

# Essay on is the 'partible person' a useful way to think about personhood

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



## Introduction

Since the dawn of social persona into archaeology, a debate has started to ensue between societies of formation and the individuals that resulted from them. The relationship between societies and individuals featured post-processual and processual archaeology in Scandinavia and in English speaking nations as well. The ongoing debate has yielded massive implications for the studies performed on individuals and identities in prehistory. Just recently, the focus has veered from the bounded individual to the partible and dividual person of the agency or personhoodc (Busby, 1997, p. 270).

Awareness should be given to the autonomous and to the cosmological/rational relational aspects of the person. Autonomous refers to the individual and cosmological/rational relational refers to dividual (Mosko, 2010, p. 230). Personhood has been the state or the condition as a person (Radin, 1982, p. 991). Persons, in context, ar maintained, altered, de-constituted, and constituted in various social practices throughout existence and even after death. It involves dynamic changes and transformations that a person has to undergo (Harre, 1998, p. 71). The concept also relays to the fact that people may pass through from one stage to another through various relationships that are not exclusive to fellow humans. It also requires relationships with spiritual entities, animals, places, and things (Dennett, 1988, p. 152).

The subject of dividual perception focuses on the subject that each individual is a complex combination of others' actions and various substances. It also suggests that each individual is comprised of the relations and things

received from others. The things could be animals or objects incorporated by society through exchange. Isn't it that when a burial takes place, all objects significant to the person is placed around the coffin or tomb? This only means that the person who dies is actually dispersed into the material or social world. It has been said that the deceased person only becomes complete during this burial ceremony because everything that the person has or has something to do with him is gathered for everyone to appreciate. Personhood, is neither stable nor fixed. It is an artifact that marks the manipulation of relationship through possessions especially those that represent wealth (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 63).

This paper aims to see if, despite the given literary evidences, the partible person is a useful way to think about personhood.

## **Modes of Personhood**

### The Western Perception

Generally, people are composed of relationships with fellow humans, animals, objects, or ancestors. Since this concept has been established, persons have dedicated parts of their beings to others. Marriage and burial rites principles have always proven this. The perception of permeable and partible personhood in Asian culture is very different from the Western one. In Western beliefs, the individual is considered as a self-contained, autonomous, and basically a whole person. Both dividual and individual personhood modes exist at the same time. A person in the West is considered as a self-moving, embodying the distinct characteristics of capitalism. Everyone is aware that the West is comprised of capitalist

communities or societies that featured the person as transhistorical or natural and as a being composed of both dividual and individual aspects. There is usually a double character involved in the Western perception of an individual. In Melanesia, the items are usually distributed by community and by kinship, through domination and power. Thw West had items made of capitalist societies (Battaglia, 1983, p. 391). Labor was the main focus in the West. This activity replaced feasts, rites, and ceremonies where verious items were acquired through exchange (Lattas, 1992, p. 39). There came a new form and shape of interdependence that appeared, wherein one's work efforts were needed to obtain items from others. This has very well liberated an individual from lineage dependence (Sampson, 1985, p. 1210). The person per se became self-shaping, independent, and self-contained. Here, the gradual development of economic and social conditions resulted to individuality.

The subject's separation from the environment was usually associated with individualization and the advanced mastery of technology over Mother Nature. This allowed the subject to lose human relations and to see nature as no longer representative of humans.

## **The Image of Man**

These days, it may be difficult to realize that the human qualites related to by means of individuality are not provided by nature. Instead, they are developed from biological raw materials honed during the occurrence of the social process. More and more people become dependent on one another because of the increasing differentiation and specialization of various

societies. The differentiation results to the development of individuals who grow separate from each other. Thus, social control needs to be practiced. The internalization of self-control also needs to be increased. Control of nature, self control, and social control comprise the chain ring that has an interconnected use. This becomes the pattern in observing human affairs (Hélène Joffe, 2007, p. 400). If one of the links in the chain ring collapses, the other side cannot develop further.

## **Personhood in General**

There have been authorities who suggested that personhood should not be converted to reductionist dichotomes or categories of essentialists such as non-Western relationality or sociocentrism or Western individualism. It is more of a process that allows interaction rather than a fixed social grid. Personhood was molded by various social practices. One example is the understanding of gender variations. It had been perceived that this depended on the fluid exchange between social norm and personhood. A vast range of possible combinations lied in between individualistic and relational sense of personhood. These combinations were not made similarly for people who belonged in one social group.

