What can philosophy contribute to the study of personhood

Philosophy

What can philosophy contribute to the study of personhood? Should philosophers seek to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for applying the concept of personhood, or should we seek to provide a descriptive analysis of the attitudes adopted when we treat someone as a person in practice? Why so? Philosophy plays a great role in the study of personhood and this study of personhood is labeled to be extremely important because it assists in the identification of a " person". It also allows the differentiation of a " person" from other living beings. Various definitions of personhood have been laid down in philosophy and the concept of personhood has also evolved and changed over the years. The initial definition of personhood did not classify females, slaves as well as certain underprivileged populations as " persons". The analysis and work of the philosophers led to the eradication of such misconceptions and led to explain the meaning of what a " person" is. Certain controversies still exists over the definition and understanding of personhood (Merrill 51; Kittay 101). Philosophy can contribute to the study of personhood by providing a unanimous and understandable definition of a " person" and provide for concepts which are accepted by the medical, legal and the religious community. The definition of a " person" has been a matter of debate but a large group of philosophers agree to the fact that not all human beings can be classified as a " person." Thus, they explain that only being born as a human does not identify an individual as a " person." Not only this, a human being cannot be classified as a " person" if he possesses only the ability to feel the sensations of " pain or pleasure." There are other criterions which need to be fulfilled for this purpose. Many philosophers contend on the fact

that the possession of intellectual capabilities along with the presence of morals as well as the capability to understand logic and act with reason classifies an individual as a " person." A few philosophers further extend the definition of personhood and demand the presence of the understanding of moral reasoning and ethics for classifying someone as a " person." Thus, a definite consensus amongst philosophers has not been attained with regard to the definition of a " person." (Canton 17, 18). The study of philosophy and more advanced research can help in reaching to a consensual definition of a " person" and provide for differentiating between a " person" and other beings. Philosophers should seek to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for applying the concept of personhood. This is because the concept of personhood is an important one in philosophy and it has evolved over the years. The study of personhood has become clearer and philosophers have started to understand and explain its concept. From the point that even women were not considered to be a " person" the definition has now reached to a point where philosophers have started to classify a person as a rational and sensible being. Controversies still exist like the issue of abortion. This is because philosophers claim that a fetus is a not a " person" as it does not have sense of judgment and the ability to take decisions. Thus pro-abortionists use the claim of the philosophers to justify the act of abortion as they argue that a fetus is not a " person." (Kittay 101, 104). The analysis of personhood should be done by the philosophers rather than by us as this would assist in setting a universal criterion for the recognition of a " person." This would lead to resolve several conflicts that exist in the society. The example of the mentally challenged individuals is

perfect. The definition of personhood excludes the mentally disabled people. This exclusion means that they do not exist as " persons" but there are arguments that despite of the fact that they have a low intellectual level, these mentally challenged people should be treated as persons and given their rights. This is the moral and ethical requirement of a society. This issue is again unresolved and a definite answer of personhood is not achieved here (Canton 20, 23). The concept of personhood is not only of importance for the philosopher but his subject is of significance for people belonging to other fields which include the medical and the legal fields. Philosophy can contribute to this study by providing definitive answers regarding the issue of personhood and the individuals who can be truly classified as persons. This would resolve many arguments and debates that exist. A unanimous approach to dealing with matters would be possible only if philosophical answers are attained and conditions are laid for the definition of a " person". Thus philosophers should be the ones to provide the conditions of personhood. This would prevent ambiguity and everyone would follow a single approach. This would be fruitful in important cases of the legal field like abortion and medical professionals would be aware as to how they should classify the mentally challenged individuals. Works Cited Cantor, Norman L. Making Medical Decisions for the Profoundly Mentally Disabled. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005. Print. Kittay, Eva F. At the Margins of Moral Personhood. 2005. University of Chicago. Web. 30 Sep. 2013. Merrill, Sarah B. Defining Personhood: Toward the Ethics of Quality in Clinical Care. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. Print.