divine persons, there is one substance, but three persons. Just as multiplicity of substances does not hinder the unity of the person, the multiplicity of the persons does not hinder the unity of their substance.²⁷

Richard seeks to further resolve the confusion introduced by Boethius's definition of personhood by amending the definition through the replacement of the term "substance" with "existence." Richard defines existence as the property of having "substantial being."²⁸ He argues that the existences of two persons may differ from one another via 1) differences in the properties of their essence, 2) differences in origin, or 3) both differences in properties and in origin.²⁹ Each of these types of differences corresponds with a different person. The existences of angelic persons differ by properties of their essence because all angels were created by one simple creation, but each has different properties.³⁰ The existence of the divine persons, on the other hand, differs by origin, because there is no difference between the qualities of the divine persons because they share the same substance.³¹ The existences of individual human persons differ by both properties of their essence and personal origins.³²

One last contribution of Richard to the concept of personhood is the significance of the relationality of the divine persons. This is best explored by returning to the

²⁷ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 10 (pp. 149-150).

²⁸ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 16 (p. 155).

²⁹ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 11 (pp. 150-151).

³⁰ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 14 (pp. 153-154).

³¹ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 15 (pp. 154-155).

³² *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 14 (p. 153).

differences in origin between the divine persons, as explained by theologian Peter Lombard in his section of *Sentences* on Richard's work. According to Lombard, each person has its *proprium*, the quality that separates it from all others. Lombard suggests that the *propria* of the Trinity ought to be defined as follows: generation, or paternity, for the Father; nativity, or filiation, for the Son; and procession for the Holy Spirit. These *propria* point to the disparate origins of the three divine persons – the unbegotten Father, the Son born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from Father and Son. The distinction between the divine persons by origin leads to an inherent relationality in the distinction of the divine persons from one another. This relationality is more than “accidental” because God is immutable, and accidents are mutable. Relations seem to be central to the definition of divine persons.³³ Although Boethius also recognized that the relationality of the Trinitarian persons is essential to their personhood,³⁴ Richard argued for the notion of relative predicates in a more complete and intentional way.

From all this, one arrives at Richard's definition of a person: “an individual existence of a rational nature.” According to Richard, the term “existence” is more universal than “substance” in defining personhood because the divine persons do not each have individual substance but do have individual existence, as determined by their distinct individual properties (*propria*) due to differing origin.³⁵

³³ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano, 1st edition (Toronto: PIMS, 2007), 140–42.

³⁴ Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, 33–37.

³⁵ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 21 (pp. 162-163).

Richard also proposes particular definitions of divine persons and created persons. Divine persons are “incommunicable existence[s] of divine nature.”³⁶ This definition resolves any concerns about the word “substance.” It also implies a significant relationality between the divine persons, as described above, such that the divine nature is distinct from other natures in this regard. Finally, it takes the more general “rational” nature and replaces it with the more specific “divine nature,” which includes but is not limited to a rational one.

Created persons are “individual substances of a rational nature.”³⁷ This definition is in line with Boethius’s universal definition of personhood. However, Richard expands even this definition by emphasizing that created persons are individual, *incommunicable* substances of a rational nature.

Overall, Richard contributes to the theological understanding of personhood by making it more compatible with the Trinity. He finds persons to be incommunicable, to be better defined as “existences” than “substances,” and to have inherent relationality, at least in the case of the Trinitarian persons.

Personhood according to St. Thomas Aquinas

Whereas Richard of Saint-Victor modified Boethius’s definition of personhood to be more compatible with the divine Trinity, St. Thomas Aquinas modified the definition to be more compatible with the Incarnation.

St. Thomas Aquinas is among the most notable philosophers and theologians in Western Christianity. While living in Italy and France in the mid-thirteenth century,

³⁶ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 22 (p. 163).

³⁷ *On the Trinity*, bk. 4, no. 23 (p. 164).

Aquinas developed two masterpieces, the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that re-examined Aristotelian concepts and the works of early philosophers and Church Fathers and systematized them into a comprehensive theology.³⁸ In Part 1, Questions 29 and 39, and Part 3, Question 4 of his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas seeks to address the concept of personhood.³⁹

Aquinas begins by establishing his definitions of substance, subsistence and hypostasis. First, Aquinas distinguishes between first and second substances. These terms are similar to the Aristotelian primary and secondary substances (see “*Aristotle’s Categories...*” at the beginning of the chapter).⁴⁰ First substances, like primary substances, are individual or particular substances. Second substances, like secondary substances, are generic or universal substances.⁴¹ Aquinas then establishes that the term “*hypostasis*,” previously used as the Greek alternative to “person,” is best used to describe first substances. Subsistences, then, are a subset of *hypostases*, namely first substances that subsist, i.e. that exist in themselves and not in something else.⁴²

The significance of this new definition of substance and subsistence is that nearly all first substances subsist; the critical exception is the human nature of Jesus Christ, which is reliant on the divine nature. To accommodate Christology, Aquinas holds that a

³⁸ Marie-Dominique Chenu, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., February 28, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas>.

³⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, “The Categories.”

⁴¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, pt. I qu. 29, art. 1, ad 2.

⁴² St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, pt. I qu. 29, art. 2, resp.

person should be defined as a “*subsistent* individual of a rational nature.”⁴³ Since the human nature of Jesus Christ is not a subsistence, it is not a person. This is significant because it affirms Richard of Saint-Victor’s notion of incommunicability of personhood. According to this notion, one person cannot assume the personhood of another. When Christ took on human form, he did not assume another person, but a human nature. It is therefore appropriate to claim that Christ is one person with two natures, human and divine. This claim has become dogmatic within Western theology.⁴⁴

Aquinas next proceeds to reconcile the definitions of personhood of Boethius and Richard of Saint-Victor. Aquinas affirms the usefulness of his modified form of Boethius’s definition of personhood for all persons. He also concedes, however, that “the incommunicable existence of the divine nature” is a better definition for divine personhood. This is because personhood as it applies to creatures is not the same as personhood as it applies to God. Though both divine and created persons share the modified Boethian definition of persons as “subsistent individuals of a rational nature,” Aquinas claims that created persons are defined in this way directly, while divine persons are defined in this way indirectly. Divine persons have a directly relational nature to their personhood that is not shared directly (and possibly not shared at all) by other persons. This relationality is reflected in the Richardian definition of divine persons as “incommunicable existences of the divine nature,” where the “divine nature” is relational. Because of the differences between divine and created personhood, Aquinas concludes

⁴³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, pt. I qu. 29, art. 3, resp.

⁴⁴ Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity*, 66.

that the concept of personhood is “fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way.”⁴⁵

Overall, Aquinas contributes to the discussion on personhood a modified definition that accounts for the changes in terminology of his day and the needs of his contemporary Christology. He also emphasizes that the personhood of the Trinity and of created persons differs. In doing so, he also affirms both the usefulness of Boethius’s basic definition of personhood and the importance of Richard of Saint-Victor’s contributions to personhood through his greater emphasis on the incommunicability of all persons and the relationality of divine persons.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *ST I* qu. 29, art. 3 resp.

CHAPTER THREE

An Emergent Account of Personhood

Introduction

This chapter begins the journey from strictly theological perspectives on personhood to more naturalistic ones. The next model of personhood, an emergent model, comes directly from a work by Dr. Christian Smith entitled *What is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good from the Person Up*. This work was selected for both its topical relevance and its recent academic acclaim; it was honored among 7,000 new scholarly works as one of the “Top 25 Outstanding Academic Titles of 2011” in *Choice* magazine, a publication of the Association for College and Research Libraries.¹ The author, Dr. Christian Smith, is a highly acclaimed sociologist and currently teaches at University of Notre Dame. Smith’s primary research interests are the sociology of religion, social theory, cultural sociology, and adolescence.²

Author Motivations and Goals

Before considering Smith’s self-proclaimed “emergent model” of personhood, we will begin by establishing his motivations for his model and his goals for writing *What is a Person?*, as established in the introduction to the work. His motivations and goals play an important role in shaping the definition of personhood itself.

¹ Joanna Basile, “Sociologist Christian Smith Wins Multiple Book Awards,” University of Notre Dame Department of Sociology, June 1, 2012, <https://sociology.nd.edu/news/sociologist-christian-smith-wins-multiple-book-awards/>.

² “Christian Smith,” University of Notre Dame Department of Sociology, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://sociology.nd.edu/people/christian-smith/>.

As a sociologist, Smith's central concern in defining personhood is to provide an underlying understanding for sociological analysis that also accurately represents the lived reality of personhood. Smith holds that sociology does not have a proper fundamental understanding of what human persons are, even though it seeks to understand human activity, culture, social institutions, and relations. This deficiency exists in part because few sociologists seem inclined to undertake a rigorous academic pursuit of the question, "What is a person?"³ Because of this failure of sociology to intentionally define personhood, its models rely on underdeveloped assumptions about human personhood. In Smith's understanding, all persons (and thus all personal systems) adopt an understanding of personhood, whether carefully considered or given by default, deeply personal or merely shaped by culture. Such an understanding shapes one's decisions and perspectives in life, especially in the face of difficult choices, suffering, and tragedies.⁴ Smith wants the view of personhood held by sociologists to not be merely left to cultural default; he wants it to be carefully considered. This overarching desire drives his four specific central motivations for devising a definition of personhood.

First, Smith believes that people are not actually being well represented by many social models. The existing models may be interesting and may be able to help sociologists understand individual elements of personhood, but they do not seem to represent what is most important about humans as people; in Smith's words, they fail to capture human "souls" or "hearts."⁵

³ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 1.

⁴ Smith, 7.

⁵ Smith, 2. To Smith, these ancient terms "heart" and "soul" relate to "deep subjective experiences as persons, crucial dimensions of the richness of our own lived lives" (Smith, 3).

Next, there seems to be disparity between the personhood of social science theories and the personal moral and political beliefs of social scientists, such as human rights, equality, and inalienable dignity. In general, sociological models do not account for “humanistic moral and political beliefs”⁶ and instead paint humans as objects governed by external influences. The realms of science, morality and politics have become so disjointed that they are essentially “schizophrenic.” Smith seeks to amend this by striving for more coherent knowledge.⁷

Smith’s third motivation is to understand what the source of social structure is. Smith believes that past sociological structures have neglected to answer this question or have provided only general answers. He holds that social structures should be grounded in theory about the nature of human persons.⁸

Finally, Smith wants to address the “deep contemporary uncertainties about the human self and person.”⁹ He seeks to come up with an acceptable definition that can then be used to address controversial ethical and bioethical questions,¹⁰ such as proper use of biotechnology, abortion, and physician-assisted suicide.

Underlying Assumptions

There are several significant assumptions within Smith’s model that need to be clarified here. First, the perspective taken in Smith’s book is intentionally *not* religious

⁶ Smith, 3.

⁷ Smith, 4–5.

⁸ Smith, 5.

⁹ Smith, 5.

¹⁰ Smith, 5–6.

or philosophical in nature. Its only self-proclaimed philosophies are philosophies of methodology, namely social constructionism, network structuralism, and variables sociology.¹¹ For simplicity, these will not be considered here.

Next, Smith assumes that humans have a quiddity, or “whatness,” that can be known. This quiddity is natural, rooted in the material or physical universe.¹² There are both material and immaterial natural realities, where “*realness*” is considered to mean “existing in the ‘totality of what is.’”¹³ Not everything that is real is “empirical” or “actual.” Immaterial natural realities, such as memories, causal forces, and noncorporeal dimensions of human persons (i.e. souls), are “real” but are not necessarily directly observable.¹⁴ One criterion that helps discern whether an immaterial entity is real is whether it has causal capacities that can influence material or mental phenomena. “Causal capacities” are “powers or abilities that belong to real entities, but which may or may not be exercised in various circumstances.”¹⁵ These abilities interact in a complex way at a lower level to create, through emergence, a *person* at a higher level. Smith believes that this naturally emerged person can only come to be fully constituted as a “normal human person” through “intersubjective social interaction.”¹⁶

One last critical assumption relates to the purpose of theory. Smith holds that the purpose of theory is to model reality, even when it is not directly observable. It is *not* to

¹¹ Smith, 8.

¹² Smith, 9.

¹³ Smith, 13.

¹⁴ “God” is *not* a natural immaterial reality because God is, by definition, supernatural.

¹⁵ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 15.

¹⁶ Smith, 16.

explain and predict observable outcomes and events at the expense of reality through oversimplification and even falsehoods. This approach to theory contrasts with many approaches in fields like economics and sociology that prioritize functionality of the theory over reflection of reality.¹⁷

Emergence

With Smith's motivations, goals, and underlying assumptions in place, it is time to move on to the concept of emergence. According to Smith, "Emergence refers to the process of constituting a new entity with its own particular characteristics through the interactive combination of other, different entities that are necessary to create the new entity but that do not contain the characteristics present in the new entity."¹⁸ In other words, "the whole is more than the sum of its parts."¹⁹

Smith establishes four necessary conditions for emergence.²⁰ First, there must be certain capacities at a lower level that interact with one another. Next, this interaction must form an entity with a higher level of existence through a process of "upward movement of ontological development."²¹ Third, this higher level of existence must be fully dependent on the combination of these lower capacities alone. Finally, this higher level of existence must have qualities that are *not* reducible to the lower level entities.

¹⁷ Smith, 11.

¹⁸ Smith, 19–20.