Various types of personhood were engaged in plant-gathering, hunting, herding, farming, loughing, stone tool-making, basket-making, dairy product making, or house painting. These skills showed that the dynamic nominalism explained how diversified human acts and humans converged with the means of naming them. The continuous interactions and interrelations between classes and labels created every type of human. When a group of

people was classified under a specific label, that group automatically acted intentionally according to what the label dictated. The actions performed were then transformed into the supposed set of norms for that particular group.

## **The Heroic Society**

A human group or agency in a heroic society back then had a main purpose and that was to acquire goods needed for feasting, fighting, or hunting. A whole village or group that won a particular battle enjoyed a feast or was rewarded for the successful kill so that their glory could increase. This was also performed to ensure reliability and fidelity with one another and with their allies. The morality that existed in every individual was required to match the morality within the group. This has always been how moral standards were viewed and made. In every group, the individuals were programmed with fixed roles given by their ranks within their social networks or kinship. The heroic societies created the individuals that comprised them. The person or individual did not have the choice. An individual's essence was determined by the established statuses and roles. This was a system that helped the individual know what was owed to him and what he owed as well. Abstract rules were not used to establish morality in terms of objective rules that are equally applied to everyone in the group. In this type of society, if the person chose to be placed outside of it, then that person will not exist anymore. It was a society wherein choosing not to be part of the system was deemed similar to choosing not to be a part of the society or social circle. This proved that the person's individuality and identity was only

valid if maintained within the society. With this understanding, every person remembered the obligations set. These were meant to be followed or accomplished consistently until death.

## **Standards and Rules**

In the past, there were standards and rules of morality that were established. These sets of standards have remained binding to this very day. It has always been believed that the self cannot be detached from the entire structure of the formed society, together with its tradition and history. The set traditions, conditions, and codes were the main ingredients in determining one's past agency or personhood. Personhood this way was understood as fluid but cemented in traditions, history, and social relations. Several relationships had to be examined. First, the relationship between the individual and the given age, kin, social community, and sex group. Second was the relationship with "other" (distant or neighboring cultural groups). Third, the relationships between the individual and supernatural entities such as spirits or gods. Fourth, the relationship between the person and surrounding objects (inanimate or animate). Fifth was the relationship between the person and the all-natural world (animals and humans).

## **Os Resectum**

Os resectum, a Roman practice for burying the dead, and body parts are greatly considered. An example given was a metacarpal bone. Festus noted that the metacarpal bone should be severed from the corpse before cremation for post cremation obsequies. With this, Cicero declared that the severed metacarpal bone should be buried. Varro said that the bone should

not be included in the purifying ceremony for the household. By then, the household kept on mourning until the family buried the bone. In *os resectum* the status of everyone who participated is changed. The personhood of both the death and the living transforms on the 9th day of the liminal period. This was the time when the house was still impure. After the period, all parties would gain new personas and new relationships. It was included that the ancestors should always be remembered so that they won't frighten or terrorize their living descendants.

### **Should the Partible Person Reign?**

Personhood is one's existence. Eastern and Western societies have existed separately and have developed different perceptions towards a person's individuality. To the Eastern beliefs, a person should be a partible person, meaning the person always remained as a part of the existing society. Every single task or behavior is related or dependent of what that particular society dictated. A person could not make any formed decisions unless the entire group affirmed it. If a decision was made against the favor of the entire group, then that person would be considered an outcast.

On the other hand, the Western groups believed that a person is totally independent or separate from the entire society. That individuals have spoken words and motion actions that did not conform with the rest of society. However, they believed that a person could also conform with the rest of the group. Both individual and dividual personhoods exist in the West. This enabled the person to be stronger in mind and in body. If ever the group



decides to go separate ways, anyone belonging to the group could still survive and go on with their lives.

## **Conclusion**

Presently, the partible person is not a useful way of thinking about personhood. This is because of the fact that individuals should stand by their beliefs and fight for them especially when principles or values are at stake. There could be times when important decisions have to be made and it may not be possible for an entire group to be present in making a consensus. This would then prompt the individual to make the best choice for the greater good or oftentimes, for his personal good. In time, many traditional societies will realize that the individual and dividual personhoods could coexist, without compromising the established cultures. They may also come to accept that the strength of one person could be the key to ultimate change and improvement for all.

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