

What is a Person?  
How does one become a Morally Good Person? The Intuitive View!

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by

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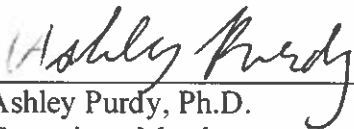
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## **Abstract**

This thesis centers around two philosophical problems: the concept of a person and the process by which one becomes a morally good person. Drawing on the works of philosophers such as Harry Frankfurt, Strawson, and A.J. Ayer, it begins with an inquiry into what it means to be a person. It argues that while humanhood, with its rational capacities, is a contingent rather than a necessary condition, it can serve as an accurate predictor of personhood. The thesis posits that personhood is an achievement rather than an inherent state, facilitated by interactions within a social framework that refine these rational capacities. Examples such as feral humans, who only achieve personhood through integration into society, illustrate this dynamic process. Furthermore, the thesis contends that becoming a morally good person is not an inherent trait, challenging the nativist view. Instead, it proposes that moral personhood is cultivated through active engagement with moral frameworks within community norms, insofar as they advance the ideal interactive environment and collective wellbeing.

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## Introduction

This work, referring to the thesis for the master's degree in philosophy, focuses primarily on personhood and good moral personhood. It explores the concept of a person as well as the aspects that becoming a person entails. It also explores the concept of good moral personhood and the extent to which adherence to collectively shared moral decisions for the preservation of this collective impacts one's moral worth. This thesis is divided into sections, each connecting to the next to make the argument that one becomes a good moral person not due to an innate tendency to be as such, but by conforming to norms insofar as they promote the well-being of the group and also by deviating from them if these norms fail in that regard. Therefore, with that goal in mind, I start by defining what it means to be a person. This involves examining the traits, conditions, and qualities associated with personhood, which will be the foundation for the concept of a person who, within the context of relational frameworks guided by moral norms, will be able to acquire a certain moral worth.

Thus, as follows, in the first section, I explore the concept of humanhood as a predictor of personhood. Here, I discuss whether being human is a necessary condition for being a person, referencing philosophers like Harry Frankfurt, Strawson, and A.J. Ayer. I argue that humanhood, with its embedded capacities such as rationality, serves as a contingent condition for personhood. This exploration is crucial for understanding that moral norms and the capacity for moral behavior are not confined to humans alone but are linked to broader traits that constitute personhood to which humans, due to their natural make-up, possess an advantage. This section lays the groundwork for the conclusion that part of the essence of being a person involves being able to interact with other persons properly, as well as adhering to moral norms designed to guide these interactions.

In the second section, I posit that personhood is not merely an inherent state but an achievement facilitated by interactions between beings with the potential for attaining personhood and those who are already persons. To illustrate this, I provide the example of feral humans, who only achieved personhood after being integrated into a person's society, which assists in refining their natural capacities. Moreover, in the third section, I define a person by presenting characteristics such as unity, interiority, autonomy, and projection. These traits collectively form the essence of personhood. Unity involves the harmonious integration of various facets of an individual, while interiority pertains to the intimate realm of moral conscience. Autonomy highlights the capacity for self-governance, and projection reflects the ability to envision and strive toward future goals. Understanding these characteristics, which are at the heart of personhood, is fundamental for recognizing how persons differ from non-persons, how interactions shape these characteristics, and what role they play in the individual's capacity to adhere to moral norms.

In Section four, I argue that because personhood implies sociability, individuals naturally lean towards living in an interactive setting where they can generally feel at ease and free from concerns for their well-being. This desire for an ideal environment makes morality necessary. It also gives rise to considerations of what constitutes right and wrong actions, as well as the guiding principles of action for making the ideal moral society a reality. Additionally, I argue that the concept of a morally good person implies the existence of individuals whose conduct matches this ideal interactive environment, serving as an example within the community. It involves both (1) doing what is considered morally good and (2) avoiding what is morally evil. The discussions in this section serve as a segue to how one becomes a morally good person, which is the main topic of this thesis.

In Section five, I delve into the nativist view, which contends that moral goodness stems from an inborn inclination within the individual to act in certain ways, a tendency that can also be naturally actualized. According to this view, a good moral person is the result of their natural tendency to act in ways that are considerate of others and in accordance with moral laws. Philosophers such as Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hume have variously supported the idea that moral qualities are innate to some extent, suggesting that virtues or vices are inherently part of one's nature. However, this view is insufficient as it does not account for the significant influence of social interactions and context on moral development.

In the final sections (six and seven), I focus on the intuitive view, which proposes that one becomes morally good by acting in ways that conform to moral norms, insofar as these norms produce what is best for the collective. This approach highlights the importance of social interactions and the internalization of community norms in the development of moral personhood. The intuitive view also acknowledges that at times, these norms may fail to serve their intended purpose, necessitating deviation from them to better serve the collective good. Through this perspective, I argue that moral goodness is not an inherent trait but a product of active engagement with and understanding of the moral framework of one's society.

### **1. Humanhood and its relationship with personhood**

A widely held position in the literature associates personhood with humanity, rationality, and moral capacity. Philosophers like Aquinas and Boethius define personhood based on humanity, emphasizing rational capacities<sup>1</sup>. Kant advanced this view by linking personhood with

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<sup>1</sup> Aquinas and Boethius perspective point to an intrinsic relationship between personhood and rationality. In his *Summa Theologiae* (Part 1), Aquinas contends that rationality is the essence of the person. Boethius' *Theological Tractates* define a person as having a rational nature. For both philosophers, personhood cannot be bestowed on entities that lack any kind of reason.

moral reason, regarding rational beings as ends in themselves<sup>2</sup>. David Hume (1878) associated personhood with rational capacities such as awareness, seeing personhood as a collection of perceptions, experiences, and memories that comprise an individual's sense of self<sup>3</sup>.

These philosophical definitions capture the contingent nature of humanhood in achieving personhood and emphasize the import of rationality. However, they overlook crucial aspects of relationality and sociability. In this section, I argue that sociability facilitates the realization of the capacities constitutive of rationality, thus defining a person as a being who is rational and socializes with those who are already persons. Here, rationality encompasses capacities such as awareness, reasoning, sense of self, abstraction, metacognition, etc. I also contend that these capacities, which are natural to humans, give them an innate advantage in achieving personhood.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that humanhood is a necessary condition for personhood, because it is not clear that these natural capacities are unique to humans or that no other being can develop them. That is, if we accept that personhood is contingent on capacities inherent in humanhood, then even nonhuman beings can achieve personhood as long as they possess such capacities. However, while humanhood is not a necessary condition, it can be considered an accurate predictor of personhood.

Philosophers such as Harry Frankfurt implied this viewpoint, which is reinforced by others such as Strawson and A.J. Ayer<sup>4</sup>. Strawson (1959), Ayer (1963), and Frankfurt (1963) collectively challenge the concept of person as conditioned to humanhood (1971). For Strawson (1959), the concepts of person that ascribe states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics

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<sup>2</sup> Kant (1788), *Critique of Practical Reason*, 87-89

<sup>3</sup> *A Treatise on Human Nature*" (part I.4, §. vi)

<sup>4</sup> Frankfurt appears to have concluded that his argument was consistent with those of Strawson and Ayer. However, these two make the argument that consciousness is not limited to humans and that judgments of personhood seem to be based on our human individual experience, which we believe to be applicable to everyone.

that are mostly found only in humans are rather limited to observing our own experiences, physical conditions, and behavior (p. 96/97, p. 100; Frankfurt, 1971, p. 05). However, according to Strawson (1959), there is not an obvious and necessary connection between certain human traits and the experiences being manifested. That is, we cannot truly assert for a fact that human physical and mental conditions predispose them to act and behave in specific ways typical of people (Strawson, p. 102/103). A. J. Ayer (1963) appears to agree with Strawson's objection to personhood corresponding to specific humans' characteristics. According to Ayer, if there is a relationship between consciousness and human physical attributes (taken as those traits of a human), that relationship is contingent rather than a necessary truth (Ayer, 1963, p. 82). As Ayer considers, though we may grant the uncertainty mentioned by Strawson—that human beings are (the only ones) especially predisposed to acting in the manner we consider to be of persons—a person's ownership of states of consciousness consists in their standing in the causal relation to the body by which he is identified (p. 116).

My view aligns with Ayer's contingent view. That is, humans are contingently rational and therefore, contingently, persons. As rational animals<sup>5</sup>, they possess a crucial trait for their status as persons. Rationality, which humans exhibit, is comprised of cognitive faculties and a variety of behaviors and mental states such as awareness, intentionality, and rational decision-making, commonly associated with personhood. It essentially provides the necessary tools for moral and agency-based moral deliberation, understanding and managing emotions, and fostering meaningful social interactions. These abilities and traits are deeply ingrained in humanhood, thus

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<sup>5</sup> The notion that humans are rational animals is a long-standing philosophical tradition frequently associated with Aristotelianism. It was used to distinguish humans from other animals based on cognitive abilities such as reason and intellect. These abilities, which are taken to be part of human nature, enable them to perform cognitive functions such as reasoning, judging, and concept formation.



making humanhood an accurate predictor of personhood<sup>6</sup>. However, it is not clear that they belong exclusively to humans and that no other being could ever develop them through different means. Their biological and evolutionary makeup, complex neural structures, and social systems that promote the development of rationality and moral behavior necessary for personhood do not make humanhood a prerequisite for personhood. Rather, they provide humans with a significant advantage in expressing or achieving it. Therefore, while humans may have an inherent advantage, this does not imply exclusive status.

