SENIOR THESIS

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Who are we? What are we? What is our essence, our nature? Is there a distinction between what it means to be “human” and what it means to be a “person?” These are important questions to consider when seeking the truth about our personhood and what it means to be human. These questions have been pondered in many different schools of thought, including scientific, religious, and in particular philosophical thought. The word “philosophy” comes from two Greek words, “philo” and “sophis” literally meaning “the love of wisdom.” Wisdom has been described as the knowledge of fundamental principles and laws that are unchanging. Philosophy has been referred to as the searching of these basic principles of life. Stewart formulates a definition of philosophy as “the attempt to provide for oneself an outlook on life based on the discovery of broad, fundamental principles” (Stewart 1).

There are different branches of philosophy that focus on different subject areas. For example, Epistemology studies the philosophy of knowledge and asks the question, “how do we know anything?” Aesthetics studies the philosophy of art and asks the question, “What is art?” Another area of philosophy, which we will examine later, is known as Ethics tries to answer the question, “What are we to do?” However, the branch of philosophy of most importance here is Metaphysics. Metaphysics, initially referred to as “first philosophy” is the area of philosophy that tries to answer the question, “What is reality.” It is often thought of as a starting point for all other areas of philosophy. For example, “before one could reasonably speculate on the fate of the soul after death, one would first have to determine if there is a soul. In this sense Metaphysics was seen as the most fundamental part of philosophy, presupposed by all the rest” (Stewart 85). Metaphysics addresses the question of our personhood by looking at the differences between the material body and the immaterial mind and by debating various
metaphysical theories about which is the true reality. It is important to determine what it means to a “person” because:

1. Our evident separation from other species on earth, through our self-awareness, sets us apart and makes us extraordinary.

2. Our personal identity, which sets us apart from other individuals of our species, also shows our unique and special character. As a result, these special qualities make noteworthy, certain ethical decisions involving persons.

3. The topic of Bioethics including beginning-of-life decisions and end-of-life decisions such as abortion and euthanasia also become significant.

4. It is important to determine what it means to be a “person” because it leads to contemplation of an after-life and potential resurrection at the end of time.

These four main reasons will be discussed in detail throughout this paper, but it is first important to look at what some common conceptions are what a person is.

The distinction between the mind and the body, which has been a topic of debate among many philosophers and theologians for centuries is the core of the so called “mind-body problem” has never truly been solved. What then, is the mind-body problem? The “mind-body problem” refers to the consideration of the nature of the human mind and whether it is material or immaterial (Stewart 137). Although this problem has been the root of many philosophers’ search for the truth, others do not think it is even necessary to discuss it as a “problem.” The question then arises: Is the mind-body problem and the idea of personal identity worth studying? This author would argue yes, the mind-body problem and the idea of personal identity are worth studying because it is the discussion of the difference between the “body” and the “mind” and what this distinction means for the human person and the meaning of life. Is the mind
immaterial or is the material body the only true “self?” Campbell, in his book *Body and Mind*, examines four propositions that make up the mind-body problem:

1. The human body is a material thing.
2. The human mind is a spiritual thing.
3. Mind and body interact.
4. Spirit and matter do not interact.

Additionally, he makes the assertion that only three of these propositions can fit together and be true, thus causing the fourth statement to be false. This conclusion is known as the “inconsistent tetrad” (Campbell 15). Nevertheless, in order to fully understand the problem, the concepts of both “body” and “mind” must be fully defined and understood.

The body is the physical part of a human -- the material part subject to the physical laws of nature. It is the “mass of matter whose weight is your weight” as Campbell describes (2). It is the atoms, molecules, cells, and organs that make up the 11 different body systems, which all work together and are interconnected. Of particular importance is the brain, spinal cord and nervous system. The nervous system controls motor organs, such as voluntary movement associated with skeletal muscle, involuntary movement associated with smooth muscle such as the stomach, in addition to glands and other secretory organs. Neurons are the cells that make up the nervous system which unlike other cells of the body actually do not undergo cell division. They conduct electrical impulses and transmit information throughout the body. These electrical impulses are all the result of varying ion concentrations inside and outside of the cell, which cause voltage changes throughout the body of the cell that allow the signals to be transmitted. Specifically, the cell has a higher concentration of positive sodium ions on the outside of the cell as compared to the inside, and a higher concentration of positive potassium ions on the
inside of the cell as opposed to the outside of the cell. Usually, molecules like to move “down” their concentration gradient in order to be of equal concentration on both sides. However in this case there is an active transporter that, when using energy, constantly pushes sodium ions out of the cell, and potassium ions into the cell. Additionally, since the cell membrane is selectively permeable and will not let many things cross its barrier, the sodium ions are not able to move down their gradient back into the cell. However, the membrane is slightly “leaky” to the potassium ions which allows some potassium to leak outside of the cell, thus causing the inside of the cell to be slightly negative as compared to the outside of the cell that contains many positive ions. This voltage disparity, known as the potential difference, becomes important when neural impulses are being conducted.