¹⁹ Smith, 20.

²⁰ The interrelations of these four conditions are well visualized by Figure 1 on p. 33 of Smith's *What is a Person?*

²¹ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 40.

These four conditions are *analytic* phases rather than *temporal* ones. This means that they can happen at the same time. In fact, the first three conditions often do happen at the same time, while the fourth may occur during or after initial emergence.²²

Another important point about the development of emergence is that the newly created emergent entity can often act upon its own lower properties and capacities that brought it to be in the first place through a process of “downward causation.”²³ Smith gives the example of depression. Depression, a “higher-level affective and mood experience,” can reshape the very physical structure and operation of the brain, the lower-level physical structure that created the possibility for depression in the first place. The higher-level property impacts lower-level capacity; this is “downward causation.”²⁴

According to Smith’s argument, emergence can be seen in many different levels of reality. These levels of reality often happen to correlate with different academic disciplines that build upon one another in a way that also reflects emergence. Smith’s example of an emergence hierarchy for such academic disciplines is the following: “subatomic, atomic, molecular, chemical, biological, physiological, zoological, ecological, meteorological, mental, social, global, galactic, and cosmological.”²⁵ Although all these levels are somehow connected, the higher ones are not a mere sum of the lower ones. A cell is not the sum of its organelles, which is not the sum of its molecules and compounds, which is not a sum of its atoms, which is not a sum of its subatomic particles, and onward.

²² Smith, 33.

²³ Smith, 41.

²⁴ Smith, 41.

²⁵ Smith, 35.

Smith seeks to strengthen his argument for the reality of emergence using a plethora of examples. Among these are cellular composition, Monet's "Water Lilies" ("The Clouds"), and computers. On the cellular level, Smith suggests that living cells contain many different subcellular and chemical components (ex. organelles, hormones, transcription factors, genetic material, etc.) that do not directly combine to form the "new causal powers" of the resultant cell.²⁶ On a similar note, particular cell types can combine to form bodily organs with highly specialized functions (ex. liver) that cannot be explained merely by the abilities of the individual cells. These organs can then combine to form bodies in a similar way. From Smith's perspective, emergence is readily demonstrated in the natural world.

Whereas cells are an example of natural emergence, Monet's "Water Lilies" and computers are examples of "emergence by design," the result of "intentional intervention by purposeful actors."²⁷ Monet's "Water Lilies" painting is, according to its lower-level components, a collection of paint dabs on canvas. On a higher level, however, it is a recognizable painting with cultural significance. It has its own characteristics and capacities that can affect the world.²⁸ Similarly, computers on a lower level are a "collection of small pieces of plastic, metal, silicon, other miscellaneous materials, and electrical energy."²⁹ These elements combine in a complex fashion to produce a working computer with "visual, informational, and computational abilities."³⁰ Smith argues from

²⁶ Smith, 31.

²⁷ Smith, 29.

²⁸ Smith, 36–37.

²⁹ Smith, 29.

³⁰ Smith, 29.

both Monet's paintings and computers that relationality, and not just composition, is critical to constructing reality.³¹

Smith's Definition of Personhood

Smith's complex definition of personhood is as follows: "A conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who – as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions – exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world."³² Smith defends his use of such a complex definition through critical realism, which claims that complex concepts like personhood deserve complex definitions.³³ The remainder of this chapter seeks to explain in more detail the components of Smith's definition of personhood.

First, Smith claims that human persons are "centers." According to Smith, this means that persons are not just collections of lower level capacities. Rather, they have an internal organization that allows for a "nucleus of coherence" and "continuity of awareness and action."³⁴ What exactly this "nucleus" is and where it comes from Smith does not explain.

³¹ Smith, 30, 37. As a reminder, "reality" according to Smith consists of "those things that exist, are genuine elements of the totality of what is." Smith claims that there are real things without physical substance, such as "certain human mental objects" like reasons and values, for example. Some realities are not empirical or actual (as opposed to potential) (Smith, 13-14).

³² Smith, 61.

³³ Smith, 62.

³⁴ Smith, 62.

Next, Smith states that human persons are centers *with* four qualities: consciousness, reflexivity, embodiment, and self-transcendence. A conscious center is one that has a capacity for consciousness that it exercises at least occasionally or that it may exercise someday (ex. fetuses). This important clarification excludes the necessity of continuous consciousness and can be a safeguard against concerns that one loses personhood during sleep or a coma.³⁵ A reflexive center is one that can examine and know itself as “self,” i.e. as different from others. Smith believes that persons can normally view themselves as both subjects and objects, allowing for “internal dialogue.”³⁶ An embodied center is part of the “corporeal materiality of living flesh and blood.”³⁷ Smith suggests that human persons have both material and immaterial components. He likens these to “body” and “soul” in a dualistic nature. Smith holds that body and soul exist in “singular unity,” much as believed by Aristotle, Boethius, and Aquinas, though he disagrees with their particular definitions. Smith chooses not to define the relations between body and soul, but he does reject “the extremes of substance dualism and reductive physicalism.”³⁸ Lastly, self-transcending centers are those that have the ability to be attentive to other persons and nonpersons. This characteristic of persons is critical to Smith’s purpose for human persons because it allows persons to ultimately self-

³⁵ Smith, 62–63. Depending on worldview, the idea that to be considered a “conscious center” one must merely have the capacity for future consciousness might also provide a way for persons with profound intellectual disabilities to be considered persons, since even those without consciousness in this life may have it later; such an implication is not directly stated by Smith, and thus his position on this perspective remains uncertain.

³⁶ Smith, 63.

³⁷ Smith, 63.

³⁸ Smith, 63–64.

transcend to the point where they are able to engage in “love for and communion with other persons.”³⁹

The above conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending centers are centers *of* four things: “subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication.”⁴⁰ First, persons are centers of subjective experience. This means that interaction of each person with the world creates sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc. that then subjectively create responses in the conscious awareness of that person.⁴¹ Persons have a “private world” or “inward place” of thought that receives, considers, and sometimes acts upon certain phenomena subjectively. For that world to be shared with others, communication is necessary, and sometimes that is not even enough to express one’s subjective experience of the world. Next, persons are centers of durable identity. They have singular, incommunicable identities “capable of generating, knowing, communicating, and sustaining over time and space.”⁴² These identities allow persons to view themselves reflexively as singular, incommunicable selves.⁴³ Persons are also centers of moral commitment. Smith observes that humans have both a “capacity and disposition” to evaluate desires, beliefs, and feelings in light of an external “moral standard” that distinguishes between right and wrong. Persons can act on these evaluations in a way that makes them the “subjects and agents of their moral lives.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Smith, 65.

⁴⁰ Smith, 61.

⁴¹ Smith, 66.

⁴² Smith, 66.

⁴³ Smith, 66–67.

⁴⁴ Smith, 67.

Perhaps most significant to Smith is that persons are centers of social communication. Smith states that “persons...are originally, constitutively, and inescapably social, interactive, and communicative in origin and being.”⁴⁵ Persons can only be fully formed as persons through relationship; socially isolated persons are “emaciated selves and underdeveloped persons.”⁴⁶ Smith claims that human relationships are special in that they have a greater depth to them than animal ones. Human relationships involve “communion” that allows for the “mutual giving of personal selves as gifts of fellowship and love for the good of each person concerned.”⁴⁷

So far, it has been established that a person is “a conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication.”⁴⁸ The next parts of Smith’s definition make claims about what such persons can do. First, persons are “the efficient causes of their own responsible actions and interactions.”⁴⁹ Since persons have the capacity to make choices about how to act, they have at least partial responsibility – including moral responsibility – for their own actions. This distinguishes persons from other animals whose actions are behavioristic. A person can be held morally responsible for killing another person; a bear cannot be held morally responsible for killing another bear or even a person, as that bear was acting according to natural behavioral instinct instead of choice.

⁴⁵ Smith, 67.

⁴⁶ Smith, 68.

⁴⁷ Smith, 68.

⁴⁸ Smith, 61.

⁴⁹ Smith, 69.

Persons can “exercise complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity.”⁵⁰ In regard to agency, human persons can make intentional, deliberative decisions and act on the world through them. Humans have the capacity to influence actual outcomes when outcomes are not predetermined.⁵¹ Regarding intersubjectivity, persons have the capacity to interact with other persons in such a way that they can have “mutually understood or shared cognitions, affects, meanings, evaluations, or desires.”⁵² Through intersubjectivity, persons can make their subjective inner selves available to other persons, often through language and other forms of communication.

Each person is a center with a purpose shared with other persons: “to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world.”⁵³ The first part of this statement, “to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self,” means that persons must sustain themselves as *personal* selves beyond just physical survival and security. Involved in such sustaining are capacities like rational egoism, self-interest, desire, competition, and choice; though these capacities can be morally problematic, they are often tempered through other characteristics like self-transcendence and morality.⁵⁴ Furthermore, persons must have particularity (“incommunicability”) that keeps them from being exchanged for other persons. Elements of this particularly of which Smith makes special

⁵⁰ Smith, 69.

⁵¹ Smith, 69–70.

⁵² Smith, 70.

⁵³ Smith, 61, 70.

⁵⁴ Smith, 71.

note are sex and gender. These characteristics tie inherently into the embodiment of a person, according to Smith.⁵⁵

The remaining part of the purpose of persons (“...in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world”⁵⁶) ties to the meaningful interactions of persons with one another. Smith makes the significant claim that the telos of man is to engage in social communication and relationships rooted in love.⁵⁷ The sort of love to which Smith refers must not merely be self-gratifying but rather self-sacrificial. The person must seek to give of himself for the good of others. He must also seek to treat the non-personal world with respect and care.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that this sort of self-sacrificial love reflects the traditional Christian notions of “charity”⁵⁹ or *agape*.⁶⁰

At this point, Smith’s complex definition of personhood has been fully explained piece by piece. However, there is one important concept underlying Smith’s definition of personhood that remains to be explicated: causal capacities. Causal capacities can be defined as “powers [that] endow humans with the ability to bring about changes in material or mental phenomena, to produce or influence objects and events in the world.”⁶¹ Smith holds that these causal capacities are the “lower-level powers,” coming from lower

⁵⁵ Smith, 72.

⁵⁶ Smith, 61.

⁵⁷ Smith, 73.

⁵⁸ Smith, 73.

⁵⁹ For more information, see St. Thomas Aquinas’s writings on charity in *ST*, IIb qu. 23-27.

⁶⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (HarperCollins, 2017). For more information, see Chapter 6.

⁶¹ Smith, 42.

level entities⁶² (perhaps within the brain), from which personhood emerges.⁶³ Through thoughtful brainstorming, Smith offers an extensive representative list of thirty causal capacities that human persons share. His causal capacities include (in order of increasing complexity) subconscious being, conscious awareness, volition, emotional experience, episodic and long-term remembering, inter-subjective understanding, acting as the efficient cause of one's own actions and interactions, inventing and employing technology, self-transcendence, language use, anticipation of the future, identity formation, self-reflexivity, abstract reasoning, truth seeking, moral awareness and judgment, forming virtues, aesthetic judgment and enjoyment, and – most significantly – interpersonal communion and love.⁶⁴ A comprehensive list of these causal capacities can be seen in a table on p. 54 of *What is a Person?*, and detailed descriptions of the capacities can be found on pp. 42-53. According to Smith, his personal causal capacities are shared in part with animals, but some are unique to humans or more pronounced in humans than in other animals.⁶⁵ Smith ranks his thirty causal capacities in order of centrality and complexity, with “subconscious being” at the bottom of the list (in the category of “existence capacities”) and “interpersonal communion and love” at the top.⁶⁶ Smith hypothesizes that his higher-level capacities can affect the lower-level ones via causal forces or influences, just as the lower-level capacities can affect the higher ones.⁶⁷

⁶² Smith, 33.

⁶³ Smith, 43.

⁶⁴ Smith, 54.

⁶⁵ Smith, 53.

⁶⁶ Smith, 54.

⁶⁷ Smith, 54–55.

Smith also categorizes the causal capacities by whether or not each individual capacity engages 1) subjective self, 2) social relationships, and 3) the material world. Smith concludes that most capacities engage all three.⁶⁸ Furthermore, every capacity engages social relationships, supporting Smith's hypothesis that social relationships are essential to personhood. Smith hopes to show through this finding that these capacities connect persons with many different dimensions of reality.⁶⁹

One last observation made by Smith is that certain capacities seem to be more central (i.e. more interconnected with the other capacities) than others. On pp. 57 of *What is a Person?*, Smith offers a diagram in which he connects causal capacities together by arrows based on his subjective perception of interrelation. From this exercise, he concludes that the most central capacities are 1) purposeful agency, 2) creative thinking and action, and 3) self-transcendence. Exactly how these designated central capacities factor into Smith's final definition of personhood remains unclear, but they at least seem to share common "themes" with the definition.⁷⁰ From these central capacities, Smith concludes that persons are "creative actors with outward life projects."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Smith, 54.

⁶⁹ Smith, 55.

⁷⁰ Smith addresses this connection between central capacities and his definition of personhood himself on p. 56. The three central "creative capacities" of purposeful agency, creative thinking and action, and self-transcendence, in sum, paint a picture of persons as "creative actors with outward life projects," as mentioned above. Smith claims that such a description of persons also "fits with the larger picture of personhood that [he is] developing in this book" (56). It is reasonable to conclude that Smith may have prioritized these three central capacities when coming up with his definition of personhood, even though he does not (to my knowledge) explain how the lists of qualities in his definition connect to the causal capacities from which personhood emerges.