Harry Frankfurt (1971) is another philosopher who objects to the inherent connotation of personhood with humanhood. Frankfurt saw such a connotation as reducing personhood to membership in a specific biological species. According to Frankfurt, because there are many entities other than persons that have both mental and physical properties, the standard view of personhood does not actually confine it to a single being (p. 05). Rather, it offers attributes that are related to our human world, our interests, concerns, and what we consider important, but because we are not alone in having them, and because these attributes could still be ours even if they were of another species, the term person is not limited to our human species (p. 06).

Rationality allows beings to operate beyond instincts and survival needs, unlike other beings whose activities are directed toward specific sub-existential objectives (food, shelter, and mating—with the “hows” determined by evolution). Rational beings such as humans do more than sensing, feeling, and needing. They perceive, imagine, think, and understand their biological

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<sup>6</sup> This view allows for the possibility of advanced beings who might display rationality to fulfill the criteria for personhood without being humans. However, based on our current understanding and empirical observations, such instances are speculative. The capacities we associate with personhood are predominantly observed in humans. Therefore, like Ayer, Strawson, and Frankfurt, I argue that humanhood is a practical proxy for identifying people. This point is relevant in establishing what being a person entails before one can be a good person.

signals and can distinguish them by their means of satisfaction and urgency. This can help determine the types of relationships they form with one another.

As asserted by Christian Smith (2011), humans have a unique ability to exchange ideas and beliefs as well as form rational patterns of actions and interactions before others (Smith, 2011, p. 119). According to Smith, humans' actions differ from those of animals primarily because they go beyond naturally acquired and genetic behaviors. While animals may show some rudimentary problem-solving skills, such as reacting to immediate needs as determined by their environment, such as a bird call alerting others to a cat nearby, humans take this to a much higher level. They are not only capable of devising solutions for immediate issues but also for the long term. They can predict problems, wants, and challenges and create alternatives for them before they occur. They do not seek food because they are hungry now, but because they understand they will be hungry soon. When faced with a food shortage, they do not rely solely on instinctive hunting behaviors. They develop agricultural techniques, invent farming tools, or even create entirely new types of food through technological and innovative means. Humans can develop their abilities and use them for survival in the group, shaping and adapting the meanings of their social relationships in the process (*ibid.*). When discussing the concept of social construction, Smith also suggests that most of the social life that people often take for granted as being naturally fixed is actually determined by variable artifacts created by humans in social interaction in response to such needs and desires (*ibid.*, p. 120).

Agreeably, desires attend to specific (sometimes shared) concerns, and individuals objectively reason about how to go about meeting those concerns with the understanding that such actions will satisfy them, sometimes giving them a sensation of relief and anticipation of how to satisfy them next time they appear. As Martin Buber indicated, humans go beyond the

surface of their instincts and their basic needs. They can relive their fulfilled desires as an experience, and from that experience, they can create a notion of cause and effect. They also engage with their surroundings based on the concept that the world consists of interactions between “I and It,” “I and He/She,” “I and Us,” and “Them and They” (1970, p. 55). Non-human beings are incapable of doing so; desires (whether simple or complex) are the result of the synchronized operation of body and mind, which only human beings are capable of performing.

## **2. The tools for personhood**

In the previous section, I discussed the contingent relationship between being human and being a person, and I contended that humanhood is a reliable predictor of personhood. In this section, I use Smith's (2011) concept of rationality-derived capacities that facilitate personhood to reinforce the notion that we associate humanhood with personhood because we recognize that humans, as rational animals, have a distinct advantage in becoming persons. However, as I argue, simply possessing these natural abilities is insufficient to be a person because personhood is an achievement rather than a given. Even if a capable being has these abilities, there is another and necessary component that must be present for them to mature into a person, and that is interaction with other persons. Because sociability is implicit in the experience of being a person, potential persons must be involved with persons in order to refine their innate capacities, broaden their critical thinking abilities, and learn how to put their behavior in social contexts. A failure to become a person because of the lack of this component can be demonstrated by individuals who, despite possessing the natural tools, were not able to perform in a person-like manner until they were exposed to an interactive environment.

In this first part, I contend in agreement with Smith (2011) that there are capacities stemming from rationality that play a huge role in the emergence of personhood. In “What is a person?” Christian Smith (2011) indicates that these capacities can be ordered into: existential, primary and secondary, creative, and higher capacities. Existential capacities encompass elements such as consciousness, understanding of time and space, control of wants vs. needs, and distinguishing desires versus purposes and goals (p. 45). Primary and secondary capacities involve the ability to assign causal attributions (cause-effect), which are used to deliberate on the results of actions and control complex emotions.

They also include the ability to use memories and past experiences to address new problems and frame choices according to what will serve interests in the long and short run (ibid., p. 46–47). Creative capacities include innovation, imagination, abstract reasoning, and the ability to visualize artifacts and ideas that do not yet exist, leading to scientific and social advancement (ibid., p. 49). Finally, the highest capacities involve the ability to distinguish reality and truth, form judgments of right and wrong, and make aesthetic judgments of pleasure, encompassing concepts of beauty, attractiveness, good taste, and appropriateness (ibid., p. 51–53).

In my view, Smith's arguments emphasize that humans, as rational animals who naturally possess all these capacities, allowing them to go beyond their natural make-up and gauge deeply with what they come into contact with, occupy a favored position in becoming persons. Their natural capacity for reason gives them the ability to establish logical principles based on experiences to regulate encounters, form moral principles for the prosperity of their species, and prioritize these principles based on predicted outcomes and preferences. Humans can engage in activities for the sake of pleasure, and they do not only have attachments but can also

purposefully engage in acts that will cultivate motivational feelings and emotions in a balanced and non-harmful way, as well as hurtful if necessary. This is the case when humans act emotively in a way that can sometimes cause harm to them or others, like in arguing, insulting each other, or when they undertake activities for sensorial enjoyment that, if unbalanced, can be fatal, such as drinking alcohol or smoking. They can also perceive, interpret, and communicate these emotions in a meaningful and complex way. Additionally, if overwhelmed by such emotions, they can also engage in intentionally and consciously self-harmful attitudes, such as committing suicide by choosing an action that will clearly end their life. Humans are naturally inclined to have all of these complex traits, which are also frequently utilized as indicators of personhood.

Max Scheler and Immanuel Kant, while not explicitly supporting the idea of human privilege for personhood, also associate personhood with qualities found in humans. Kant (1785), in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, emphasizes that humans are called persons because their nature distinguishes them as ends in themselves (4:428, 4:438). However, this distinction can include not only humans but all beings in general, as long as they possess rationality. The key for Kant is that, through rationality, beings exist as ends in themselves rather than as a means for other beings to use for their own benefit. This perspective on personhood not being inherently exclusive to humans but rather characterized by rationality also aligns with Scheler. For Scheler personhood, in essence, implies the status of being a logical being, and this logical nature serves as the starting point for all acts of will (Perrin, 1991, p. 88). However, Scheler makes a crucial distinction. He argues that being a person should not be directly correlated with being human or engaging in human activities. According to Scheler, personhood should be understood as an entity that unifies modes of activity, and these activities have their

own distinct and essential places within the hierarchy of values (*ibid.*, p. 88). This implies that personhood is not confined to human beings alone but extends to any entity that exhibits rationality and engages in activities that hold value within its own context.

Nevertheless, merely possessing the capacities for personhood—such as rationality—is insufficient on its own; a being needs to actualize these capacities by interacting with others who are already persons<sup>7</sup>. The interactions I am referring to include communality, meaningful communication, cooperative activities, sharing of interests, and moral and ethical discussions. In this sense, I contend that a being cannot be a person in isolation because they must interact with others who are already persons in order to refine their natural capacities, thus making sociability an implicit condition of being a person. Though theoretically meeting the rational criteria for personhood, the lack of relational and empathetic aspects that define true personhood may hinder the transition from a human to a person. That is, even with all the natural capacities, one can still fail to achieve personhood if they miss this interactive feature, thus making personhood not a given but an achievement. Feral humans such as Dina Sanichar, the inspiration for Mowgli, and real-life Tarzan John Ssebunya are examples of failure to achieve personhood and the necessity of social interactions in actualizing natural capacities. Isolated from human contact, their upbringing, guided solely by wild creatures whose ways of life they adopted as their own, denied them the intricate understanding of interpersonal relationships and the interactive frameworks ingrained in the collective experience of the person kingdom.

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<sup>7</sup> There is a stronger claim to be made contending that prospective persons can become persons over time by interacting with one another. However, I will stick with the weaker claim that they must interact with those who are already persons because this will help them refine their capacity to a higher level, which those who are already persons have attained. Nonetheless, regardless of the claim I defend, my general view is that interactions play a vital role in achieving personhood.

In their case, their behaviors and primal instincts, developed in the untamed wilderness, guided their judgments down a different path—harmonious with the non-rational beings they interacted with but distinct from the customary standards of personhood that other interacting rational beings achieve. Their condition also made them miss the intricate understanding of interpersonal relationships and the moral frameworks ingrained in societal experiences of beings predisposed to become persons. However, upon rescue and exposure to people's ways, they eventually transcended the status of mere humans with the capacity to be persons, and they actually became persons. But what can be acquired through social interactions that cannot be developed through the exercise of one's rational capacities?

