

What is a human being? The evolution of 'personhood'

It is at the intersection between psychology and the social sciences (as well as humanities and [philosophy](#)) that we find one of the most central problems in the academy, which pertains to the question of what is a person?

This question is directly taken up in Professor Christian Smith's excellent work, [*What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life and the Moral Good From the Person Up*](#).

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Smith puts the issue as follows:

The central idea in personalism that is relevant for my argument is deceptively simple. This is the belief that human beings are persons.

...

The question thus emerges regarding what Christian means by a person. Through a long series of detailed and powerful arguments, Christian delineates how personhood has emerged in evolutionary and social history and consists of a long list of intersecting capacities. Ultimately, he comes to define persons as follows:

By person I mean a conscious, reflective, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable [identity](#), moral commitment, and social communication who—as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions—exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own communicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and the nonpersonal world.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)