⁷¹ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 56.

Conclusion

In *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good from the Person Up*, sociologist Christian Smith advocates for a form of personhood reliant on the property of emergence, which involves the combination of lower-level capacities to form a higher-level being who is “more than the sum of its parts.” Using the philosophical perspective of critical realism, which suggests that complex concepts call for complex definitions, he defines a person as follows: “A conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who – as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions – exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world.”⁷² One central component of this definition is the underlying causal capacities that allow this personhood to exist. These lower-level capacities are the basis for the emergence of higher-level emergent personhood. Smith tentatively proposes thirty capacities in total, which he organizes in order of “centrality, complexity, and primary exercise or expression of engagement.”⁷³ He notes that there are three capacities, dubbed “central capacities,” that connect the most with the other capacities. These central capacities are purposeful agency, creative thinking and action, and self-transcendence. According to Smith’s definition, persons are essentially centers of being with an inherent purpose. This central purpose, or *telos*, is to maintain the incommunicable self in relationships in

⁷² Smith, 62–63.

⁷³ Smith, 54.

the sort of way that allows the self to treat persons and non-persons with self-sacrificial love – the sort of love reminiscent of the Christian *agape*.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Reductionist Account of Personhood

Introduction

In the last two chapters, we have considered first traditional theological and then emergent perspectives on personhood. In this chapter, we will transition into the realm of reductionism. We will begin with a brief history of reductionism and the distinguishing of its different manifestations. Next, we will consider some important clarifications on the reductionist understanding of person as tied to “self” or “consciousness.” Finally, we will examine three specific reductionist approaches to understanding the person and its source.

Reductionism

Reductionism is a term in science that has come to have several distinct but related uses and meanings. These distinctions are important because they allow for clarification of the types of reductionism relevant to the discussion in this chapter. A brief history of reductionism, as outlined primarily by the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, will be useful to distinguish between types of reductionism.

The term “reductionism” first emerged in science in the twentieth century, between World War I and World War II. During this time, science was expanding into increasingly specialized disciplines. Scientists were facing barriers of physical isolation due to international conflict and academic isolation due to the increasing impossibility of thorough knowledge of *all* newly emerging scientific fields by any individual. Due to

these barriers, Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath proposed the reduction of the various scientific “languages” (i.e. terminology unique to each specialty) into one universal language so that interdisciplinary understanding would be possible. This proposal became known as the “Unified Science” movement and was popular in the 1930s. Carnap, Neurath, and their supporters hoped that such unification might allow for verification of theories between fields by putting the theories into a common language. This understanding of reductionism became known as the *translation model of reduction*.¹

By the 1960s, some philosophers began to extend the concept of reduction to reduction of scientific theories from one more specialized “target science” (e.g. psychology) to theories in another more generalized “base science” (e.g. physics). The goal was to create a comprehensive theory of reality. Philosophers Carl Hempel and Ernest Nagel were notable in this movement. Nagel is known for advocating for the possibility of a *heterogenous* reductionism that allowed for connection of theories between different sciences without the universal translation of the sciences advocated by the translation model of reduction. Such connection could occur via “bridge laws” that connect terms from the base science to those in the target science. In this sense, some sciences could be connected to other sciences without being completely translated, and the more specialized “target sciences” could be considered to be *derived* from the “base science.” This new type of theoretical reductionism became known as the *derivation model of reduction*.²

¹ Alyssa Ney, “Reductionism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/red-ism/#H4>.

² Ney.

Around the same time as the derivation model was developing, philosophers John Kemeny and Paul Oppenheim developed the *explanation model of reduction*. This model sought to integrate more specialized target theories into more generalized base theories that could explain the observational data from the target theories appropriately in a manner that was as well systematized as the original target theory. The hope was to eventually integrate all theories from target sciences into the theories of a base science, achieving unification and *eliminating* superfluous theories to create “theoretical parsimony.” This belief in *elimination* as the end goal of such reduction is controversial and is not universally held by all who advocate for the explanation model of reduction. Many hold that the explanation and derivation models of reduction do not compete but rather are complementary, or perhaps are even such that the derivation model subsumes the explanation model.³

In recent years, the original translation model of reductionism has become obsolete for practical reasons. The derivation model of reduction continues to hold sway among many modern reductionists, who usually claim that “the laws of all the special sciences are derivable from physics.”⁴ This view takes on great significance to reductionists who study metaphysics and philosophy of mind. Reductionists in these fields often claim that Nagel’s bridge laws must be philosophical “identities.” The consequence of this is that “reduction of all special science theories to physics is thought to bring with it the reduction (*qua* identification) of all entities to entities describable in

³ Ney.

⁴ Ney.

the language of physics.”⁵ Though not directly claimed by the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, it seems that this sort of derivation reductionism implies physicalism, such that there is no longer a possibility of a mental or spiritual world, as neither would be “describable in the language of physics.”⁶ Reductionism becomes a form of physical monism (i.e. physical substance is the only substance there is⁷).

In the modern day, there is also a large group of “reductionists” who are no longer concerned with theoretical reductions. These reductionists find their origins in the pre-Nagelian writings of identity-theorists, including U.T. Place and J.J.C. Smart. Place and Smart explicitly deny translation reductionism and do not address derivation and explanation reductionism. Instead, they simply claim that “mental phenomena...are identical to physical phenomena.”⁸ They stake their claims on observation rather than reflection on theory and terminology. This cohort again adheres to physical monism.⁹

As reductionism has extended beyond a philosophy of science to a philosophy of life, it (or, at least certain branches of it) has faced increasing criticism. One such criticism is that “the completion of all of the derivations [from special sciences to physical science] would not have shown one why it is that the bridging identities obtain.”¹⁰ In other words, the identity bridge statements themselves need to be explained

⁵ Ney.

⁶ Ney.

⁷ “Monism,” *Collins English Dictionary*, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/monism>.

⁸ Ney, “Reductionism.”

⁹ Ney.

¹⁰ Ney.

and justified. This concern has led to development of the field of *functional reductionism*. Functional reductionism creates “functional reductions” through two stages: 1) “priming” the special science phenomenon for reduction to the base science by “construing it relationally” and 2) seeking out the “property figuring in the base science that could ground the obtaining of this relational description.”¹¹ Via such functional reductionism, “boiling of substance x,” for example, could properly be said to be “identical with x’s being such that x’s atoms have reached a certain momentum, and x’s internal pressure is less than the pressure of x’s external environment.”¹² Ironically, though functional reductionism was developed to provide a better logical underpinning for the identities in Nagelian derivation reductionism and the reductionism of Smart and Place, it has become a favorite target of anti-reductionist arguments.¹³

Ontological and Methodological Reductionism

The physical monists adhering to Nagelian derivation reductionism and those adhering to the non-theoretical reductionism of Smart and Place could be grouped under the name of *ontological reductionists*. The Oxford Companion to Philosophy explains that “Ontological reductionism refers to the belief that the whole of reality consists of a minimal number of entities or substances.”¹⁴ This statement is usually argued in a metaphysical manner to claim that the only substance is material substance. Simply put,

¹¹ Ney.

¹² Ney.

¹³ Ney.

¹⁴ Ted Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2005), 1518, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=422618>.

ontological reductionism is a form of physical monism. It denies “the existence of unseen life forces and such things” and claims “that organisms are no more (nor less) than complex functioning machines.”¹⁵

Many adherents to ontological reductionism also hold to *methodological reductionism*, which holds that “the best scientific strategy is always to attempt explanation in terms of ever more minute entities.”¹⁶ This form of reductionism has been important for major scientific advances in physics and beyond. One notable advance was the reduction of genes to the behavior of the macromolecule deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). However, as with ontological reductionism, methodological reductionism often extends beyond methodological implications into philosophical ones. Methodological reductionism denies emergence claims that “entities at upper levels can never be analyzed entirely in terms of entities at lower levels.”¹⁷ One branch of methodological reductionism, known as “biological reductionism,” makes the claim that “human nature is...fully understandable in terms of genetics.”¹⁸

Both ontological reductionism and methodological reductionism lead to claims by reductionist philosophers of mind that human persons are ultimately “nothing but a pack of neurons.”¹⁹ This remainder of this chapter is dedicated to elucidating what is meant by

¹⁵ Honderich, 1518.

¹⁶ Honderich, 1518.

¹⁷ Honderich, 1519.

¹⁸ Honderich, 1519.

¹⁹ Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, Reprint edition (London: Scribner, 1995), 3.

this statement and how adherents to reductionism within philosophy of mind support their understanding of the physicalist “self.”

Personhood and “Self”

In the literature of the reductionist perspective, there is a general lack of the use of the term “person.” Instead, the notion of “person” is conveyed using the vocabulary of “self” in reductionist literature. “Self” is generally considered to be the sense of “the presence in the mind,”²⁰ the “something-to-which-knowing-is-attributed,”²¹ the “You”²² or “me.”²³

When “personhood” is extended to “self,” reductionist views of personhood are readily evident in literature, especially science books and articles written in layman’s terms (“popular science”). Even titles of such works can be revealing of the reductionist perspective on personhood as tied directly to brain. Consider the following:

1. *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*²⁴
2. *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*²⁵
3. *I of the Vortex: From Neurons to Self*²⁶

²⁰ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, First edition (San Diego, CA: Mariner Books, 2000), 9.

²¹ Damasio, 159.

²² Crick, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, 3.

²³ Patricia Churchland, *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 11.

²⁴ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

²⁵ Koch Christof, *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*, 1st edition (Denver, Colo.: Roberts and Company Publishers, 2004).

²⁶ Rodolfo R. Llinas, *I of the Vortex: From Neurons to Self*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass. London: A Bradford Book, 2002).

4. *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain*²⁷
5. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*²⁸
6. *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*²⁹

These titles all point to the notion of self, brain, and mind as one. Often cited as evidence in this reductionist notion are various sciences, such as neuroscience, psychology, neurobiology, and even physics. Another commonality is the significance of consciousness in having a sense of self. This is reflected again by the book titles above and is considered in depth by the three books analyzed more closely in the rest of this chapter.

What is a Person? Three Reductionist Perspectives

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, three primary sources will be described to provide reductionist perspectives on personhood: *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (“*The Astonishing Hypothesis*”) by Francis Crick; *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (“*The Feeling of What Happens*”) by Antonio Damasio; and *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain* (“*Touching a Nerve*”) by Patricia S. Churchland.

The Astonishing Hypothesis was published in 1994 by Dr. Francis Crick, one of the primary discoverers of the structure and replication process of deoxyribonucleic acid

²⁷ Churchland, *Touching a Nerve*.

²⁸ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 2012).

²⁹ Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*, Reprint edition (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

(DNA) along with James Watson.³⁰ *The Astonishing Hypothesis* has been deemed a significant work due to its early role in urging scientists to no longer eschew research on consciousness out of fear that it is a realm for philosophy. In 1990, Crick and his research partner, Christof Koch, first advocated for “an assault on consciousness” at a seminar.³¹ They suggested that consciousness is synonymous with awareness, and that awareness has an underlying mechanism relating to attention and short-term memory, both of which can be studied through examining neurons and their interactions. They urged their fellow scientists to help them “accumulate the kind of empirical, unambiguous knowledge that is required to create truly scientific models of consciousness, models analogous to those that explain transmission of genetic information by means of DNA.”³² In *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, Crick elaborates on these ideas and delineates a possible approach to scientific research on consciousness. Crick and Koch succeeded in their campaign to bring consciousness to the forefront of scientific study, and it has flourished in recent years.³³

The Feeling of What Happens was published in 2000 by Dr. Antonio Damasio, a leading neurologist and neuroscientist. Damasio has written multiple books on the topic of consciousness and self, and these books have met much international acclaim.³⁴

³⁰ “Francis Crick Biographical,” The Nobel Prize, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1962/crick/biographical/>.

³¹ John Horgan, “Can Science Explain Consciousness?,” *Scientific American* 271, no. 1 (1994): 88–94.

³² Horgan.

³³ Horgan.

³⁴ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*. Some of these accolades are indicated on the back cover of the edition referenced here.

Damasio takes a more neutral philosophical approach to reductionism of persons in his book and primarily focuses on the science behind consciousness, emotion and self. He introduces a significant distinction between notions of *core self* and *autobiographical self*, and he connects each of these to different forms of consciousness.

Touching a Nerve was first published in 2013 by Dr. Patricia Churchland, a prominent neurophilosopher who, along with her husband, Paul, has studied the philosophical implications of a reductionist view of the brain and self since the 1970s. She has been awarded the MacArthur Fellowship for her pioneering work in neurophilosophy.³⁵ In *Touching a Nerve*, Churchland challenges dualist religious notions about topics like the soul, heaven, and morality. She suggests that the brain/mind can account for many notions of self often attributed to a soul. She also contributes a model for how consciousness and a sense of self could arise from the brain, based on the work of several neuroscientists.

The Astonishing Hypothesis

Chapter 1 of Crick's *The Astonishing Hypothesis* opens with the following lines:

The Astonishing Hypothesis is that 'You,' your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased it: "You're nothing but a pack of neurons."³⁶

This, in a nutshell, is Crick's definition of personhood. To Crick, the person is the "self." The self – "You" – is nothing but a sense of personal identity, autonomy,

³⁵ Churchland, *Touching a Nerve*. Some of these accolades are indicated on the inside back cover of the edition referenced here.