I contend that social interactions play an important role in the development of empathy, emotional regulation, and communication skills, all of which are essential characteristics of personality. These interactions provide the contextual feedback required for learning appropriate emotional responses and navigating complex social situations, allowing individuals to fine-tune their rational capacities so that they can be applied effectively in a variety of scenarios. They also assist individuals in engaging in effective communication that goes beyond simply transmitting information and includes processes of understanding and being understood. My view is supported by several research studies by social scientists such as Davis (1940)<sup>8</sup>, Haney (2003)<sup>9</sup>, Grassian (2006)<sup>10</sup>, Gill et al. (2023)<sup>11</sup>, and Chtouris & Miller (2024)<sup>12</sup> who show that social

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<sup>8</sup> Davis, Kingsley. "Extreme Social Isolation of a Child". *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 4, Jan. 1940, pp. 554-565. The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>9</sup> Haney, Craig. "Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and 'Supermax' Confinement." *Crime & Delinquency*. *SAGE Journals* vol. 49, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 124-156.

<sup>10</sup> Grassian, Stuart. "Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement." *Journal of Law & Policy*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2006, pp. 325-383. Washington University Open Scholarship.

<sup>11</sup> Gill, R., et al. "The Psychological Impact of Solitary Confinement." *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 79, no. 1, 2023, pp. 45-67.

<sup>12</sup> Chtouris, Sotiris, and Miller, Michael. "Isolation and Socialization: Revisiting Classical Theories in Modern Contexts." *Sociological Review*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2024, pp. 112-135.

isolation caused by abandonment or even prison confinement can lead to mental and emotional deterioration, including impaired rational capacities and regressive individuality<sup>13</sup>. Davis's study on social isolation, for example, presents the case of Anna, a child who was kept in isolation from a young age and had significant mental developmental delays and emotional deficits, as well as difficulty engaging with others even after being exposed to an interactive environment (p. 555). This case, along with other well-known examples of feral children (such as the aforementioned), emphasizes the critical role of socialization in the refinement of natural capacities that facilitate the achievement of personhood.

Furthermore, my view concerning the combination of rationality and interactions, which refine this existing natural rational capacity for the attainment of personhood, is also supported by the Cooley-Mead-Dewey-Faris theory of socialization<sup>14</sup>. This theory introduces concepts like the “looking-glass self,” where our self-concept is shaped by how we believe others perceive us, the distinction between the spontaneous ‘I’ and the socialized ‘Me,’ which emphasizes the importance of social interactions in developing a coherent self, and the concept of role-taking, where individuals mentally assume the perspectives of others to understand and predict their behavior. All of these concepts include aspects that, as I argue in Section 3 of this thesis, are encompassed within the traits of personhood and are critically developed within the social framework.

Therefore, interactions between capable beings is a relevant condition as potential persons can learn important social skills such as empathy, compassion, cooperation, and conflict

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of regressive individuality in this context refers to the reversion to an earlier developmental form of rational function—intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally experienced by individuals due to prolonged social isolation (Chtouris & Miller 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Which is a synthesis of views from social philosophy by Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Dewey (1916), and Faris (1937) that argue for the critical role of socialization in the refinement of rational capacities.



resolution, and these skills are necessary for navigating the interpersonal complexities that come with personhood. In fact, these are expected to be observed in all beings who have achieved personhood. Moreover, they foster a sense of belonging together, where individuals experience both identity and difference, sharing similar natural properties while maintaining uniqueness as persons (Ormay, 2018, p. 39). This view aligns with Kant, who argues that rational beings share a common ground in representing their existence: “the same rational ground that holds for me also holds for the other” (4:429). This perspective finds resonance in Buber's (1970) assertion that communication between individuals involves a pair of "I and you." When a person says "I," they mean that they understand their own presence and are aware of themselves as a separate entity from another (p. 54).

In this sense, personhood is not an inherent attribute but rather an accomplishment that can be attained through the development and exercise of specific abilities, including those given by nature. From this viewpoint I argue that individuals must actively cultivate traits like rationality, self-awareness, and moral agency in order to become or be recognized as persons. For example, a child is not automatically considered a complete person at birth. Rather, they develop personhood as they mature, learning to engage in rational thought, moral reasoning, and social interaction. I also argue that despite having the inherent capacity for personhood, one must actively cultivate and maintain these characteristics in order to achieve and maintain personhood. This implies that personhood can also be lost if these abilities become severely limited or compromised. Consider people who, due to severe cognitive impairments or profound psychological disorders, may lose their ability to think rationally and act morally. In such cases, the characteristics that define personhood are jeopardized, and their status as human beings is called into question. This viewpoint agrees with the notion that personhood is a dynamic rather

than a static state. It is an ongoing process that necessitates the continuous application of rationality, moral judgment, and social engagement.

In conclusion, the accomplishment of personhood is a progression from one form of being to another in which beings become beyond their physical configuration. In this sense, a human is a person's unfinished project, a person in the making, or a person to be. In other words, being a person is, for humans, an inherent possibility. However, personhood, which can be attainable, can also be lost. Given that rationality allows for the development of typical human behaviors and interactions, beings lacking sufficient rational capacity may be excluded from personhood due to their inability to form proper relationships. This also implies that individuals who lose rational competence, such as the elderly or those who become mentally ill, may be stripped of their personhood.

### **3. What is a person? Definition and characteristics of a person**

In previous sections, I presented the claim that although natural capacities such as rationality played a crucial part, being a person was not a given. In this section, I present the distinctive features that define a person and distinguish them from non-persons, including humans who do not yet or no longer meet the criteria for personhood. I will also discuss the role that each of these features plays in adherence to moral norms, which I argue is a condition to achieving morally good personhood. These features include:

#### Singularity

As personhood extends beyond the physical realm, there is an abstract difference among persons, which makes each a unique entity, a copy of no one. Although they can be replaced or

repeated as subjects playing a role and fulfilling their functions, persons are persons of themselves in their own “I”. There are not two persons who are equally the same, even if they are identical twins. In this case, despite their genetic similarity, which makes them physically identical in appearance and almost a human mirror of one another, and possibly the same life circumstances if they live in the same environment, they are not homogenous as persons. This is because, while they may encounter and experience similar life situations or interact with similar people, their experience is not uniform and varies in how they are affected by them.

Despite their human appearance, these minor differences in how each is particularly impacted by such experiences will distinguish them as separate and unique individuals. Therefore, within the community of persons, each person is singular, original, and unrepeatably. A person is numerically and qualitatively distinct and cannot be replicated. In the context of morality and adherence to norms, singularity can be associated with the individual's personality<sup>15</sup>, which refers to behavioral patterns that help predict one's conduct and evaluate and consequently moral worth. For instance, within a household, we may be able to correctly ascertain who performed specific actions without first gathering evidence.

### Unity

Despite being composed of various facets such as the physical body, reason, emotion, and action, a person encapsulates a harmonious unity. The dynamic interplay of personal experiences, with each constituent aspect shaping a unique essence (singularity), forges an unmistakable identity. As a result, each person becomes a totality of one, where the diverse parts

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<sup>15</sup> In this context, the term personality refers to one's interrelated behavioral, cognitive, and emotional patterns that comprise their unique adjustment to life. These interrelated patterns shape beliefs and influence conduct that is assumed to be an expression of character.

coalesce into a cohesive whole, forming a personal unit. The experiences with each constituent part contribute to shaping an individual's unique way of being and define them as a distinct person. Whether playing the roles of a parent, a spouse, a professional, a sibling, a child, a citizen, or a member of society, these diverse experiences, even when marked by physical differences like missing a limb, contribute to the unity of the whole person. These dimensions seamlessly converge, intertwining to create the intricate tapestry of their existence. Each role and experience bring forth individual challenges, feelings, and responsibilities, all of which must be navigated simultaneously, shaping a person's unique "I." Roles and experiences generate responsibilities, diverse emotions, and aspirations, all intricately woven into the fabric of their united being as a person.

Unity, which encapsulates the harmonious integration of various aspects of a person's experience, allows the person to evaluate the appropriateness of an action based on a specific facet of their experience as persons and on each act differently without any contradiction. Consider a doctor who stays at the hospital to care for critically injured patients on his daughter's birthday due to professional obligations but leaves early the next day to support his daughter during an emotional breakdown, reflecting his role as a caring father.

### Interiority

Within every person exists a realm reserved for self and intimacy, an inaccessible and inviolable space known as the realm of (moral) conscience. This sacred sanctuary, dedicated to self-reflection, serves as a constant dialogue chamber where individuals deliberate on their innermost concerns, construct ideas, and engage in internal debates before and after undertaking actions. Additionally, a person harbors in this space both short- and long-term purposes, along

with dreams that, even if distant, motivate them to take actions toward realizing those goals. This innermost chamber becomes the nexus where our rational capacity and external experiences find expression, giving rise to complex discernments such as guilt, shame, pride, and secret desires, which we guard with the utmost reverence.

Despite its apparent isolation, this interior realm is intricately woven into the fabric of interpersonal relationships. Through interactions, individuals learn how and whom to express what discernment, as well as how to direct each concern to its appropriate interior qualification, understanding what should constitute shame or pride under social norms. This interactive process also provides valuable insights into the topics of debate that transpire in this inner sanctum. Furthermore, the complexity of social dynamics, acting as a shaping force, refines individuals' abilities to navigate the vast social landscape.

Interiority is essential for developing a strong moral conscience. It enables people to think about their actions, consider the moral implications, and align their behavior with ethical principles. This reflective capacity ensures that people do more than just superficially follow norms and that they are committed to understanding and upholding them. Individuals can internalize moral values and make conscientious decisions that are consistent with their inner beliefs by reflecting on their own actions.

