

# Personhood-Centered Reasoning



*A person is someone with a special moral status.*

In everyday speech, the terms “person” and “human” are interchangeable, but in philosophy the term “**person**” (a moral entity) does not mean the same thing as “**human**” (an individual member of the species *homo sapiens*).

## Which humans are persons and thus have moral status?

### Endowment Theories

Personhood is endowed by your nature. It results naturally from what you are.

*All X's are persons.  
Therefore, if you are an X,  
you are a person.*

Endowment theories take for granted statements, like:

- If human, you are a person.
- If plant, you are not a person.
- If inorganic, you are not a person.

### Function Theories

Personhood results from abilities, what you can do now or could do in the future.

*All things with X ability are persons.  
Therefore, if you have X ability,  
you are a person.*

Function theories use different abilities as criteria for personhood, like:

- Reason
- Will
- Usefulness
- Consciousness
- Capacity for pain
- Self-awareness

## Is an unborn child a person?

### Endowment Theories

#### Confer Personhood:

*If you are a living human, you are a person.  
An unborn child is a living human.  
Therefore, an unborn child is a person.*

#### Deny Personhood:

*Only living humans who have been born are persons.  
An unborn child has not been born.  
Therefore, an unborn child is not (yet) a person.*

### Function Theories

#### Confer Personhood:

*If you have the capacity for reason, you are a person.  
An unborn child has the capacity for reason.  
Therefore, an unborn child is a person.*

#### Deny Personhood:

*Only humans who actively possess reason are persons.  
An unborn child does not actively possess reason. Therefore, an unborn child is not (yet) a person.*