³⁶ Crick, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, 3.

memory, emotion, desire, etc., that comes from the neurons in the brain and the consciousness. Because Crick holds that consciousness is the source of “self,” he sets out in his book to “sketch the general nature of consciousness and to make some tentative suggestions about how to study it experimentally.”³⁷ His overarching message to his readers is that “now is the time to think scientifically about consciousness (and its relationship, if any, to the hypothetical immortal soul) and, most important of all, the time to start the *experimental* study of consciousness in a serious and deliberate way.”³⁸

The Astonishing Hypothesis begins by attempting to dismantle the notion of a soul and dualist nature in favor of reductionist physical monism. Crick first asserts that man has always been interested in exploring human nature. One way in which human nature has been explored by many major world religions has been through the notion of a soul or spirit.³⁹ Though Crick acknowledges that religions differ in their characterization of the soul, he claims that they almost universally hold that the soul embodies “the essence of the human being,” is necessary to proper human functioning, and continues to exist after death. Furthermore, he holds that the soul is literal and not just metaphorical.⁴⁰ Crick next claims that science will show belief in the soul to be outdated, and that dualists simply do not wish to acknowledge this. According to Crick, science has supplanted many common beliefs held throughout history, especially by major world religions.⁴¹

³⁷ Crick, xi.

³⁸ Crick, xii.

³⁹ Crick, 3.

⁴⁰ Crick, 4.

⁴¹ Crick, 6.

These include that the earth is not flat, but round;⁴² the earth is not only 10,000 years old, but about 4.6 billion years old; and that stars are not fixed in the sky and guided by angels.⁴³ Crick believes that, just as science has disproven these notions, it will disprove the notion of the soul by showing that the functions of the soul can be met by the brain, and thus there is no need for the soul to exist. This can be seen in his statement that “A modern neurobiologist sees no need for the religious concept of a soul to explain the behavior of humans and animals.”⁴⁴ Crick concludes his argument with the assertion that “the main object of scientific research on the brain is not merely to understand and cure various medical conditions, important though this task may be, but to grasp the true nature of the human soul. Whether this term is metaphorical or literal is exactly what we are trying to discover.”⁴⁵

Next, Crick proposes reductionism as an alternative to dualistic belief in body and soul. According to Crick, reductionism is the “main theoretical method that has driven the development of physics, chemistry, and molecular biology. It is largely responsible for the spectacular developments of modern science.”⁴⁶ Reductionism, according to Crick, claims that “a complex system can be explained by the behavior of its parts and their interactions with each other.”⁴⁷ These complex systems may require many layers of

⁴² Crick, 4.

⁴³ Crick, 5.

⁴⁴ Crick, 6.

⁴⁵ Crick, 7.

⁴⁶ Crick, 8.

⁴⁷ Crick, 7.

explanation. For example, the brain's behavior can be explained by the interactions of nerve cells, which can be explained by interactions of ions and molecules, which can be explained by atoms.⁴⁸ However, Crick clarifies that "Reductionism is not the rigid process of explaining one fixed set of ideas in terms of another fixed set of ideas at a lower level, but a dynamic interactive process that modifies the concepts at both levels as knowledge develops."⁴⁹ In this sense, Crick's perspective on the brain and the mind bears similarity to emergence. Crick explains this resemblance by clarifying that he is not opposed to emergence in a scientific sense, which recognizes that "while the whole may not be the simple sum of the separate parts, its behavior can, at least in principle, be understood from the nature and behavior of its parts plus the knowledge of how all these parts interact."⁵⁰ Rather, he is opposed to a sort of "mystical emergence," which suggests that consciousness, the mind, and the self "cannot in any way, even in principle, be understood as the combined behavior of its separate parts."⁵¹

From Crick's description of reductionism, he seems to advocate for methodological reductionism. This is not surprising, as he played a major role in the methodological reduction of DNA to its molecular structure. From Crick's strong monist perspective, he also seems to advocate for ontological reductionism. He attempts to defend his ontological monistic views through his methodological views. In this sense, his approach to reductionism mirrors that of Smart and Place.

⁴⁸ Crick, 7–8.

⁴⁹ Crick, 8.

⁵⁰ Crick, 11.

⁵¹ Crick, 11.

Crick believes that consciousness is the reductionist answer to the sense of self that humans (and perhaps other upper level organisms) have. He believes that this can be convincingly established with the help of present and future research on consciousness. While he does not have all the answers yet, he seeks to establish what can already be known about consciousness. Crick does *not* provide a precise definition of consciousness because he fears that this could mislead or restrict research. He also seeks to avoid detailed descriptions of the purpose of consciousness without more research.⁵² However, Crick does note some critical characteristics of consciousness, based on consensus points from three leading cognitive theoreticians.⁵³

Crick argues that one way in which consciousness can be connected to a sense of self is through neural correlates. Neural correlates are what happens with neurons to make individuals perceive a sensation in a particular way.⁵⁴ In other words, when properties of an object are perceived, certain neurons tend to fire simultaneously in response, while others that do not correlate with that object do not fire at the same time.⁵⁵ This seems to suggest that the brain is responsible for specific perceptions, and that specific sets of neurons may be involved in or even responsible for those perceptions. By studying these neural correlates, researchers can begin to understand how the brain works to perceive certain things. Crick suggests that researchers begin consciousness research by studying the neural correlates of vision and visual awareness – a form of

⁵² Crick, 20.

⁵³ Crick, 19–21.

⁵⁴ Crick, 9.

⁵⁵ Crick, 22.

consciousness – to the point where they understand how vision works. By determining which psychological processes are involved in visual awareness and where in the brain they are located (their “neural correlates”), it might be possible to find corresponding “awareness neurons.”⁵⁶ Since “awareness” is essentially the same as consciousness,⁵⁷ discovery of the location of awareness neurons may allow for location of the neurons involved in consciousness. Study of these neurons could provide better understanding of consciousness itself, and with it better understanding of self-consciousness and self.

Though Crick does spend a significant portion of *The Astonishing Hypothesis* expounding upon his suggested visual neural correlate methodology to research consciousness and self, this is not the most significant contribution of Crick’s work. Rather, the lasting impact of *The Astonishing Hypothesis* is that it serves as a programmatic manifesto that challenges scientists to do research and provide evidence for his “astonishing” reductionist belief that “You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.”⁵⁸

The Feeling of What Happens

Throughout *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, Crick consistently advocates for both methodological and ontological reductionism and against dualism and even religion as a whole. In *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio takes a very different tone and approach.

In assessing the problems that consciousness poses to researchers, Damasio surmises the following: “In the very least,...the neurobiology of consciousness faces two

⁵⁶ Crick, 204.

⁵⁷ Crick, 10, footnote i.

⁵⁸ Crick, 3.

problems: the problem of how the movie-in-the-brain is generated and the problem of how the brain also generates the sense that there is an owner and observer for that movie...In effect, the second problem is that of generating the *appearance* of an owner and observer for the movie *within the movie*...”⁵⁹ This quote in the opening chapter of Damasio's book gives valuable insight into his view of self. The self is the "something-to-which-knowing-is-attributed.”⁶⁰ It is “the presence in the mind” – “You.”⁶¹

While Crick's book is primarily a hypothesis about how consciousness might be perceived and explored by researchers, Damasio's is a thoroughly argued proposal for what consciousness is, how it is constructed, and how it helps produce a sense of self.⁶² In writing the book, Damasio accounted for observations of patients with disruptive neurological conditions and experimental neuropsychological studies of disorders, as well as data from general biology, neuroanatomy, and neurophysiology. He sought to design “testable hypotheses [for]...neuroanatomical underpinnings of consciousness informed by reflection and theory.”⁶³

Damasio begins by establishing some underlying facts about consciousness.

These are as follows:

⁵⁹ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 11.

⁶⁰ Damasio, 159.

⁶¹ Damasio, 9. It is interesting to note that, according to this definition, to have a “self” and to have a “sense of self” are the same thing. This places a limitation on who can be considered “selves,” particularly on infants and those with certain mental disabilities, as will be shown later in this section.

⁶² Damasio, 11–12.

⁶³ Damasio, 12.

- 1) “Some aspects of the processes of consciousness can be related to the operation of specific brain regions and systems, thus opening the door to discovering the neural architecture which supports consciousness.”⁶⁴
- 2) “Consciousness and wakefulness, as well as consciousness and low-level attention, can be separated...patients can be awake and attentive without having normal consciousness...”⁶⁵
- 3) “...consciousness and emotion are not separable...when consciousness is impaired, so is emotion.”⁶⁶
- 4) “...consciousness is not a monolith, at least not in humans: it can be separated into simple and complex kinds, and the neurological evidence makes the separation transparent.”⁶⁷
- 5) “...not infrequently, consciousness is simply explained in terms of other cognitive functions, such as language, memory, reason, attention, and working memory. While such functions are indeed necessary for the top tiers of extended consciousness to operate normally, the study of neurological patients suggests that they are not required for core consciousness.”⁶⁸

Using these facts and other research on consciousness and the brain, Damasio begins to paint a picture of the development of consciousness and self.

⁶⁴ Damasio, 15.

⁶⁵ Damasio, 15.

⁶⁶ Damasio, 16.

⁶⁷ Damasio, 16.

⁶⁸ Damasio, 18.

It all begins with the concepts of *internal milieu* and the *proto-self*. The *internal milieu* is the internal environment of a cell and/or organism.⁶⁹ For any organism to survive it must have a relatively stable internal milieu.⁷⁰ More specifically, it must have “a boundary; an internal structure; a dispositional arrangement for the regulation of internal states that subsumes a mandate to maintain life; [and] a narrow range of variability of internal states so that those states are relatively stable.”⁷¹ As listed above, in order for the internal milieu to remain relatively stable, the organism must have the ability to monitor and regulate the internal environment. This is where the proto-self comes in.

The *proto-self* is defined as “a coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions.”⁷² Damasio explains that first-order neural patterns occurring at many neural levels carefully regulate the organism.⁷³ These neural patterns form a neural map of the organism itself, an *image* in the brain of the bodily organism. Although this proto-self is not conscious in itself, it forms a critical basis for a sense of self, as distinct from other non-self objects.⁷⁴

The next significant players in the development of biological self are *external objects*, *images*, and *core consciousness*. Damasio describes *objects* as “entities as

⁶⁹ Damasio, 138.

⁷⁰ Damasio, 135.

⁷¹ Damasio, 136.

⁷² Damasio, 154.

⁷³ Damasio, 154.

⁷⁴ Damasio, 22.

diverse as a person, a place, a melody, a toothache, a state of bliss.”⁷⁵ *Images* are then “mental pattern[s] in any of the secondary modalities, e.g. a sound image, a tactile image, the image of a state of well-being.”⁷⁶ As mentioned above, the brain forms a mental image of the bodily organism. Whenever that organism interacts with an object, an image of that object must be formed. The interaction between the image of the organism via the proto-self and the image of the object in a causal relationship forms the root of *core consciousness*.⁷⁷ In Damasio’s words, “core consciousness occurs when the brain's representation devices generate an imaged, nonverbal account of how the organism's own state is affected by the organism's processing of an object, and when this process enhances the image of the causative object, thus placing it saliently in a spatial and temporal context.”⁷⁸

So, what exactly does *core consciousness* do? Core consciousness “provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment - now - and about one place – here.”⁷⁹ It is a “simple, biological phenomenon” with one level of organization, and stability across a lifetime. It is not exclusively human and does not depend on conventional memory, working memory, reasoning, or language. Most significantly, core consciousness

⁷⁵ Damasio, 9.

⁷⁶ Damasio, 9.

⁷⁷ Damasio, 170.

⁷⁸ Damasio, 169. For more information on Damasio's outline on how this process might work, see pp. 169-170 of his work.

⁷⁹ Damasio, 16.

produces *core self* – “a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts.”⁸⁰

The higher order of consciousness to be considered – and the most relevant for this thesis – is that of *extended consciousness*. *Extended consciousness* is a “complex kind of consciousness” with “many levels and grades” that “provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self – an identity and a person, you or me, no less – and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it.”⁸¹ Extended consciousness relies on core consciousness⁸² but extends beyond it through time.⁸³ As Damasio says, “Extended consciousness still hinges on the same core ‘you,’ but that ‘you’ is now connected to the lived past and anticipated future that are part of your autobiographical record. Rather than just accessing the fact that you have pain, you can also survey the facts...”⁸⁴ Unlike core consciousness, extended consciousness is a “complex biological phenomenon” with “several levels of organization” that develops with time.⁸⁵ It depends on conventional memory and working memory and is only present at its highest levels in humans. Lastly, it is enhanced by language.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Damasio, 16.

⁸¹ Damasio, 16.

⁸² Damasio, 219.

⁸³ Damasio, 196.

⁸⁴ Damasio, 196.

⁸⁵ Damasio, 16.

⁸⁶ Damasio, 16.