### Autonomy

Owing to their interiority, unity, and singularity, a person is acknowledged as possessing the capacity to formulate individual ideas, which, even if not agreed upon, should be recognized as expressions of their reasoning and inner selves. A person thus emerges as a center of opinion, decision, and action, inherently equipped for self-governance and self-determination. This aligns

with Kant's perspective, which considers a person as an end in itself rather than a means to an end (GM, 429). A person exists as a being in and of itself, deserving of dignity and recognition as the efficient cause of their own actions. They can independently formulate ideas, reason about things, and learn from experience. They can also, within their power, determine what should be avoided or replicated based on what they deem self-beneficial.

As moral agency is defined by a person's ability to make independent decisions and govern their own actions, autonomy emphasizes voluntary adherence to norms and the ability to govern and make decisions for oneself. Moreover, in the context of moral adherence, it lends credence to the notion that morally good people are those who freely choose to follow moral norms, not out of obligation but out of genuine commitment to ethical principles.

### Projection

Humans are not persons solely because of rationality and consciousness. In fact, they possess consciousness and rationality by virtue of being humans born with intellect, granting them an advantage over other animals. This intellectual capacity enables them to surpass mere instinct, engaging in activities beyond survival and often associating their actions with moral considerations. Persons exhibit the unique ability to project themselves into a distant future. They harbor passions, goals, and fantasies that serve as motivators for action. The capacity to envision themselves beyond current circumstances and aspire to a future self-propels them on quests and endeavors.

Humans can reason about factors that might lead to their detriment and strategize ways to avoid such pitfalls. Their ability to contemplate the outcomes of actions is grounded in realistic, self-centered terms, considering how a particular course of action will personally benefit them. A

person understands the impact of their actions on themselves and others, and when he morally good they may strive to act in ways that foster long-term benefit of their moral behavior.

Thereupon, the projection feature ensures that a person takes a forward-thinking perspective in their conduct, so it is not only ethically sound in the present but also beneficial in the long run.

A human being who exercises her rational capacity but does not engage in social interaction will fail to fully develop these features. For example, given that the sense of uniqueness is shaped by the experiences one has in contact with other people, in isolation, it would be incomplete or without validation. Moreover, a lack of social interaction can lead to a shallow or undeveloped interior life, devoid of the depth that relational experiences and emotional engagement provide. Additionally, since unity is the integration of various aspects of oneself into a coherent whole, interactions play an important role in this process as they provide contexts for harmonizing these aspects.

They also expose individuals to a variety of perspectives, which are critical and shape individual decisions. Therefore, without these interactions, the individual's autonomy may be less grounded in reality, rendering decision-making ineffective or nuanced. Furthermore, interactions also improve interiority by challenging a person emotionally and morally, resulting in deeper self-reflection and understanding. Without such interactions, developing a fully integrated self may be more difficult, potentially leading to internal conflicts or fragmentation.

One critical objection to my conceptualization of personhood concerns the necessity of considering all the traits together. For example, we may form a conception of a person based on the idea of someone who can be responsible for their actions. In this case, we may only prioritize a criterion such as autonomy while dismissing singularity, interiority, and all other traits as irrelevant. Consequently, a more straightforward conception of personhood, with autonomy as

the sole standard, may appear sufficient for establishing personhood without having to account for all of the other traits.

I contend that these traits are not isolated silos that can function independently and in total disregard of one another. While we can examine each of them separately, it is always under the assumption that the other traits are present and playing a complementary role, rather than taking them as non-existent or unnecessary. Consider, for example, the trait of autonomy, which is understood as the capacity for self-governance and making independent choices. If we were to conceive of a person as someone who possesses autonomy in the sense of being responsible and in charge of their agency, we would also have to assume that such a person possesses an inner chamber to engage in dialogue before taking voluntary action. This ensures that the actions for which they are being held accountable precede an internal deliberation and a moral decision based on reasoned judgment rather than impulsive reactions or external pressures. Therefore, in conceiving a person as being autonomous, we would inherently make the presence of other traits, such as interiority, a requirement, and the absence of such a complementary function would undermine the idea of autonomy itself.

This interdependence extends to other traits of personhood as well. Take, for instance, projection, which involves envisioning oneself in the future and setting long-term goals. This capability of situating themselves in the distant future and self-propelling on quests and endeavors is deeply intertwined with autonomy, singularity, interiority, and unity. To project into the future, an individual must possess the autonomy to set personal goals and the reflective capacity to deliberate on these goals. Furthermore, singularity, the sense of being an individual self, and unity, the integration of various aspects of the self, are required for maintaining a coherent and consistent future-oriented plan. Individuals who do not see themselves as a unified



being playing multiple interactive roles will struggle to formulate and pursue long-term objectives because their goals and aspirations may lack cohesion and direction. Therefore, while autonomy, interiority, singularity, and projection may appear to be sufficient on their own, they are actually deeply interconnected and inter-influential. Each trait complements and reinforces the others, resulting in a holistic framework of personhood. Without acknowledging this interdependence, any concept of personhood is incomplete and lacks explanatory power.

Another important objection that can be raised is regarding the necessity of each of these traits—autonomy, singularity, unity, interiority, and project—to the concept of personhood. The reason these traits are essential is that they conceptually distinguish those who are persons from those who are not. As they result from the realization and refinement of natural capacities through social interactions, they add specificity to why one has lost or has not achieved personhood. Consider Bob, who, due to a psychological condition, becomes unable to distinguish between being in a restroom and being in a public park, leading him to strip inappropriately in public. Broadly, Bob's compromised personhood is due to his rational deficiency, but being more specific, it is because his deficiency prevents him from exhibiting several traits such as interiority, unity, and autonomy. Possessing these traits means he should be capable of properly deliberating in ways that reconcile his private self with his role as a social member who understands public appropriateness norms. Now, consider John, the real-life Tarzan, who grew up apart from the community of persons and, though rational, did not socialize, and therefore, based on my concept of personhood, did not achieve it. Suppose John entered someone's home and stole their food. Due to his lack of socialization, he is unable to make informed decisions about adherence to social norms regarding ownership or personal property; therefore, his actions would not be considered autonomous. Consequently, John is not conceptually a person, not only

because his behavior resembles that of wild animals acting on instinct, but also because, since he did not socialize, he does not exhibit moral autonomy. This implies that John cannot be held morally accountable for his actions, distinguishing him from a fully realized person.

These examples demonstrate that these traits are necessary insofar as they are manifestations of the development and refinement of rational capacities through social interactions. This viewpoint underscores the claim made in Section 2 that, rather than being a given, personhood is an accomplishment realized through the development and exercise of these essential traits. Thus, in summary, the necessity of these traits lies in their role in defining and distinguishing what it means to be a person.

#### **4. Personhood, Sociability and Good Morals**

In this section, I argue that because personhood implies sociability and individuals naturally lean towards living in an interactive setting where they can generally feel at ease, free from concerns for their well-being, this desire for an ideal environment makes morality necessary. It also gives rise to considerations of what constitutes right and wrong actions as well as the guiding principles of action for making the ideal moral society a reality. Additionally, I argue that the concept of a morally good person implies the existence of individuals whose conduct matches this ideal interactive environment, serving as an example within the community. It involves both (1) doing what is considered morally good and (2) avoiding what is morally evil. The discussions of this section will serve as a segue to how one becomes a morally good person, which is the main topic of this thesis. In this section, and generally throughout this thesis, I do not intend to discuss how moral claims are formed or to settle the debate about whether they are objective facts or social constructions. However, I accept a moral relativist and

anti-realist approach as true, and I argue for good moral personhood while acknowledging that norms are not universal truths. I assume that they are rather relative principles of conduct that each community of persons adopts based on aggregated agreements.

Throughout this thesis, the terms “community of persons” or “society” refer to a group of people who share a common physical or social territory and are typically subject to the same political authority and cultural expectations. This definition encompasses more than just a household or family, extending to larger social structures such as towns, cities, professional groups, or religious communities. This broader definition is justified by the need to account for the diverse and overlapping social affiliations that individuals navigate. While a household may have its own set of moral norms, these norms exist within the larger context of broader societal norms that provide a framework for resolving potential conflicts. For instance, if a family's norms diverge from those of a professional group or religious community, the broader societal norms usually take precedence because they are more widely recognized and enforced. The hierarchy of norms is explained by the scope and authority of the social groups involved. Broader societal norms have a more extensive reach and are generally backed by stronger institutional support, making them more influential in guiding behavior and resolving conflicts. This approach acknowledges the relative nature of moral norms while providing a mechanism for navigating conflicting moral standards within a pluralistic society.

Personhood revolves around both individual and relational existence. Being a person entails participating in a complex web of social relationships and interactions, and this relational aspect of personhood suggests an innate sociality. This viewpoint is consistent with Aristotle's, which states in “Politics” that man is a social animal by nature<sup>16</sup>. According to Aristotle, an

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<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, and C. D. C. Reeve. *Politics*. Indianapolis, Hackett Pub. Co., 2009

individual who is unsocial, intentionally or unintentionally, is either beneath our notice or more than human (1253). Thus, social interaction is not just a means to an end but an essential component of personhood. As stated in previous sections, the realization of our uniquely human capacities, particularly those resulting from our capacity for reason, is inextricably linked to these interactions with others in a social setting.

Nonetheless, in these natural interactions that are inherent in personhood, people prefer to live in a place where they can feel at ease, free of concerns about their security, and surrounded by people whose behavior is deemed acceptable. This tendency for sociability, as well as this preference for ideal forms of interaction, makes morality necessary and gives people reasons to adhere to the resulting principles. Morality helps define what constitutes right and wrong actions in terms of which actions can assist in cultivating such an envisioned interactive environment. In this context, morality is defined as a system developed by a society or community that prescribes codes and norms to guide behavior with the goal of creating an environment in which people feel at ease and secure. It establishes guidelines aimed at ensuring that interactions are conducive to beneficial cooperation and that they do not devolve into chaos where self-interest reigns supreme and relational trust is non-existent. This system is not only concerned with practical requirements or abstract notions of the good, but also with what is interpersonally required of us in our social interactions as part of the condition of being a person. It encompasses the rules and expectations that allow for smooth and respectful interactions between people out of the desire for peaceful coexistence.

This viewpoint is consistent with Shaffer-Landau (2017), who contends that societies develop moral norms based on what they approve of and commit to encouraging certain actions while discouraging others (p. 296). It also agrees with Hume's (1983) view that social virtues are

determined by societies and expected to be known and followed by their members, who are praised for acting in accordance with these virtues because they benefit all members (p. 19, 24). However, the development of these norms is not a purely conscious or deliberate act by individuals but rather a collective process shaped by the needs and experiences of the community. The transition from pre-moral considerations (those referring to a desire to live in an environment where one can interact without fear for their well-being), to moral norms (principles aimed at the realization of such an ideal environment), and then to moral laws (a system of rewards and punishments for those who benefit or threaten society), involves a complex interplay of social interactions, mutual understanding, and the shared goal of creating an environment that fosters well-being. In this sense, the role of well-being is central, as it is the underlying concern that drives the generation of moral norms.

This suggests that moral norms emerge not solely from consequentialist calculations or contractual agreements but from the intrinsic social nature of persons. As people are inherently inclined towards social interaction and desire one that is safe, they naturally develop and adhere to norms that facilitate positive and interpersonal interactions. Therefore, morality is what is interpersonally required of us to ensure that our actions contribute to the community's collective well-being and harmony.

This presupposes that the adopted moral standards will reject actions that are detrimental to the purported ideal setting and that adhering to these norms, which supposedly promote healthy interactions, will advance this ideal environment. In this sense, a morally good person will be one who has good conduct and displays good moral traits in reference to the advancement of this ideal interactive setting. That is:

*If “q and p” are good moral traits and stand for good conduct<sup>17</sup>;*

*And X acts and displays “q and p”;*

*Then, X is a good person.*

Just as a dependable car's worth is evaluated based on its ability to serve its purpose effectively, the moral worth of an individual is assessed by the extent to which their actions contribute to the well-being of the group, with exceptional moral features acting as admirable qualities much like the desirable features of a high-quality car. This evaluation influences how we choose to interact with them, or even avoid them. In the case of a car, this distinction can determine whether we prefer this brand for our daily commute or choose to avoid it altogether, considering it unreliable and sending it to the scrapyards. Excellent conduct can also be taken by the group as exemplary, and the persons who engage in it serve as model moral agents for other members. It is in the idea of their conduct being ideal that we will build a narrative to celebrate their exemplarity and morally excellent agency. This is the case for figures such as St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa, Ghandi, Jesus, Nelson Mandela, Robin Hood, and others who are held up as representatives and epitomes of moral goodness due to their supposed nonpareil moral conduct. They are presented as those with excellent moral features such as empathy, philanthropy, integrity, etc., that exist on top of their personhood. These moral features are additional, therefore not a “*sine qua non*” condition to personhood, and because they go beyond the benefit of the self, they are regarded as aspirational by those who hold them in high moral regard. Nevertheless, a failure to exude these exceptional moral features does not imply a failure to be a moral person. In fact, it is because they make interactions easier and more desirable that

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<sup>17</sup> In this thesis, I take good moral traits and good conduct to be socially construed in reference to their contribution to the well-being of others in the collective.

they are ideal. It can even be argued that the fact that moral exceptionalism is not so common proves that, although challenging, it is possible, which also makes moral merit even more admirable.

Moreover, a morally good person will be the one who: (1) produces good actions for themselves and for others; and (2) prevents, within their possibilities, those that are evil. Intuitively, a good person engages in actions that have useful, acceptable, and satisfactory outcomes and does so with the intent and desire to do so. Their actions will be morally good on purpose, devoid of the concepts of reward and self-beneficence. They will not seek to cause harm to others but rather to benefit the group as a whole. This is because, as a good person, this individual is concerned about the best interests of his group, and as a result, they avoid evil actions by not engaging in them and, within their limits, preventing others from engaging in them. This view is shared by Linda Zagzebski, who in her paper *Good Persons, Good Aims, and the Problem of Evil* explains that aiming to prevent evil is a more basic property and a fundamental condition for being a good person than simply producing good (Adams, 2017, p. 45). Her standpoint is based on the belief that preventing evil produces good by essentially avoiding evil from reaching someone, and thus, by doing (2), a good person is also producing (1) (ibid.).

It is crucial to note that actions are not considered right simply because they are performed by a good person. Rather, a person is deemed morally good because they consistently choose to engage in morally right acts. Therefore, moral goodness is not inherent in personhood but is linked to the consequential trend of one's actions. It becomes a potential moral credit attributed to a moral person under specific conditions, assessed through an overall judgment made retrospectively on their actions. Being a good person implies a level of moral excellence

that extends beyond personhood, exceeding the basic expectations of membership in a moral society. It suggests reaching a developmental stage where certain values and behaviors are internalized to the extent that one stands as a model of what it means to be a moral person. This perspective goes beyond merely adhering to moral rules, demanding an understanding of their significance, which can only be achieved through a genuine commitment to the ethos of group norms. In this context, the concept of a good person involves more than just following moral rules; it necessitates an intrinsic understanding of their importance. This understanding, rooted in a genuine commitment to the group's norms, means that certain actions have a pre-established moral significance, and the good person consistently chooses the morally right path. Endowed with prior knowledge of what constitutes the right action, as explained by the group or determined by what is beneficial, the good person actively selects actions aligned with moral goodness as he believes the benefit they bring to all.

Following the claims I made until this point, including the one referring to what it means to be a morally good person—made in this section—I now focus on the most significant issue of my work: how does one become a morally good person? This discussion is supposed to be an epistemological and virtue-ethics inquiry into how one becomes morally good. Throughout, I will assume that moral conduct, often seen as a reflection of a person's character, is crucial in determining their moral worth. Therefore, in the upcoming sections, I will explore two perspectives: one, that individuals have an innate tendency to act in certain ways, determining whether they will conform to norms, and two, that even if such tendencies exist, the inherent sociality of personhood requires individuals to suppress these tendencies and conform to norms to achieve the ideal interactive setting.



## **5. Becoming a morally good person: the nativist view**

In the previous sections, I discussed the concept of a person and argued that personhood is an achievement rather than a given because, even with all of the relevant capacities, one can still fail to become a person if he is isolated and does not interact with others. I argued that interactions provide the social and moral context required for the development and refinement of natural capacities emphasizing the social aspect that is implicit in personhood. I also argued that because people prefer to live in an environment where they do not worry about their safety, a moral system establishing interpersonal norms and codes of conduct becomes necessary as it will help achieve this ideal interactive setting.

In this section, I address the question of how one becomes a morally good person, and to answer that question, I present two approaches. The first approach, which I refer to as the nativist view, contends that a person's moral goodness stems from an inborn inclination to act in certain ways that, when matched to norms, are ideal. This concept goes beyond the mere capacity to act morally; it suggests disposition that can be actualized, or a 'naturally forced behavior' that, rather than being a learned response, is so deeply ingrained in a person that they cannot help but perform actions that, when society compares them to norms, are morally good. Consider, for instance, a person who, upon seeing a helpless child, experiences an overwhelming, unmotivated desire to help. This person acts not out of conscious adherence to moral norms but out of an innate discomfort with the child's suffering. They do not have in them the ability to ignore this child's condition and move on with their day. Their actions are driven by an inborn inability to ignore the child's plight, demonstrating how their inherent tendencies naturally align with morally acceptable behaviors.

Finding the nativist view insufficient, and to an extent inaccurate, I switch to the viewpoint I believe is more correct: the intuitive view. According to this view, one becomes morally good by acting in ways that conform to moral norms, insofar as these norms promote what advances the wellbeing of the collective. This implies that at times they may be required going against these norms if they fail to serve this purpose.

### The nativist view

According to this viewpoint, individuals have inherent tendencies to act in specific ways that are predetermined by nature and can exist independent of significant social influences. The actualization of these natural tendencies is integral to the nativist viewpoint. It implies that as they mature and interact with the world, a person becomes more adept at expressing their moral tendencies in ways that are consistent with their inherent predispositions. It is important to note that this viewpoint's argument is not based on the simple assertion that individuals have a natural ability to act morally, as that would be trivial. Instead, it asserts that certain behaviors, whether morally good or bad by societal standards, stem from an inborn disposition in some people. These behaviors extend beyond mere adherence to societal norms. They are kinds of compulsions that drive them to act in such ways, regardless of societal approval or rejection.

In this sense, one becomes a morally good person as a result of natural tendencies<sup>18</sup> that lead them to engage in morally good actions, thereby putting their inborn virtuous traits into practice in their daily lives. That is:

*If “q and p” are good moral traits and stand for good conduct;*

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<sup>18</sup> It is essential to define what is meant by "moral tendency." In this context, a moral tendency is an innate predisposition that compels people to engage in inherently good behaviors, regardless of external validation or societal norms. This predisposition is more than just the ability to act morally; it is an innate desire that drives a person to perform morally commendable actions as a natural response to certain situations.