From extended consciousness comes an entity called *autobiographical self*. *Autobiographical self* is, in a nutshell, “our traditional notion of self.”⁸⁷ Specifically, it is “linked to the idea of identity and corresponds to a nontransient collection of unique facts and ways of being which characterize a person.”⁸⁸ These facts are gathered by the core consciousness when it is engaged “the most invariant characteristics of an organism’s life.”⁸⁹ These characteristics are systematically organized and stored into *autobiographical memory*, where they can be accessed by the extended consciousness.⁹⁰ Although both core and extended consciousness seem to have a role in forming autobiographical self, the interaction of autobiographical self with an object within the working memory is also key to formation of extended consciousness from events known by the core consciousness.⁹¹

Although Damasio rarely uses the word “person” throughout his work, he does make several significant points about the concept of person. First, person is essentially made synonymous with autobiographical self.⁹² This is evident in the following passage of *The Feeling of What Happens*: “Our traditional notion of self, however, is linked to the idea of identity and corresponds to a nontransient collection of unique facts and ways of being which characterize a person. My term for that entity is the *autobiographical*

⁸⁷ Damasio, 17.

⁸⁸ Damasio, 17.

⁸⁹ Damasio, 17.

⁹⁰ Damasio, 17.

⁹¹ Damasio, 222.

⁹² Damasio, 17.

self.”⁹³ Damasio connects autobiographical self not only to the formation of “an identity and a person”⁹⁴ but also to the “unique dignity of a human being.”⁹⁵ Thus, human dignity is indirectly tied via *autobiographical self* to the person. Next, Damasio makes the claim that “autobiographical selves occur only in organisms endowed with a substantial memory capacity and reasoning ability, but do not require language.”⁹⁶ From this, he concludes that humans may develop an autobiographical self – the quality of personhood – by eighteen months of age.⁹⁷ Finally, in a subsection entitled “One Body One Person: The Roots of the Singularity of Self,” Damasio makes two significant claims about persons. First, he establishes as a “first principle” a “simple relationship:” “one person, one body; one mind, one body.”⁹⁸ Through this statement, he explicitly denies the possibility of persons without a body. Second, he directly links personhood to mind, almost defining personhood as mind in the way he defines personhood as autobiographical self. This is evident in the following passage:

Why should there not be bodiless persons in our midst, you know, ghosts, spirits, weightless and colorless creatures? Think of the space savings. But the simple fact is that such creatures do not exist now and nothing indicates that they ever did, and the sensible reason why not is that a *mind, that which defines a person*, requires a body, and that a body, a human body to be sure, naturally generates one mind.⁹⁹

⁹³ Damasio, 17.

⁹⁴ Damasio, 16–17.

⁹⁵ Damasio, 229.

⁹⁶ Damasio, 198.

⁹⁷ Damasio, 198.

⁹⁸ Damasio, 142.

⁹⁹ Damasio, 143 (emphasis mine).

Overall, Damasio makes the argument that a person is the autobiographical self, an entity derived from the extended consciousness, which comes from core consciousness, which comes from the nonconscious proto-self mechanisms that regulate the internal milieu.¹⁰⁰ The personhood of humans ties to their “unique dignity” and does not develop until humans develop an autobiographical self around 18 months of age.¹⁰¹

Touching a Nerve

Compared to *The Feeling of What Happens*, Patricia Churchland’s *Touching a Nerve* is quite philosophical in approach. However, it is similar in that it uses current scientific data to suggest a model for some of the underlying mechanisms of consciousness that may, according to Churchland, lead to the formation of self.

Like both Crick and Damasio, Churchland makes a significant (and similar) claim about personhood in the opening pages of her book. She says,

My brain and I are inseparable. I am who I am because my brain is what it is. Even so, I often think about my brain in terms different from those I use when thinking about myself. I think about my brain as *that* and about myself as *me*. I think about my brain as having neurons, but I think of me as having a memory. Still, I know that my memory is all about the neurons in my brain. Lately, I think about my brain in more intimate terms - as *me*.¹⁰²

Churchland’s thesis is, in essence, identical to Crick’s: I am my brain. I am nothing but a pack of neurons. It is, by definition, reductionist.

Churchland’s interest in neurophilosophy began in the mid-1970s. While working as a philosopher, she came to believe that it was impossible to understand the

¹⁰⁰ For a summary of the relationships between autobiographical self, core self, and proto-self, please see the figure in the appendix.

¹⁰¹ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 229, 198.

¹⁰² Churchland, *Touching a Nerve*, 11.

mind without understanding the brain, the source of mental processes. She and her husband, Paul (who is also a philosopher), became obsessed with studying the brain.¹⁰³ They became early leaders in a field known as “neurophilosophy,” a field that “works the interface between philosophy’s grand old questions about choice and learning and morality and the gathering wisdom about the nature of nervous systems.”¹⁰⁴

Churchland, like Crick, is adamantly against religious explanations of reality, including personhood. *Touching a Nerve* seeks to use neuroscience to challenge various religious notions, including body-soul dualism, the existence of heaven, religious establishment of morality, understandings of sex and gender, causes of aggression and war, and free will.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the book, Churchland argues that science tends to challenge established beliefs with its data and that, rather than modifying their beliefs to fit with “reality,” many religious believers cling to the “verities they wish were true.”¹⁰⁶ She suggests that a better approach to life than a religious one is to make “peace with reality and come to like it.”¹⁰⁷ Churchland’s methodology for seeking after the truth of reality is to study explanations of reality and determine which have the most “consilience” with the phenomena and facts of reality. In her view, religious explanations of reality do not have great consilience, while neuroscientific explanations do.¹⁰⁸ In regard to body-soul duality, for example, Churchland claims that neuroscience

¹⁰³ Churchland, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Churchland, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Churchland, 5–6.

¹⁰⁶ Churchland, 5–6, 13–16.

¹⁰⁷ Churchland, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Churchland, 51.

appears to have “the leg up on soul science.”¹⁰⁹ While Churchland admits that her consilience approach cannot definitively invalidate religious explanations of the world, she likens the situation to a Pascaline bet: “If you had to place a big-money bet, on which hypothesis would you put your money?”¹¹⁰

So, what is Churchland’s alternative to a dualist explanation of personhood, and what are some ways in which it might work? While Damasio hypothesizes that the central source of the me vs. not-me distinction stems from regulation of the internal milieu by the proto-self, Churchland suggests a different source, stemming from a phenomenon called “efference copy.” When someone’s head moves, for example, the body must be able to determine whether the body or an external object is actually moving. For this to occur, the signal in the motor cortex that triggered the head to move must also send a copy of that signal to other areas of the brain, such as the visual cortex, to indicate that part of the organism itself is moving. This copy is known as an efference copy. The generation of the efference copy prevents confusion.¹¹¹ Churchland suggests that this efference copy may be “an important source of data that the brain uses in generating the complex sense of *me* versus *not me*.”¹¹² Churchland uses the research of neuroscientist A.D. Craig to explain how this might work.

...just as the brain uses efference copy to distinguish *movement-out-there* versus *my-movement*, so there is a higher or more abstract level of brain function that, via efference-like loops, distinguishes between mental states that represent *changes-in-my-body* (the *bodily-me*) versus mental states that represent *changes-in-my-brain*, such as being aware that I am feeling angry (the *mental me*). My

¹⁰⁹ Churchland, 53.

¹¹⁰ Churchland, 53.

¹¹¹ Churchland, 42.

¹¹² Churchland, 42.

knowledge of the *bodily-me* concerns such things as knowing that I am running or vocalizing. My knowledge of the *mental-me* underwrites my knowing that the pain I feel is *my* pain, that the fear I feel is *my* fear. This allows me to have a grasp of what I know – for example, that I know the words to “Jingle Bells” – or to have a grasp of whether I am a generous person or a tightfisted person.¹¹³

So, according to Craig’s argument, consciousness develops as the organism’s brain abstractly differentiates between changes in body and changes in brain. The distinctive part that recognizes changes in the brain – the “mental-me” – allows for a certain type of self-awareness or self-consciousness that we know as simply “self.”

As useful as this explanation may be, it lacks detailed explanation of neurobiological mechanisms. What structures create the abstract “efference-like loops,” for example? It also speaks more to self-consciousness than consciousness, perhaps. To address how consciousness itself might work and how it ties to this efference copy model of self-consciousness, Churchland turns to other sources. The details of this scientific model will not be delved into here for the sake of space. Suffice it to say that Churchland, like Damasio, presents a compelling hypothesis for how the brain might produce consciousness and self-consciousness. Because the brain seems to be able to account entirely for the sense of self, then there is no need for mind, soul, or self outside of the brain. This affirms her confident reductionist view of the person – the self – as brain.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, one statement of Churchland’s ring true: “Certainly, these are still very early days in the science of the brain. Much, *much* more is sure to come.”¹¹⁴ While some of the above processes seem promising, their exactly mechanisms are still

¹¹³ Churchland, 211.

¹¹⁴ Churchland, 12.

hazy, and there may be different answers; Crick's, Damasio's, and Churchland's different research approaches and results indicates as much.

Nevertheless, for reductionists like Crick, Damasio, and Churchland, the exact mechanisms of consciousness and the development of a sense of self have little effect on their philosophy. They are, at heart, monists. They all share the belief that neuroscience points to identity of mind and brain, and that physical matter is all there is. If the brain and mind are the same, any sense of self that humans have must be a product of the brain, and, most importantly, *nothing more*. From a monistic viewpoint, there is no room for a concept of soul in the process. To call someone a person is nothing more than to say that the organism has a "presence in the mind," a "You," an "autobiographical self;" you are "nothing but a pack of neurons;" you are your brain.

CHAPTER FIVE

Critical Assessment in Light of Biblical Anthropology

Introduction

In Chapter 1, biblical anthropology was defined, and significant principles of a biblical anthropology were laid out. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, traditional theological, emergent, and reductionist perspectives on personhood, respectively, were considered. In this final chapter, these perspectives will be assessed for their compatibility with Scripture.

Review of Biblical Anthropology Principles

We will begin with a reminder of the definition of “biblical anthropology” and a summary of the biblical anthropology principles laid out in Chapter 1. Biblical anthropology is “the field that seeks to address what human beings are from a biblical perspective.”¹ As stated in Chapter 1, the Bible does not contain a clear definition of “what human beings are.” It does, however, contain scattered truths about human personhood that can serve as guidelines for what a proper perspective on personhood must entail. In Chapter 1, some (though likely not all) of these truths according to Scripture were identified. This chapter will take these identified principles and compare the three perspectives on personhood to them. For easy reference, the twelve biblical anthropology principles are as follows:

¹ Schultz, “Person, Personhood.”

1. Humanity was made by God in God's image and likeness.
2. Humanity was created with a purpose. Our creation was for God's glory, and we further glorify God through worship and obedience. We are also created to rule over other creatures through stewardship and to love God and others.
3. The creation of humanity was *very* good.
4. Humans were created to be in relationship with God.
5. Humans were created to be in relationship with one another.
6. Humans are bodies in both earthly life and eternal life.
7. Humans are “spirit” and/or “soul.” These words are found throughout Scripture, and their meaning is hotly contested.
8. Although the creation of humanity was “very good,” it is also true that humanity is now fallen, and the world is subject to sin.
9. Humanity has moral accountability.
10. In general, humans have a capacity for reason to an extent that other animals do not.
11. Humans have a limited lifespan in part due to sin and in part as an act of grace from God.
12. Humans are everlasting, both in terms of body and spirit, even though the body will go through an interruption physically through death.

Though there may be others, these twelve principles should serve as a solid basis for determining in what ways different perspectives on personhood align with Scripture and in what ways these perspectives fall short.

Finally, note that, by definition, anthropology studies humans. Thus, the discussion of personhood is primarily limited to *human* personhood in this thesis, though the challenge of the use of *person* in a divine context will be discussed in this chapter as well (as it was in Chapter 2).

Biblical Anthropology and Approaches to Personhood: Analysis

In the following sections, we will assess each perspective on personhood presented in Chapters 2-4 with respect to the list of principles of biblical anthropology established above (and more thoroughly in Chapter 1). While the assessment will be fairly systematic, different points will be given differing amounts of attention for each perspective on personhood, and certain points will be highlighted later in the chapter for more thorough discussion.

Each perspective will be organized according to three categories: “points of agreement,” “neutral points,” and “possible points of contention.” “Points of agreement” are points that are clearly affirmed by or in alignment with a particular perspective. “Neutral points” are ones that could be compatible with a perspective but are not directly addressed by it, often because the point is somewhat irrelevant to the conversation from that perspective. “Possible points of contention” are those that seem to be in conflict between the perspective and the claim by Scripture. These are difficult to define because Christians from each perspective vary in their beliefs and may find ways to argue around the points of contention. Thus, they are labeled as “possible” points of contention. Ways to address the conflicts, if they exist, will be considered later in the chapter. As such, one must be careful not to conclude that points of contention *immediately* invalidate a perspective on personhood.

Some of the claims of the perspectives on personhood do not fit cleanly with the biblical anthropology principles. They might agree with part of a biblical anthropology principle and not the whole, for example. When this occurs, a principle may be found in more than one of the “agreement/neutral/contention” categories, with a brief explanation of why it has been split between multiple categories.

Note also that these perspectives are being categorized by the views of a *Christian* within each category. This is critical. Despite the fact that reductionism is used often by atheists to argue against Christianity, as evidenced by the writings of Crick and Churchland (see Chapter 4), there are Christian reductionists when it comes to human personhood. These Christian reductionists often hold to a form of reductionism that we will call “human reductionism.” This is basically the belief that *human persons* consist of only physical matter and is not necessarily the same as a form of holistic reductionism, a belief that all that exists is physical matter. Though most human reductionists are holistic reductionists, there are some that fall into the former category only. This is particularly significant for Christian reductionism because it allows for the existence of a spiritual (as opposed to physical) God and spiritual realm; humans just do not fall directly into it. Thus, human reductionism *in itself* is not necessarily anti-Christian. In general, it should be noted that each perspective will be treated with as much charity as possible, bearing in mind that there are devout Christians whose beliefs about personhood align with each of the three perspectives.

Traditional Theological Perspective

We will begin with an analysis of the traditional theological perspective on personhood, as primarily presented by Boethius, Richard of Saint-Victor, and St. Thomas

Aquinas. In this particular case, alignment of the theological perspective with the biblical anthropology principles was determined by the alignment of traditional theology in general with the principles. This is because several principles in the list are principles that are explicitly advocated by traditional theology but that were not mentioned in Chapter 2. An example of this might be principle 12, which claims that “Humans are everlasting, both in terms of body and spirit, even though the body will go through an interruption physically through death.” With this in mind, the points of agreement, neutral points, and possible points of contention for the theological perspective can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Principles Analysis of Traditional Theological Perspective

Points of Agreement	Neutral Points	Possible Points of Contention
Points 1-14	None	Point 1

Overall, the theological perspective has twelve points of agreement, no neutral points, and one possible point of contention. The theological perspective seems to be compatible with a scriptural understanding of the human person. The only possible point of contention is a debatable overinterpretation of the meaning of “made in God’s image” to imply that human personhood is centrally defined by the rational nature. This concern will be further analyzed later in the chapter.

Emergent Perspective

Next, we will analyze the emergent perspective on personhood, as presented by Christian Smith. The points of agreement, neutral points, and possible points of contention for the emergent perspective can be summarized as follows:

Table 2: Principles Analysis of Emergent Perspective

Points of Agreement	Neutral Points	Possible Points of Contention
Points 2, 5-10	Points 1-4, 6, 8, 11-14	None

Overall, the emergent perspective has seven points of agreement, ten neutral points, and no possible points of contention. This bodes well for the emergent perspective in regard to its compatibility with Scripture. There are several principles that were split between the points of agreement and neutral points because the claims of Smith’s emergent perspective did not fully align with the principles.

First is the claim of principle 2 that “mankind was created with a purpose.” Smith’s perspective clearly agrees with this principle, and further would agree with the parts of the principle that claim that “we are...created to rule over other creatures through stewardship and to love...others.” This similarity is evidenced in Smith’s definition of personhood, which claims that the purpose of a human person is “to develop and sustain his or her incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world.”² However, Smith’s perspective attempts to be areligious, so it does not make any claims along the line of “our creation was for God’s glory, and we further glorify God through worship and obedience.” It also overlooks the claim that we are created to love God. Thus, it does not perfectly match principle 2.

The next point of overlap is with principle 6, which claims that “humans are bodies in both earthly life and eternal life.” While Smith obviously agrees that humans are bodies in earthly life, Smith makes no acknowledgement of an eternal life, and thus is neutral on this subject.

² Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 61.

The final point of overlap is with principle 8: “Although the creation of humanity was good, humanity has fallen, and the world is subject to sin.” Smith does actually acknowledge that the world is subject to brokenness. On pp. 75-78 of *What is a Person?*, Smith draws out the point that there is much suffering and brokenness in this world. It is easy to argue that such a perspective is similar to the Christian notion of sin; I have deemed it close enough to list as a point of agreement. However, Smith’s areligious perspective makes no claim that humanity was ever good and underwent a fall, nor does it explicitly use the word “sin” to describe the fallen state. Thus, it seems fair to put this principle as a neutral point as well.

Reductionist Perspective

Finally, we will analyze the reductionist perspective on personhood, primarily as presented by Crick, Damasio, and Churchland. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, a charitable approach will be taken to this analysis. Thus, even though Crick and Churchland especially might dispute the truth of some of the biblical anthropology principles, many of these principles would be acceptable to a Christian reductionist and will be categorized as such (mostly as neutral points). The points of agreement, neutral points, and possible points of contention for the emergent perspective can be summarized as follows:

Table 3: Principles Analysis of Reductionist Perspective

Points of Agreement	Neutral Points	Possible Points of Contention
Point 10	Points 1-6, 8, 9, 11-13	Points 7, 14

Overall, the emergent perspective has one point of agreement, twelve neutral points, and one possible point of contention. There are no points of overlap between the twelve points; all fit clearly into one of the three categories.

The one point of agreement is as follows: “In general, humans have a capacity for reason to an extent that other animals do not.” This seems somehow fitting. The respect for the human capacity for reason as above that of animals, in general, seems to be a common trend among all three studied perspectives on personhood. As described later, this may also be a danger of all three perspectives.

Both possible points of contention hinge on the problem of the spiritual realm. Reductionists, by definition, reject the possibility of a human spiritual existence along the lines of a “spirit” or a “soul” through their claim that human persons are merely composed of physical matter. This directly contradicts principle 7, “humans are ‘spirit’ and/or ‘soul.’” It is also incompatible with the view of principle 14 that humans have an everlasting spirit, though it may allow for the everlasting existence of the body after a temporary physical disruption by death.³

On Consilience

The theological viewpoint, not surprisingly, seems to hold up best under the above assessment. It aligns with the greatest number of claims from Scripture. This is followed in order by the emergent and then the reductionist perspectives. Since the theological viewpoint aligns with the greatest number of points, it might at first appear

³ If it seems unlikely that a Christian reductionist could believe in everlasting life, consider the work *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* by Dr. Kevin J. Corcoran of Calvin College. Corcoran does not believe in the human soul but adamantly supports the notion of eternal life and bodily resurrection.

that it would be just to simply conclude that it is the best perspective on personhood. This conclusion might be supported by the observation that the various traditional theological positions (those of Boethius, Richard of Saint-Victor, and St. Thomas Aquinas) all clearly line up with the scriptural principles. For the emergent and reductionist perspectives, it is not always clear whether a particular perspective lines up with a biblical principle. A perspective may align with a biblical anthropology principle in part but remain neutral or even diverge in part. This is particularly notable in the above assessment of the emergent perspective. Furthermore, there is not enough homogeneity within the emergent and reductionist perspectives that it can be concluded that “Christians believing perspective X believe this, and therefore perspective X is/is not compatible with this part of Scripture.” This overall diversity is evidenced by the diversity of views among the different key authors on each perspective considered in the last few chapters. There is no one perspective X (e.g. one perspective of “emergent personhood”). Given the clear alignment of the traditional theological perspective with Scripture and the imprecise alignments of the emergent and reductionist perspectives, is it fair to conclude that the traditional theological perspective is simply the best perspective on personhood?

It would appear that this is not a fair conclusion to make based merely on the assessment above. This is true for a couple of reasons. First, all three perspectives on personhood do have concerns, and it is not necessarily the case that any of them is true. The three chosen perspectives were meant to illustrate common perspectives on personhood and to range the spectrum from theological roots to scientific ones. Thus, there may be better perspectives on personhood that were not considered in this project.

Second, and more significantly, the case will soon be made that the best perspective on personhood is the one that aligns best with the body of human knowledge as a whole while prioritizing Scripture. Thus, at best what can be concluded from this project so far is how the three perspectives rank in regard to alignment with Scripture.

Overall, it can be said that deciding which perspective is best often cannot be done merely by deriving principles from Scripture, considering which perspective aligns best with these scriptural principles, and immediately concluding that this perspective is true. So, if this determination from Scripture has not been accomplished, what was the point of this project? What *has* been accomplished?

This project has argued from the start that scriptural compatibility should always be the first step in determining whether a particular perspective, such as those on the metaphysics of personhood, is possible to hold as an orthodox Christian. This project has demonstrated throughout that this initial step is important but challenging and nuanced. It will inevitably be impacted by personal bias, theological tradition, and interpretation of Scripture. Furthermore, Scripture remains frustratingly unclear on some points. The metaphysics of personhood is one of those. Still, Christians have to try to navigate the possible perspectives on different topics and consider which they might believe. Every Christian has beliefs on these important questions. These beliefs will either be formed reflectively through careful consideration or haphazardly through cultural influences. The latter often results in cognitive dissonance.⁴

⁴ I have discovered this problem through my own personal processing of the question of personhood while researching and writing this project. For example, at the beginning of the project, I believed resolutely that humans had body and soul, and I viewed the soul as basically a spiritual replica of the body. As I researched Scripture and considered reductionist claims against the soul, I found myself questioning its nature and even its existence. It seemed that my view of the soul, heavily influenced by Western philosophy, was not argued by Scripture. This realization brought into question many of the theological beliefs I held as authoritative for years and encouraged me to consider their compatibility with

So, once one has considered what Scripture has to say on a topic, how does one keep exploring? What other variables should be considered in determining whether a perspective is true? One important notion is that of *consilience*. Ironically, I was introduced to this notion by the atheist reductionist Patricia Churchland. According to Churchland, a belief is *consilient* if it “fit[s] with the rest of the body of knowledge.”⁵ From her perspective, “the greater the consilience, the greater the coherence and integration of phenomena and facts.”⁶ I wish to make the argument that consilience fits well with the Christian notion of an absolute reality established by God. Insofar as there is one absolute reality established by the same God that inspired Scripture, it is to be expected that the specific revelation of Scripture and the general revelation of creation should both point to the same Truth. Thus, both should be considered when discerning whether a perspective on a challenging topic (like personhood) is likely to be true. One goal of human persons is to apprehend the absolute reality through various approaches. These approaches may include theology, science, philosophy, the arts, and prayer. The better the conclusions of an approach align with reality – or, at least, our best attempt to understand reality – the more likely they are to be true. Consilience is not foolproof. It faces the limitations of the knowledge of the time, the disunity of that knowledge, and the

Scripture. Though this process of reconsideration is just beginning, it has reaffirmed some of my beliefs and challenged others. To my pleasant surprise, I came to conclude, based on my interpretation of thoroughly examined Scripture, that Scripture affirms my belief in the existence of the soul. I feel much less certain, however, that there is a scriptural answer for exactly what the soul is, and thus I remain hesitant to resolutely support one perspective or another on this. Regardless of this new uncertainty, I feel more secure in what I do know and more at peace with what I do not. The resolution of earlier cognitive dissonance and the sense that my beliefs are becoming my own are blessings that have come from careful consideration.

⁵ Churchland, *Touching a Nerve*, 51.

⁶ Churchland, 51.

possibility of confirmation bias stemming from the reality that what we know is what we think to be true. Yet, it would seem that it may be the best approach available for Christians who are trying to understand their world through the guidance given by the specific revelation of Scripture and the general revelation of the world.

For Christians, the first step toward determining whether a perspective is true is determining whether it is consistent with Scripture through careful analysis. This is because Christians generally believe Scripture to be the infallible Word of God, Truth itself. Once consistency with Scripture has been considered, consistency with other sources should be considered. Though Scripture holds greater weight in the consideration, it is not the only matter worth consideration. This is particularly important because, as mentioned before, although Scripture is infallible, our interpretations of it are very much fallible. If one perspective has great consistency with other approaches to knowledge but does not *seem* to have consistency with Scripture, we should reconsider our *interpretation* of Scripture to determine whether it may be able to be modified without compromising Truth. As Churchland clarifies, "...consistency is not a *guarantee* that the explanation is right, because you can have a totally wrong theory whose bits and pieces happen to cohere." This is important. Outside of direct revelation from God (such as through explicit claims of Scripture), we cannot know with certainty that even our most consistent beliefs are true. We humans are fallible, and our knowledge is fallible. We can merely do our best to fit together the pieces of understanding that we have. The process of understanding is far more an art than a science.

Concerns with Perspectives on Personhood

Bearing in mind considerations of consilience with Scripture and consilience with other modes of knowledge, how might we assess the concerns with the three perspectives on personhood? As stated before, the theological model seems most consilient with Scripture, the emergent and reductionist perspectives increasingly less so. Nevertheless, all three viewpoints have concerns. To illustrate this point, some of these concerns – both with Scripture and other forms of knowledge – will be pointed out for each perspective in this section.

Concerns with the Traditional Theological Perspective

Overall, the traditional theological perspective seems highly consilient with Scripture. There is, however, one point of concern: a possible overinterpretation of the meaning of Genesis 1:27, which reads that “...God made mankind in his own image.”⁷ The concept of being made in God’s image (often dubbed “*imago dei*”) is one that tends to be interpreted by Christians as carrying significance when defining personhood and human dignity. It would seem that Boethius, like many others, may have interpreted this Scripture to mean that humans have a “rational nature.” This is not surprising because Boethius was heavily influenced by classic Western philosophers, including Aristotle,⁸ who essentially believed man was a “rational animal.”⁹ However, the significance of being made in the “image of God” has long been up for dispute. Common interpretations

⁷ Gn. 1:27 New International Version, 2011 Edition

⁸ Marenbon, “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius.”