*And X has a natural inclination to act and displays “q and p”;*

*Then X is naturally a moral good person.*

X is naturally inclined to “q and p” which happens to be morally acceptable conduct that involves actions like showing concern for others. Therefore, X is, by nature, a morally good person. In other words, for this view, a person’s moral quality derives from an inborn inclination within the person. In essence, a morally good person emerges from their natural tendency to be considerate of others and to act in ways that happen to be in accordance with moral laws. Good people, driven by an innate proclivity, tend to act in ways that are significantly good and considerate of others, as well as engage in actions that are generally regarded as morally good for the collective, without the need for such external incentives.

In alignment with this view, Plato argues in Republic that individuals have innate qualities that predispose them to certain virtues, such as justice, courage, and wisdom. In Books II and III, Socrates and his interlocutors, while delving into the nature of justice and the ideal city, posit that virtues, like justice, which enable a good life, are the excellency of the soul—which we are born with—and evil, on the other hand, is its defect (353). Later, in Book IV, where they discuss the concept of philosopher-rulers and their understanding of virtue, Socrates talks about how the guardians of the city should be virtuous and have good souls that are properly ordered. As he explains, a good man is one who has a good soul (409a), that people have an innate sense of justice, and that it is the duty of the state to foster and develop this innate virtue (Republic, 409/10). Socrates acknowledges nonetheless that these innate qualities must be cultivated and refined through education, highlighting the significance of both nature and, to some extent, nurture in individuals' moral development.

Hobbes also holds a belief in the existence of a natural predisposition within individuals toward certain behaviors. In *Leviathan* (1651)<sup>19</sup>, Thomas Hobbes asserts that humans were inherently selfish and violent beings, susceptible to a state of “Bellum omnium contra omnes,” or a war of all against all. Motivated by self-interest, individuals acted for their own self-preservation, even if it resulted in harm to others. According to Hobbes, humans, driven by self-preservation, were naturally inclined to engage in actions (such as war) that, upon the establishment of society, would be categorized as morally evil, while their opposite, peace, would be deemed morally good (ibid.). It is crucial to note that Hobbes did not explicitly argue that this inherent nature was also inherently immoral and evil, even in the state of nature; rather, he indicates that it acquired such moral status after the establishment of societal norms and a shared understanding of what constitutes good and evil based on general aversions and praises (Hobbes, 1651, p. 97/98). Hobbes' perspective relates to a hypothetical scenario where individuals live outside an organized society that establishes norms for an ideal existence. According to Hobbes, only a strong, rule-based government could restrain human behavior (Leviathan, 1651, Chapter XIII).

Another philosopher associated with the nativist viewpoint is David Hume. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, particularly his discussions of the involuntary nature of virtues (such as constancy, fortitude, magnanimity, and, in short, all the qualities that make up the great man) and the role of sentiments in human behavior (Book 3.3)<sup>20</sup> provide significant views that can be used to support the nativist viewpoint. Though he is not explicitly advocating this approach, his analysis of natural virtues and good moral traits such as sympathy and humility provides

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<sup>19</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. “Leviathan”. Chapter XIII: Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery

<sup>20</sup> Section IV: IV OF NATURAL ABILITIES

substantial support for the argument that certain moral tendencies are inherent and drive people to act in morally commendable ways regardless of external expectations. According to Hume, the ability to empathize with others and be moved by their plight is an inherent part of our psychological makeup rather than something learned or imposed by society (Book 3.3, Section 01). He writes: “Natural virtues and the good that results from them are the object of some natural passion... When I relieve persons in distress, my natural humanity is my motive, and so far as my succor extends, so far have I promoted the happiness of my fellow creatures” (ibid.). This view diverges from the more trivial assertion that individuals simply possess a general capacity to act morally. Instead, it emphasizes that certain individuals have a natural proclivity for behaviors that society deems morally good. Although societal approval or rejection may influence their realization, these behaviors are not contingent upon external validation or adherence to prescribed norms. Instead, they are originally prompted by innate dispositions that exist independently.

One of the criticisms directed at the nativist approach, which links a person's moral quality to natural inclinations, is that if moral excellence and moral deficit arise from an individual's nature, then normativity becomes an unconventional means of pressuring people to act in ways that may run counter to their moral tendencies. Essentially, if an individual, X, has a natural inclination to act in a certain manner, denoted as “*p*,” and if “*p*” is not permitted by moral norms, then X's natural tendency to “*p*” will be considered morally unacceptable. Enforcing “*not p*” could imply restricting X's moral inclinations to “*p*” and pressuring them to act against their moral nature, which urges them to “*p*”. Nonetheless, if this objection is false and the nativist approach is accurate, then individuals engaging in morally reprehensible conduct because it is in their nature may not deserve blame for their actions, as these actions could be

beyond their control<sup>21</sup>. However, considering that morality and moral principles are primarily directed at promoting the group's coexistence rather than personal gain, this view appears inaccurate. Norms are formulated and disseminated to achieve this collective primary goal. As explained in section 4, it is through morality that a community of persons develops conditions and rules for interaction, allowing certain actions to be censured or praised. Upon becoming a person, individuals gradually learn these norms, and being part of the collective implies a tacit consent to these guiding norms for actions in that society<sup>22</sup>.

Moreover, given that normativity is socially relative and subject to influences such as group dynamics, social norms, and environmental pressures, it is improbable for all humans to possess an unchanging moral compass dictating consistent behavior across all times and places<sup>23</sup>. Even within individual humans, the choice of actions changes over time, a phenomenon inconsistent with the notion of conduct being exclusively determined by an inherent moral

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<sup>21</sup> It could also be argued that the nativist viewpoint is incorrect, but for other reasons besides these, the objection is false. Nevertheless, that would still indicate that the intuitive view (to argue next) is correct because no one would challenge that inclinations are irrelevant. Being a member of the collective implies that the norms of the collective will always take precedence over individual inclinations for certain actions in order to pressure the person to act in ways that benefit the group.

<sup>22</sup> This primarily applies to individuals who have attained personhood, as discussed in previous sections. To demonstrate this viewpoint further, consider how we refrain from defining it as morally objectionable when a toddler makes comments about someone's appearance, even if there is a moral norm that advises against it. This nuanced approach is based on the recognition that, while toddlers are humans, they are still in the process of becoming persons, gradually familiarizing themselves with moral principles. However, the acceptability of such remarks changes as the child grows older and achieves full personhood. Comments like these, which were less objectionable prior to personhood, are not appropriate and possibly censurable for a person because it is assumed that there is a comprehensive understanding that certain comments are unnecessary and that certain thoughts should not be vocalized, given the potential harm to others, which is not in the group's best interests.

<sup>23</sup> This goes to the direction of what say in section 4 in which I hold moral relativism to be true. Consider, for example, the practices of personal hygiene among the Berber people in the desert and tropical communities in the Congo. The Berber people, residing in regions with scarce water resources, may consider infrequent showering as morally acceptable, reflecting the pragmatic need to conserve water. In contrast, individuals in tropical Congo may deem this a lack of hygiene and censurable, as unpleasant odors resulting from heat and moisture may cause discomfort to others. I use this example to illustrate that moral norms vary across contexts. This, in no way, implies the moral superiority of one practice over the other.

predisposition. In a scenario where individuals are solely guided by inherent moral inclinations, morally bad persons, for example, would consistently act badly as dictated by their nature. There would be no instances of individuals gaining new perspectives on the moral significance of certain actions. However, empirical observations reveal that people's moral behavior can undergo shifts as they acquire and internalize new moral principles, especially when existing principles undergo reevaluation. This suggests that when immersed in social interactions, their innate moral inclinations (even if they exist) become irrelevant, and persons must conform to the evolving norms of what is deemed right and wrong in that group. Therefore, it follows that the moral status of actions, as well as a person's moral worth arising from them engaging in such actions, is predominantly shaped by the changing norms established by the group over time, rather than being solely determined by innate factors.

## 6. The Intuitive View

The second alternative, the intuitive view, while it does not explicitly reject the role of natural tendencies, is unaffected by the concern that moral norms pressure people to act in ways that may contradict their moral tendencies, especially if the actions deriving from them are counter to the group's best interests. According to this viewpoint, a person becomes morally good by 1) adhering to social norms and 2) advancing the wellbeing<sup>24</sup> of the group, even in instances where moral norms may fall short in that regard. That is:

*If “q and p” are good moral traits and stand for good conduct;*

*And X has acts and displays “q and p” as they advance the wellbeing of the group;*

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<sup>24</sup> I hold Sumner's (1996) view that well-being as the state of being comfortable as true.: Sumner, L W. Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics. Clarendon Press.

*Then, X is a moral good person.*

According to this view, it matters not one's natural disposition to certain actions, given that morality can go in direct opposition to those. What truly matters is adherence to norms and whether the moral norms they are conforming to advance the wellbeing of the group or not. A good person is characterized by actions that manifest certain moral qualities and behaviors acknowledged by the group as positive or desirable. You are a good person in relation to the worth of your actions to and for the collective. Therefore, a morally good person will be one who consciously follows moral principles without expecting to receive moral merit, driven by consideration for the welfare of the group. He will make decisions based on the group principle and for the well-being of the group, avoiding discrimination or favoritism toward norms that solely benefit the individual at the expense of the broader community. Nevertheless, some norms can contradict their original purpose—that of making the ideal setting where people can generally feel at ease and have no fear for their wellbeing a reality.

As explained in earlier sections, moral norms are primarily intended to advance the general well-being of the group. Therefore, adhering to these norms should entail promoting the group's interests. Yet, due to the potential for incorrect judgments in formulating certain norms, there may be instances where norms fall short of this primary objective. Examples include moral norms supporting slavery, misogyny, apartheid, and similar issues. Acting against such norms remains in the best interests of the group and its general wellbeing, even if the group is unaware of it. This applies to individuals who, despite having personal advantages, choose to prioritize the group's interests and aim to establish an environment benefiting everyone collectively rather than a select few as permitted by social norms. Take Nelson Mandela, for instance. As a young lawyer in Apartheid South Africa, he could have chosen to focus only on his legal career despite



heavy segregation, likely enjoying better living conditions than most of his fellow countrymen enduring extreme misery.