⁹ Kristin Andrews, “Animal Cognition,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/cognition-animal/>.

include reflecting God through the ability to reason, a sense of morality, a desire and capacity to create, free will, or self-consciousness.¹⁰ As argued in Chapter 1, the meaning of *imago dei* is not made clear by context. Although there are good arguments to be made that humans reflect God in all the above ways, it does not seem that any one interpretation can be conclusively supported, in context, by this verse of Scripture. Furthermore, the rationality of man does not seem to be emphasized throughout Scripture, though there are scattered verses about it.¹¹ Rationality *does* seem to distinguish humans from animals, at least according to 2 Peter 2:12. That being said, rationality may not be essential to personhood. After all, it seems fair to ask why rationality should be deemed the defining characteristic of personhood, as it is by Boethius. Why not language, stewardship over the earth, relationships, or free will? There is a danger to using single characteristics to make claims about what a person is or is not, as is problematic in Smith's model as well.

The danger of defining personhood as so explicitly connected to rationality can be further highlighted by considering the consilience of such a belief with other forms of knowledge. One counter to the defining of persons as "individual substances of a rational nature" is that it seems to diminish the personhood of those with profound intellectual disabilities. This problem (henceforth dubbed "the disability argument") is explored in depth by theologian Hans Reinders in *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*.¹² Reinders argues that definitions of

¹⁰ Hensley, "Made in His Image and Likeness."

¹¹ Consider, for example, 1 Peter 3:15, Isaiah 1:18-19, Isaiah 43:26, Acts 17:1-3, and 2 Peter 2:12.

¹² Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*, first edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2008).

personhood that rely on the “human faculties” – including language, reason, will, and sense of self – inevitably lead to the conclusion that those with profound intellectual disabilities are either “subhuman” at worst or “subnormal” at best.¹³ According to Reinders, the Church’s interpretation of *imago dei* as the notion that “human beings are closer to God than any other living creature because of their capacity for reason and will” has played a major role in the definition of personhood in terms of human faculties.¹⁴ Reinders counters this tendency with a notion of personhood that relies on relationship, particularly the passing on to others of the gift of friendship given to humans unconditionally by God, from his effort and not our own. This gift of friendship is open to all, regardless of human faculties, and thus does not run the risk of denying or diminishing anyone’s personhood, while still framing personhood in a theologically meaningful way.¹⁵

Yet another potential problem with defining personhood in accord with rationality is the potential rationality of creatures that have not classically been considered to be persons. Of significant concern is the rationality of non-human animals and the potential rationality of artificial intelligence in the future. While animals are generally agreed to not have the same degree of reason as humans do because of a less fully developed cerebral cortex, “animal cognition” is a field of study in its own right,¹⁶ and many animals

¹³ Reinders, 1–2.

¹⁴ Reinders, 2.

¹⁵ Despite the compelling nature of Reinders’ argument, it too has its own concerns, including its failure to define personhood in terms applicable to God. These concerns will not be otherwise evaluated here, as the source is being used merely to illustrate the concerns of using rationality and other human faculties to define personhood.

¹⁶ Andrews, “Animal Cognition.”

have been found to have capacities for reason far beyond what the ancients ever thought.¹⁷ It is argued by some that artificial intelligence, on the other hand, may eventually have the capacity to match or outstrip human reason and to “think” on their own via machine learning methods.¹⁸ Might they come to be recognized as “individual substances of a rational nature?” While this does not necessarily threaten human personhood, it does challenge the notion that humans are set apart from all other forms of physical life, at least if being made in the image of God simply means that one is an “individual substance of a rational nature.”

One last argument against the definition of persons as “individual substances of a rational nature” is that the emphasis on rationality may be excessively influenced by Western values and that it has been used as a justification for horrendous evils in the past (and likely still is today). The argument could go something like this: Early Western philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, valued rationality highly. Plato placed rationality as the controlling element of the non-rational elements that, when properly ordered, could bring about happiness.¹⁹ Aristotle essentially defined man as a “rational animal.”²⁰ Given the influence of ancient Greek philosophy on early Christians and the ancient Church, it should not be surprising that Boethius – himself an Aristotle translator

¹⁷ Lori Marino and Christina M Colvin, “Thinking Pigs: A Comparative Review of Cognition, Emotion, and Personality in *Sus Domesticus*,” *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* 28 (2015): 23.

¹⁸ David L. Anderson, “Artificial Intelligence: Can a Machine Think?,” Consortium on Cognitive Science Instruction, 2006, http://www.mind.ilstu.edu/curriculum/ai_can_a_machine_think/ai_machine_think_1.php.

¹⁹ C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato on Rationality and Happiness* (Oxford University Press, 2008), <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199226399.001.0001/acprof-9780199226399-chapter-13>.

²⁰ Andrews, “Animal Cognition.”

and scholar²¹ – would readily conclude that persons are “individual substances of a rational nature.” The appeal of rationality as a central aspect of personhood has continued to permeate prominent groups of theologians – particularly those guiding the Catholic Church – for centuries. This tendency carried through the likes of Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, Aquinas, and Anselm of Canterbury, to name a few.²² It is also readily evident across many church denominations today. Reason took on even greater worth with the coming of the Renaissance, a rebirth of empirical reason.²³ Later, for moral philosopher Immanuel Kant, reason was taken to be universal among humans and to be the source of moral law, a law discernable by all humans because of their rationality.²⁴ Yet all these early philosophers had something in common: they were Western in influence and were men. The problem with this lies in that reason is sometimes used as weapon against non-Westerners and non-men. As colonization spread and both travel and anthropology grew, it was widely assumed that those of foreign race had diminished rationality (especially those deemed “uncivilized”).²⁵ Similarly, women were long assumed since antiquity to have limited capacity for reason compared to men.²⁶ Both

²¹ Marenbon, “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius.”

²² Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 2–3; Boethius, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, 85; Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity*, 104–5.

²³ “The Dark Ages, Medieval Scholasticism and the Rediscovery of Aristotle,” Ayn Rand Institute Campus, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://campus.aynrand.org/campus/globals/transcripts/the-dark-ages-medieval-scholasticism-and-the-rediscovery-of-aristotle>.

²⁴ Tim Holt, “Kantian Ethics: The Role of Reason,” *Moral Philosophy*, 2009, <https://moralphilosophy.info/normative-ethics/deontology/kantian-ethics/the-role-of-reason/>.

²⁵ Bernard Boxill, “Kantian Racism and Kantian Teleology,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, February 23, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190236953.013.46>.

²⁶ Elizabeth D. Harvey and Kathleen Okruhlik, *Women and Reason* (University of Michigan Press, 1992); Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (University of California Press, 2004), sec. 3.

people of color and women have, at times, been deemed as less than human or less than persons because of this perceived lack of reason. This reality is well exemplified by Kant's moral philosophy. Kant appears to judge that women act according to inclinations and not from rational moral principles and thus are morally deficient. Since Kant ties moral deficiency to deficiency of autonomy, and Kant grounds human dignity in autonomy, women are no longer persons, and instead are like animals.²⁷ Kant has similar views on non-white ethnic groups; he views them as mentally and morally deficient, and thus deficient in autonomy, dignity, and personhood.²⁸ The consequences of such undermining of personhood are evident in the historical oppression of women and non-whites, perhaps most notoriously through chattel slavery. While the abuse of reason is not enough to reject it as central to the definition of personhood, it does provide a cautionary tale. The history of the value of reason suggests that its emphasis is a product of Western philosophy and culture as much as Scripture. Perhaps a definition that better accounts for the diversity of global values is in order.

Given all these criticisms rooted in Scripture and outside knowledge, is it possible to still hold to the definition of persons as "individual substances of a rational nature?" Yes, and many people do. What, then, might be counterarguments to the above concerns? Without getting carried away into detail, there are several. First, in regard to the "disability argument," one could argue that the Catholic stance does already account adequately for disability. In the Catholic view, reason and will do not identify individual

²⁷ Mari Mikkola, "Kant On Moral Agency and Women's Nature," *Kantian Review* 16, no. 01 (March 2011): 90–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415410000014>.

²⁸ Boxill, "Kantian Racism and Kantian Teleology."

humans but are qualities characteristic of humanity as a whole. Those with disability cannot be dismissed as non-persons because they still share in humanity by their human descent.²⁹ Individuals with disability are definitionally subnormal but not subhuman. This does not diminish the fact that they are made in the image of God, but it does recognize that disability is an imperfection and not something desirable. It would seem that Reinders would be unreconcilably opposed to this view because he is opposed to any definition of personhood that relies on human faculties. In his view, reliance on human faculties leads to the conclusion that those with limitations on those faculties are “subhuman” or “subnormal.” Even subnormality, as suggested by the Catholic stance, is not acceptable to Reinders because he interprets it to suggest that “subnormal” humans are not “human beings properly speaking.”³⁰ It is as if they are simply *de facto* humans but lack the capacity to have a meaningful human experience that satisfies the natural aims of human life. Still, despite Reinders’ protests, the Catholic view does account for those with any form of disability as persons, and it could be argued that “subnormal” is not meant to diminish the value of a disabled human life but to acknowledge disability as the presence of physical brokenness in the world that will be healed with the world’s redemption. Overall, while the Catholic stance on the personhood of those with profound disability will not be satisfying to those who resist a conception of disability as an undesirable imperfection, it does genuinely seek to protect as persons those with disability and to not diminish their value as beings made in the image of God.

²⁹ Reinders, 12.

³⁰ Reinders, 2.

There are also counters to concerns about the rationality of other creatures implying that they are persons via the definition of “individual substance of a rational nature.” For example, one could argue that the rationality of other animals is not so highly developed as that of the typical human person, or that rationality is not essential to the nature of other animals. Regarding artificial intelligence (AI), it could be argued that AI is at least an indirect product of human rationality, and perhaps thus not of a “rational nature” in its own right. Alternatively, one might allow room for personhood of animals or, more likely, the personhood of AI; the latter is currently a subject of popular debate.³¹

Finally, regarding the use of rationality to perpetrate much evil in the world, it could be argued that the reality that a principle has been used in a malicious way does not mean that the principle itself is malicious or false. A failure to yield it properly is the fault of the doer, not necessarily a flaw in the philosophy. The history of Christianity and the evils it has been used to justify points to this.³²

Concerns with the Emergent Perspective

Surprisingly enough, the emergent perspective does not have any definite concerns with Scripture. Rather, whether one’s emergent views are problematic depends on one’s particular emergent theology. This being said, there are a few concerns that may be more likely to become an issue with the emergent perspective – especially Smith’s version – than with the theological one. Let us consider these.

³¹ Anderson, “Artificial Intelligence: Can a Machine Think?”; Jonathan Tran, “The Problem Artificial Intelligence Poses for Humans,” *The Other Journal*, June 6, 2018, <https://theotherjournal.com/2018/06/06/the-problem-artificial-intelligence-poses-for-humans/>.

³² Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity*.

The first potential place of conflict relates to humanity's purpose. Christian Smith's emergent perspective does agree with the claim of principle 2 that humanity was created with a purpose. Smith would say that this purpose is "to develop and sustain his or her incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world."³³ The problem with this definition of humanity's purpose is that it neglects the purposes of glorifying God through mere existence and glorifying God through worship and obedience. It possibly also neglects relationship with God, though Smith's purpose could be stretched to place God in the "others" category. It is possible to argue that these additional purposes could be added to Smith's definition of the purpose of mankind. However, they still would not play the essential role to man's purpose that they play in the strictly theological anthropology. This is illustrative of the challenges faced by all perspectives on personhood that are not inherently theological: their ties to Scripture can come to seem almost incidental, and scriptural additions may not seem to have the obvious authority found behind a system that begins with theology and extends to other fields of knowledge.

Next, Smith's understanding of the soul is somewhat problematic. Emergence – at least Smith's – seems to admit to the existence of an entity outside of the brain (but stemming from natural brain processes) that Smith calls the "soul." Smith himself seems, in fact, to hold to a sort of dualism. However, his dualism is clearly complex and admittedly vague. In an extended footnote on p. 22 of *What is a Person?*, Smith briefly describes his understanding of body and soul. According to Smith, the soul need not have connections to religion or immortality, but rather is acceptable even with a secular

³³ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 61.

understanding of the world. Smith claims that he does not have a definitive understanding of the soul and does not intend to argue for one. Regardless, he goes on to say that he holds a “realist” approach to the soul that suggests that it has a “single, definite nature in continuity across all stages of life...” and is not just a “higher-end aspect of human experience that comes into being developmentally...”³⁴ He holds that the soul is something along the lines of a “real and vital principle of life...that endows each particular life with organization and integrated unity, continuity, identity, and direction, thereby providing specificity, integration, and developmental direction to each particular being.”³⁵ The soul is ontologically prior to the body, does not emerge from the operation of parts like the brain over time, and is not something that humans *have* but rather something that they *are*.³⁶ However, Smith clarifies that soul and body are inseparably intertwined. In fact, he makes the statement that human persons “...are always unified beings of existent duality...all the time both material body and immaterial ‘soul’ existent in singular unity.”³⁷ While Smith cites the ontology of Aristotle, Boethius, and Aquinas for this claim,³⁸ it would seem that he may actually extend beyond the claims of Boethius and Aquinas to hold, like Aristotle, that body and soul cannot ever be separated. This presents the Christian emergence theorist with a challenge in explaining the metaphysics of the temporary separation of body and soul after death. This challenge does not necessarily invalidate the emergent perspective. Even theological models are

³⁴ Smith, 22, footnote 30.

³⁵ Smith, 22.

³⁶ Smith, 22.

³⁷ Smith, 63.