However, he opted for the path of anti-apartheid activism, joining a movement classified as a terrorist organization at the time, ultimately leading to his imprisonment and costing him 28 years of his life. Furthermore, even after winning the presidency, he could have sought revenge on the former colonists or implemented reverse racism. Instead, he championed a path of prosperity for all, irrespective of past animosities and injustices. Despite numerous opportunities for self-service, Mandela exhibited qualities that promoted the best interests of his group through unwavering determination and commitment to a cause greater than himself. His consistent exemplary behavior made him a moral hero, earning moral merit by defying norms that did not align with this overarching goal, showcasing that a good person can be ahead of their time even in the face of unreasonable norms.

The moral merit attributed to Mandela implies that a good person prioritizes the group's well-being over strict adherence to societal norms. While these norms serve as a means to demonstrate their commitment to the group's welfare, the welfare of the group takes precedence. Another illustration of this prioritization is seen in the historical figure Marcus Brutus as portrayed in Shakespeare's fiction. In Shakespeare's accounts, Brutus was such an honorable and good person that he was forced to literally backstab and sacrifice his beloved friend Julius Caesar, whose dangerous ambition would become the doom of Rome if not stopped. Brutus, guided by good moral conduct, acted not only in accordance with the ideals and norms of friendship but, more importantly, in a manner beneficial to the group. Thus, being a good person may involve shifting the priority from merely adhering to norms to actively working for the group's welfare, even if it entails betraying a dear friend. Harman discusses the issue of norms

and the welfare of others in “Moral Relativism Defended” (1975), where he refers to people's intention to adhere to certain moral principles over others according to their relevance and understanding, which makes them tend to act in accordance with such principles without having to think about them (p. 11).

An example of this, as provided by Harman, is how we tend to value the principle of not harming others over the principle of helping others. Doctors, for instance, cannot sacrifice one healthy patient for five others who would benefit from this patient's organs. This would be the guaranteed harm to the life of someone who is clearly well for others whose lives are not guaranteed, and any professional who acts in this way will be considered a bad doctor. This view that places harm as worse than refusing to help others is the result of an implicit agreement reached by a process of mutual adjustment and bargaining that killing is worse than not saving (ibid., p. 13).

As aforementioned, since moral norms are just means to an end—which is generally the welfare of the collective, or realizing the ideal interactive environment—a morally good person will not act on unjust laws simply because they are the norm. This view is shared by John Stuart Mill (1906), who contends that unjust norms are those that benefit some while disadvantaging others and infringing on their rights (p. 65). Mill associates good norms with those of public benefit and utility, those that can promote others' happiness, and these are established by a moral system that takes into account the preferences and aversions of competent judges (1906, Chapter 2). Once these just norms are established, it is unjust, according to Mill, to violate them because that would be breaking the faith of engagement and thus disappointing the expectations that were voluntarily and knowingly raised by your group to guide your conduct for everyone's happiness (p. 67.). In this sense, a good person is one whose actions benefit the individuals who comprise

his world rather than just the individuals he is concerned about, unless that does not violate the rules and rights of the excluded individuals (1906, p. 27). Mill also refused to consider any natural mental disposition for being morally good or bad, or one whose predominant essence is to influence conduct that is outside norms of morality (p. 30).

Theologians also align with the common view, asserting that God has established laws categorizing some actions as honorable and deserving of reward, while others are deemed sinful and shameful and warrant eternal punishment unless one repents. Although these norms are not man-made but ordained by God, they serve the same primary purpose: the well-being of humanity. In this case, it is God who ensures that the norms consistently align with the overarching goal of everyone's well-being. A good person, according to this perspective, wholeheartedly follows these divine norms without questioning their reasonableness, confident that God will always ensure the welfare of His creations. Other philosophers sharing this view include Confucius and Hume. Confucius, as presented in his "Analects", argues for how a good person conforms to their community's moral standards and acts with no regard for external rewards.

Aristotle falls somewhere between the common and nativist perspectives. As he points out in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1102/04), while there may be innate factors that influence a person's moral behavior, moral goodness requires knowledge that can be cultivated through habit and learning. Thus, a good person is one who practices the knowledge of acting right, with the right person, in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way (1110/1111). A wicked person, on the other hand, is someone who is unaware of what he is doing, who he is doing with (e.g., a tool), who he is doing with (e.g., a company or targeted person), why he is doing it (e.g., for a purpose), and how he is doing it (e.g., gently or rudely) (1111a). According to Aristotle, a

good person is one who chooses well with knowledge and character actions for themselves by doing what is noble, useful, and pleasant and avoiding what is shameful, harmful, and painful (Nicomachean Ethics, 1105b). As a result, being a good person refers to one's ability to make choices that are right in feelings and actions and to what a wise person would regard as rational (ibid., 1107a). A morally good person is one who performs well when in between two choices: one of excess and the other of deficiency (ibid., Book 2, §09). Nonetheless, moral character is something that arises from rational choices of what is good and bad and according to the knowledge of what to avoid for being bad and obtain for being good (NE, Book 3, §02).

In this sense, a person's moral worth is not an inherent absolute quality but is tied to one's conduct that advances the wellbeing (or does not put it at risk) of others in the collective. Its assessment takes place within the framework of moral principles and societal norms, considering the impact of their conduct on the collective. Additionally, the determination of moral character involves a critical examination and appraisal of actions within the context of societal moral norms and their overarching goal. Thus, the possibility of being a good person is contingent on one's actions aligning with standards of acceptability, benefit, or, at the very least, non-detriment to the coexistence of others in society.

## **7. Criticism to the intuitive view**

There are three potential problems that may be raised against the intuitive approach and use them to argue that this approach is inadequate. Those are: (a) it lacks a solution for changes in norms that guide the moral conduct over time; (b) it is susceptible to external factors that can cloud the perception of one's true conduct; and (c) and there is no way for ensuring that the so-

called "morally good person" truly embraces the norms that he is acting on. In this section, I address and explain how these worries may not be a problem for the view.

For the first concern, a) refers to the potential for change in a person's moral worth over time and place. Given that moral norms are subjective and may vary according to the determinations of each society, how can one be consistently considered morally good? Unless we accept that no person is absolutely or consistently morally good—which would imply moral goodness is a quality that can be attained universally—moral goodness must be viewed as a restricted quality that can be attained at a given moment or in a specific place and possibly reversed in other contexts. The reevaluation of historical figures once lauded for their moral excellence serves as a poignant example of this phenomenon. Consider, for instance, living during a period when racial segregation was morally acceptable. Advocating for desegregation and taking an integrationist stance would have been diametrically opposed to the prevailing norms of the time. Such actions could have rendered those who opposed segregation morally dubious and even harmful to the community. However, as society evolves and revises its moral compass to promote inclusivity and improve the living conditions of previously marginalized groups, the moral value and significance of certain actions change. Former moral heroes who championed outdated norms, such as segregation, and were considered morally upright can now be morally discredited in this revised ethical framework. Conversely, individuals who stood up against dominant norms and were morally sanctioned, such as abolitionist figures, emerge as moral champions.

This highlights that, within this view, good moral personhood is not an absolute state but is contingent on one's alignment with the dominant norms of their era. The intuitive view does not account for how individuals from the past, who may have been considered morally good by

the standards of their time, can be reevaluated and potentially vilified by evolving contemporary values. Recent controversies over the removal of Confederate statues illustrate how societal perspectives on morality can shift dramatically, recasting individuals once regarded as moral paragons into moral reprehensibility. In the face of evolving norms, these individuals, who may have believed they were upholding norms for the benefit of their group, are now condemned as embodiments of racial evil, even though they acted in accordance with the norms of their time. Thus, good moral personhood in this sense becomes dependent on the dominant norms of a particular time and place.

Responding to this objection, it is essential to understand that the intuitive view does not advocate for blind adherence to existing norms. Instead, it emphasizes the significance of norms that truly benefit the group. Therefore, one does not become a morally good person simply by following current norms without critically evaluating them and, possibly, deviating from them whenever they fail to serve the overarching goal of an ideal interactive setting. This view allows for good moral personhood to be adequate for those who, in the face of faulty principles, can act as moral forerunners. It becomes appropriate for individuals who, despite existing in a context with flawed or harmful norms, identify these shortcomings and advocate for better norms that promote a healthier, more just society. Consider historical figures who advocated for civil rights in an era when segregation was the norm. Although their actions deviated from prevailing societal standards, their commitment to improving the well-being of marginalized groups is consistent with the intuitive view's central tenet: promoting the collective good whenever the norms fail to do so. By this account, the intuitive view allows for the actualization of moral norms and the reassessment of historical figures. It asserts that true moral goodness entails not

only adhering to current norms but also the ability to critically evaluate and, if necessary, challenge these norms in order to better serve the collective welfare.

The second objection (b) expresses concern that following moral norms may not always be sufficient to achieve moral goodness. This is a two-fold concern: (1) we frequently choose which actions contribute to moral worth, overlooking others, and (2) individuals can violate norms and still be highly regarded morally based on external factors. One part of this objection is that we often selectively consider which actions contribute to moral worth based on their proximity to the person. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi is widely regarded as a paragon of kindness, peace, and freedom due to his philosophy of nonviolent non-cooperation that led to India's independence. However, he also allegedly assaulted children to test his celibacy vow and advocated for apartheid against South Africans. These actions would typically be considered morally reprehensible. Despite this, Gandhi's high moral regard remains intact, even among those directly affected by his actions. His role in advocating for peaceful independence seems to outweigh his predatory behavior and racism. In this case, Indians may disassociate Gandhi's support for apartheid and his sexual abuses from his crucial role in India's independence. They might argue that his efforts in India are more relevant and influential than his views on race and the age of consent. Conversely, South Africans who faced racial discrimination and oppression may find it difficult to appreciate Gandhi's contributions to India's independence, given his opposition to their struggle. Gandhi's support for apartheid could be seen as a betrayal of the principles for which they fought, overshadowing his contributions to India's freedom movement. Individuals and communities often prioritize certain aspects of a person's character or actions based on their own experiences and proximity to the person. This selective emphasis results in commendable actions being spotlighted while nefarious ones are overlooked. Similarly, when

evaluating moral demerit, any potential positive actions by the individual are often dismissed. That is, if X did p and q, where p is good and q is bad, and q had more and worse effects than p, which affected you and your society directly, you can tend to judge X unfavorably and discredit him morally. Consider figures like Jeffrey Dahmer, for instance. Even if, during non-violent periods, he extended help to those in dire need, the prevailing narrative fixates solely on his coldblooded infliction of harm, disregarding any instances of benevolence.

The other part of this objection is that external factors can also cause some people's morally upright actions to be disregarded. Stereotypes and biases can lead to certain individuals never being morally credited by the group, regardless of their consistency with ethical standards. Conversely, some individuals may remain relatively unpunished even when violating norms. For example, if a person is a national of a Middle Eastern country such as Afghanistan, their moral goodness can be denied solely based on their nationality, despite their actions aligning with moral principles. Religion is another factor that can counteract the intuitive belief that a morally good person is one whose actions correspond to moral norms. For example, individuals who act immorally might seek to manipulate the assessment of their moral worth by asserting their religious identity, such as by declaring "I am a Christian," hoping to dispel the negative moral connotations associated with their actions. By doing so, they aim to convince others that their religious identity alone should qualify them for moral excellence, suggesting their actions should be exempt from scrutiny, even if they contradict established norms and the interests of the group. Political affiliation is another external factor influencing moral assessment. Belonging to a specific political party, whether conservative or liberal, can disqualify individuals from being considered morally good, as affiliation with certain groups is associated with contemptible attitudes. For example, conservatives may jokingly say they would rather be Russians than



liberals, and liberals may say they would rather be Americans than conservatives, implying that political associations dictate moral character.

Responding this objection, we can argue that the selective consideration of actions is not necessarily problematic for the view that moral goodness is determined by adherence to norms and the advancement of group wellbeing. If certain actions are indeed of greater significance, it is both reasonable and necessary to weigh them more heavily when determining one's moral character. For instance, Gandhi's advocacy for peace and freedom for Indians had far-reaching positive effects, making it more significant than his assaulting children and racism, which are moral wrongs on their own. Furthermore, the intuitive view holds that a person's moral goodness is contingent on their actions advancing the wellbeing of the group and promoting the ideal interactive environment. Thus, if the problem is that, when evaluating behavior, certain negative actions are ignored or overshadowed by more significant positive contributions, even assuming this is due to the proximity to the person being considered, this does not indicate a flaw in the view itself. Instead, it may reflect a failure by the group to fully consider all aspects of an individual's behavior. Thus, the view remains robust, as it emphasizes the importance of holistic evaluation and the advancement of group wellbeing.

Additionally, we can argue that while external factors may influence moral evaluations, the intuitive view focuses on the alignment of actions with norms and the advancement of group wellbeing. In the case of stereotypes and biases, the view acknowledges that true moral evaluation requires looking beyond superficial attributes and focusing on actions. For religion, Christianity holds that moral right and wrong are determined by God, and this does not clearly conflict with the view that a morally good person is one whose actions align with group norms and interests. Moreover, political associations, while impactful, should be understood within the

context of group norms. Just like in cases where people select favorable actions because of proximity, focusing on unfavorable actions because of irrelevant associations does not undermine the view itself but rather indicates the need for a more thorough and balanced evaluation process.

The third objection to the intuitive view concerns cases in which people appear to align with moral norms, creating the illusion of moral integrity, but underneath the surface are moral impostors. Consider the hypothetical case of Charles, a neighbor who created a false moral image that, because it was deceptively sustained and undiscovered, was misinterpreted as genuine moral goodness within the intuitive framework. Assume that, while ostensibly adhering to norms, he is holding people captive in his basement. Fortunately, one of them escapes and informs the authorities, leading to his arrest. Now that his non-adherence to norms has been discovered, his community is forced to reconsider the moral worth attributed to him based on his past apparent norm adherence. The issue is that a person can skillfully project a fabricated image of moral goodness while deviating from genuine adherence to moral standards and still remain highly regarded. This deception is possible because the intuitive standpoint appears to follow a consequentialist model of moral credit, referring to actions that are consistent with good norms and are thought to benefit the group's wellbeing. Recognizing the societal benefits of having good moral worth and understanding how that can personally affect them, individuals may feel compelled to fake good behavior. Another inherent challenge to this viewpoint is that moral character is internal and only revealed through observable actions. Unexpressed thoughts or hidden actions are inaccessible, so we cannot fully demonstrate concern and commitment when assessing moral standing. That is why, despite being aware of the social consequences of

engaging in morally reprehensible behavior, people may decide to conceal their unfavorable actions.

In response to this objection, I argue, first, that the concerns raised by the objection are not necessarily in conflict with the viewpoint. According to the intuitive view, a morally good person follows social norms and promotes the group's well-being. If a person, such as Charles, only pretends to follow these norms, then they are not a good person, according to the intuitive view. Not only is Charles not following norms, but by holding people hostage, he is not promoting the desirable interactive environment that the views advocate. His deception only creates the illusion of moral goodness, which is based on the community's limited knowledge. Second, the case of Charles is based on a false contrast that implies that either Charles was truly good or that the intuitive view was flawed because it allowed him to appear good. However, a more plausible alternative is that Charles' neighbors did not have all of the relevant information about his true actions due to their limited epistemic capacity. This lack of complete information does not imply that their idea of a morally good person is incorrect. It simply means they were misled by insufficient evidence. The community's determination was based on the information available to them, and their acceptance of Charles as morally good was contingent on their comprehension of his actions.

Furthermore, this objection addresses the concern that the intuitive view is based on a consequentialist model of moral credit. While the view acknowledges that outcomes and adherence to norms are indicators of moral goodness, it does not account for hidden or deceptive behaviors. The community's initial positive assessment of Charles was based on observable actions that appeared to be consistent with moral norms and beneficial to the group. Once his true actions are revealed, the community must properly evaluate his moral standing. In addition,

the objection emphasizes an inherent difficulty in evaluating moral character: moral character is internal and can only be revealed through observable behaviors. This limitation does not apply only to the intuitive view but to any framework of moral evaluation. External assessment cannot assess unexpressed thoughts or hidden actions. The inability to access these hidden aspects does not undermine the intuitive viewpoint; rather, it emphasizes the complexities of moral evaluation in practice.

### **Conclusion**

The choice of this topic for my master's thesis stems from my interest in how social interactions shape our experiences as persons and social beings. Therefore, in this paper, I discussed what defines a person, the implicit sociability of personhood, and the need for norms of conduct to guide persons in their inherent interactions. I argued that personhood is an achievement, not a given, and it requires interaction with others to develop fully. This means that humans, as beings who have the potential for personhood because of their rational capacities, must learn from those who are already persons.

Furthermore, I explored the idea that personhood is a dynamic process rather than a static state. It can be attained and maintained through the continuous application of rationality, moral judgment, and social engagement. Conversely, it can also be lost if these abilities are severely limited or compromised, as seen in cases of severe cognitive impairments or profound psychological disorders. I also supported the view that these norms serve as a guiding framework that outlines acceptable behavior within a community. Being a member of such a community entail allowing oneself to be governed by these norms, and acting in accordance with these norms is interpreted as reflecting one's moral character. This concept of moral character enables

those who interact with you as a person to anticipate your behavior and address you appropriately.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that the development of personhood emerges not solely from individual capacities but from continuous, dynamic interaction with a social framework that fosters norms of conduct. Moreover, I advanced the notion that adherence to societal norms, coupled with the promotion of collective welfare, is pivotal in enabling individuals to become morally good. I also delved into the process by which one becomes a morally good person, and I argued that a person's inclination toward certain actions is irrelevant unless it can be matched with norms that advance the wellbeing of the group. This is in reference to the intuitive view, which proposes that moral goodness arises from acting in ways that conform to moral norms and promote the collective good. This perspective emphasizes the importance of social interactions and the internalization of community norms in developing moral personhood. It also acknowledges that deviations from norms may be necessary when these norms fail to serve their intended purpose, suggesting that moral goodness is a product of active engagement with the moral framework of one's society.

In addressing objections to the intuitive view, such as the potential for individuals to deceptively project a false image of moral goodness, the thesis argues that moral character is internal and revealed through observable actions. The limitations in evaluating moral character based on incomplete information do not undermine the validity of the intuitive view but highlight the challenges inherent in any framework of moral evaluation and the epistemic limits people have in assessing true moral adherence. In conclusion, I sought to demonstrate throughout this thesis that the development of personhood is inextricably linked to societal norms and

interactions. These norms act as a scaffold, guiding individuals through their moral and ethical development; the pinnacle of these interactions in this context is good moral personhood.

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