³⁸ Smith, 63–64.

limited in how to explain the metaphysics of death and resurrection because there is much that humans do not know about the afterlife. But it does seem fair to conclude that an emergent view that holds the body and soul to be inseparably intertwined will find the metaphysics of resurrection much more challenging than a theological view that allows for temporary separation of body and soul between death and resurrection. Emergence seems primarily concerned with the relationship between body and soul in this life, relegating specifics of the afterlife to what is, by definition, unknowable by science. In this step, it serves well to not overstep its bounds, as reductionism is more prone to do. Nevertheless, given that an emergent perspective on personhood may come to have theological implications for a Christian believer, Christians believing in emergence may have to wrestle with this issue more in the future.

The emergent perspective on personhood is challenged by a couple of other perspectives outside of Scripture. First, Smith's version of emergent personhood runs up against the same "disability argument" that the theological perspective does. This is evident in a particularly concerning way in *What is a Person?* As with theological personhood, Smith defines characteristics – human faculties – that are central to personhood that seem to be inherently tied to brain functioning and rationality. Smith's emphasis on these higher characteristics could diminish or dispose of the personhood of those with the most profound mental disabilities. Smith is aware of this concern, but he seems to consider it to be a lesser concern; he is primarily interested in "normal" human functioning. In a lengthy footnote on disability, Smith writes that his definition of personhood is mostly concerned with "normal" persons, which he defines as "persons who are not seriously damaged physically and mentally and have not seriously

deteriorated in their functional capacities.”³⁹ While Smith expressly wishes to avoid stigmatization of nonnormal persons and exclusion from the community and rights of personhood, he still believes that the distinction between normal and nonnormal is essential. He explains this as follows:

To lump every case of genetically human being into the category human or person without possessing ideas distinguishing the normal and nonnormal destroys crucial analytical categories and comparisons and ultimately collapses into mere nonevaluative descriptions of what is, as if every case were the same with no distinctions to be made between them. . . . No reasonable reader actually believes that every living, genetically human being is normal. If that were so, then words like *damaged*, *malformed*, *pathological*, and *deranged* would be meaningless and useless when applied to human bodies or persons.⁴⁰

From this quote, it becomes clear that Smith wants a definition of personhood that allows for categorical evaluation and thus that is sociologically useful. Smith seems adamant that it is important to not lump humans into one category without acknowledging the diversity that allows for comparison and analysis. This begs several questions. Why is it important to compare people based on a scale of normalcy? What does it mean to be normal? Is it better to be normal than to not? Might Smith’s intentional concern to distinguish between those who are normal and those who are not entail a value judgment? As mentioned in the criticism of the theological perspective, it is possible to designate individuals as “subnormal” without diminishing their personhood. However, Smith’s definition of personhood ties so closely to human faculties of reason and will that it seems impossible not to consider those with disability (Smith’s “damaged, malformed, pathological, and deranged”) as having diminished personhood. After all, a serious

³⁹ Smith, 45.

⁴⁰ Smith, 45.

intellectual disability would remove the higher functions of the brain from which Smith's qualities of a person arguably emerge. And, more significantly, while the traditional theological view has a hedge against this concern through arguments about human descent and the affirmation that all humans are made in the image of God, there is no such defense within Smith's emergent view. Thus, it appears that the existence of humans with diminished personhood within Smith's definition may be of justifiably serious concern for Christians.⁴¹

Another area of concern for the emergent perspective of personhood is its failure to account for divine and angelic personhood. While the traditional theological perspective on personhood gives focused attention to creating a definition of personhood that accounts for human, divine, and angelic persons, divine and angelic persons are irrelevant in Smith's model. In fact, Smith's model arguably excludes non-physical persons by its stipulation that human persons are body and soul.⁴² More significantly, the qualities highlighted in Smith's definition of personhood are so anthropocentric that it becomes difficult to see how the term "person" could be applied to God or angels. Thus, at best person could be applied to God, angels, and humans in an equivocal way. One way to surmount this concern might be to say that Smith is only concerned with duality for human persons and that divine and angelic persons follow a different metaphysics entirely. This, however, would sever the tie between the different types of persons in a significant way and bring up many new questions in itself.

⁴¹For a better understanding of why this should be of concern to Christians, refer to *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* by Hans Reinders.

⁴² Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 63.

One last challenge to the emergent perspective might come from the realm of reductionism. The likes of Crick might challenge Smith's notion that there is a soul or even a *real* emergent reality beyond the brain. Crick himself is not opposed to emergence; he approves of the sort of "scientific emergence" that acknowledges that, "While the whole may not be the simple sum of the separate parts, its behavior can, at least in principle, be understood from the nature and behavior of its parts plus the knowledge of how all these parts interact."⁴³ However, Smith's emergence seems to transcend the realm of "scientific emergence" to Crick's so-called "mystical emergence."⁴⁴ And, Smith himself criticizes Crick's definition of persons as "nothing but a pack of neurons."⁴⁵ Thus, it seems fair to say that there is conflict within the body of knowledge between some forms of emergence and reductionism. It remains unclear at this point which, if either, will be deemed more credible in the long term, and thus which, if either, is a more viable option for defining personhood.

Concerns with the Reductionist Perspective

The reductionist perspective is challenged on a few points by Scripture. First, the claim of human reductionism that humans lack a spiritual nature seems to be at odds with passages of Scripture that suggest otherwise. As discussed in Chapter 1 in the section on principle 7, the metaphysics of soul, spirit, and body in Scripture is quite complicated and subject to interpretation. Nevertheless, a few verses in the New Testament pose particular challenge to those who deny the existence of a spirit or a soul. One such verse

⁴³ Crick, *Astonishing Hypothesis*, 11.

⁴⁴ Crick, 11.

⁴⁵ Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 37.

is Matthew 10:28, which reads, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁴⁶

This verse makes a clear distinction between body and soul. Another challenge is the notion that the human spirit interacts with the Holy Spirit. This is affirmed by Romans 8:16, which reads, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”⁴⁷ Given that it is a central tenant of Christian faith that the Holy Spirit exists, it seems likely and fitting that humans could have a spirit that could interact metaphysically with the Holy Spirit, as claimed by Scripture. A similarly relevant verse is Mark 14:38, which reads, “...The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”⁴⁸ This draws a distinction between spirit and body. A Christian reductionist must have a way to theologically justify the elimination of the soul and/or spirit in their worldview for their perspective to be in consilience with Scripture.

Another challenge with Scripture is the notion of eternal life. Whereas Smith’s emergence poses a problem because the soul is tied inextricably to the body, human reductionism poses a problem because there is no soul to continue past bodily death at all. This problem is not insurmountable, according to Christian physicalists. Dr. Kevin Corcoran, a Christian physicalist from Calvin College, provides just such an argument for resurrection within the view of human reductionism in his book *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul*.⁴⁹ Whether Dr. Corcoran’s

⁴⁶ NIV

⁴⁷ NIV

⁴⁸ NIV

⁴⁹ Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2006).

argument is scripturally and theologically sound remains to be determined. Regardless, a convincing answer to this challenge would need to be posed to assuage the concerns of many Christians.

One last concern with Scripture is that there is no clear purpose built into life according to reductionism. Smith builds a purpose into his model of personhood that aligns partially with the scriptural purpose for life (see principle 2). There is not a similarly obvious built-in purpose in the reductionist model. The same scriptural purposes (glorification of God, relationship with God and neighbor) can be claimed by Christian reductionists, though, so this concern does not pose a serious threat to reductionism. The main concern is simply that the purpose seems to be incidental, rather than intricately connected to the reductionist view of human nature.

There are three more concerns that are distinct from Scripture. The first is that, according to Damasio's understanding, persons are not persons until they are approximately 18 months old – that is, until they have the capacity for self-consciousness and enough life experience and memory to have an *autobiographical self*. This is deeply concerning because it creates a circumstance of personhood that is conditional. One conclusion of Damasio's claim, for example, could be that abortion or even infanticide is allowable or at very least is not murder because it is not the killing of a person.⁵⁰

A related concern is that the personhood of those with profound intellectual disability or dementia might be threatened because personhood, in all three reductionist models, is tied to not just *self* but *self-awareness*. Reductionism faces the same limitation

⁵⁰ Note that this is not an inevitable conclusion. It could be argued that abortion or infanticide are wrong because you are killing someone with the potential to develop into a person. Or, perhaps human dignity or rights could be detached from personhood.

as traditional theological and emergent perspectives on personhood in that it fails to pass the “disability argument.” It sets up a necessary requirement for personhood – in this case, self-awareness – that some humans will not conclusively pass. The result is the denial or diminishment of the personhood of some persons. Furthermore, as with the emergent perspective, the reductionist perspective does not have any way to ameliorate this diminishment as the traditional theological perspective does. Thus, the disability argument limitation of reductionism poses a serious, unresolved concern.

One last concern with the reductionist perspective of personhood is that, like the emergent perspective, it fails to provide an account for divine personhood and how, if at all, it is connected to human personhood. Any form of holistic reductionism categorically denies the existence of a spiritual world by definition, and thus would be prohibitive to the spiritual existence of God or angelic persons. Damasio, who makes little religious commentary in his book, even comments that the notion of a person without a body is unthinkable, and directs this notion to the existence of spiritual beings.⁵¹ For a Christian human reductionist, the existence of the spiritual realm outside of humans is not an issue, but a meaningful description of a personhood not tied to the functioning of the brain and the mechanisms that produce a sense of self would be challenging.

Conclusion

The traditional theological, emergent, and reductionist perspectives have now all been critiqued regarding their consistency with both Scripture and other forms of knowledge. All three perspectives have been found to have concerns, and the point has

⁵¹ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 143.

been illustrated that the superiority of a perspective on a challenging issue cannot be ascertained simply by scriptural compatibility. Nevertheless, it seems evident from the above assessment that the traditional theological perspective on personhood is the best option of the three assessed, in the sense that it is the most consistent both with Scripture and with the rest of the body of knowledge.

Regarding challenges by Scripture, emergence and reductionism are both potentially challenged by serious concerns about the lack of evident purpose of man and the continuation of life after earthly death. Reductionism faces further scriptural challenges over the existence of the soul. Traditional theological personhood does not face any of these challenges, but rather only deals with a possible overinterpretation of *imago dei* as a rational nature.

With regard to challenges from the rest of the body of knowledge, all three perspectives are challenged by the “disability argument,” i.e. the personhood of individuals with profound intellectual disability. Nevertheless, as has been argued in the previous sections, the traditional theological perspective holds up better than the other two perspectives against this argument because it affirms personhood through human descent and affirms worth through the adamant assertion that all humans are made in the image of God. The traditional theological perspective is also not without answer to the concerns about the rationality of animals and AI and the abuses carried out in the name of rational personhood. Furthermore, the emergent and reductionist perspectives face the extra concern that they cannot account for divine and angelic personhood. The validity of “mystical” emergence faces challenges by reductionism, and reductionism faces

challenges in that it inherently creates a conditional personhood, in which even children under 18 months of age are not considered persons.

Based on this evidence, it seems clear that the traditional theological perspective on personhood is the best option of the three, with the emergent and reductionist perspectives lagging behind significantly. A comparison between the emergent and reductionist perspectives is less clear, but it would seem that the failure of reductionism to allow for the existence of a soul, in direct contrast with certain passages of Scripture, may be enough to place emergence in a better ranking than reductionism. It is quite possible that none of these perspectives is the “correct” one; the discussion of rationality suggests that rationality (or other human faculties) may not be the right place to secure personhood. There may be other perspectives that hold up better with both Scripture and the rest of the body of knowledge. Thus, all that can be concluded is that the traditional theological perspective is the best of these three.

Through the course of this project, it has become clear that there is not one proper "Christian" perspective on personhood. Scripture does not provide a clear metaphysics of human personhood or of personhood in general. The very notion of personhood is a human concept, devised to explain the Trinity first by Tertullian, and later adopted by other theologians, like Boethius, Richard of Saint-Victor, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Much of the theological meaning of personhood has been lost today, a result of the continued secularization of the sciences. There is no place to consider the divine in defining personhood in a field that only studies the physical, the empirically evident, the natural. The divine is, by definition, supernatural. Thus, an account of personhood that

considers divine personhood seems to be relegated to the field of theology only and is beyond the scope of other fields.

This may be alright. As is evident by the section on reductionism (Crick and Churchland), science that gets too philosophical is dangerous; it becomes scientism. Suddenly, science is used to defend one's personal beliefs and to discredit those of others. When science can be used to do this, something has gone wrong; science exceeds its bounds. Similarly, when religious beliefs become genuinely discreditable by science, something has gone wrong; religion has exceeded its bounds, playing with "pseudoscience" that is not demonstrably true.

So, how do Christians navigate this terrain of truths? As described earlier in the conclusion, we have to begin by recognizing the authority of Scripture, and the capacity of human fallibility to distort it through improper interpretation. When considering a particular topic, we thoroughly investigate what Scripture clearly has to say about the topic, what Scripture might be interpreted to say on the topic, and what it remains silent on. Then, we consider possible perspectives on the topic, such as the theological, emergent, and reductionist perspectives on personhood. Next, we consider what input other fields of study – science, philosophy, the arts, etc. – have to say about the topic. Based on all these considerations, we try to come to a position of belief that seems most consistent with the body of knowledge available to us, recognizing that the body of knowledge itself is not coherent and is reliably flawed. In the end, we rely on the love and grace of God to cover over the multitude of mistakes we make in our journey to understand Him and the reality we have been given.

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