The neurons themselves consist of a cell body (soma), an axon and dendrites, which are the region of the cell that receives the impulse. The axon transmits the information through the cell to the cell body and out through the axon terminal. From here the signal, causes a voltage change in the axon terminal, causing the release of a neurotransmitter from the “pre-synaptic neuron” into what is known as the synaptic cleft. This specific neurotransmitter, acetylcholine in the example of skeletal muscle neural impulses, then binds to receptors on the post-synaptic neuron causing the influx of positive sodium ions. This changes the voltage of the inside of the cell from negative to positive. Once the voltage reaches the “threshold” potential the impulse can occur again down the post-synaptic neuron. However, this event, known as the “action potential” is an “all-or-nothing” event. If the voltage does not reach a particular voltage known as “threshold” an impulse will not occur. However, as soon as it does reach threshold, an action potential will occur instantly.
There are two main divisions of the nervous system; the Central Nervous System (CNS) and the Peripheral Nervous System (PNS). The CNS consists of the brain and spinal cord. The PNS consists of the accompanying nerves, ganglia and sensory structures that help connect the CNS to the rest of the body, and is further divided into the somatic nervous system (voluntary) and autonomic nervous system (involuntary). The brain in particular is the relay center of the entire nervous system, which is why it is well-protected by a thick, bony skull. The brain exclusively uses glucose and oxygen for metabolism. Glucose is not stored by the brain, therefore blood-glucose levels must be regulated which is why it is important that we maintain proper glucose levels in our diet. Low blood glucose levels can result in confusion, mood changes, and visual effects. The main part of the brain, the cerebrum, consists of two hemispheres with a band, known as the corpus callosum, which interconnects the two (VanPutte). Additionally, each cerebral hemisphere contains four different lobes: the frontal lobe, the temporal lobe, the occipital lobe and the parietal lobe. The frontal lobe is responsible for much of conscious thought and executive decisions. The temporal and occipital lobes mainly house the primary auditory cortex and primary visual cortex respectively. The parietal lobe is mainly involved in integrating sensory information and some visuospatial processing. Moreover, another special area known as the limbic system is located more in the inner portion of the cerebrum. One part of the limbic system known as the hippocampus is involved in memory, while another portion known as the amygdala is associated with emotions, especially fear and anger (Cairns-Smith).

Other main parts of the brain include the cerebellum and the brain stem. The cerebellum is located at the base of the neck, below the occipital lobe. Its main function is to help control coordination of the higher level voluntary muscle movements, and balance and equilibrium. The
brain stem lies in front of the cerebellum. The most inferior portion (lowest) of the brain stem right above the spinal cord is the medulla oblongata which aids in regulating heart beat and breathing rhythm. Above the medulla is the pons which also is important in controlling breathing and is a relay center for the cerebellum, aiding in various voluntary movements. Next is the midbrain which helps to coordinate muscle movements and is a relay center for auditory information. The thalamus comes next and is a major sensory relay center between the cerebral cortex of the brain and the lower portions of the brain, the stem and spinal cord. It is also closely associated with the limbic system and therefore is involved in memory and emotion. The hypothalamus is next and is located underneath (“hypo”) the thalamus. It is involved in many basic regulatory functions such as heart beat, hormone regulation, thirst and hunger, and control of body temperature. Located right next to the hypothalamus is the pituitary gland which is in change of many basic body functions, such as blood pressure, growth, water balance in the kidneys, temperature regulation and metabolism. Although technically part of the endocrine system, the pituitary gland is known to be a connection/communication center between neural and hormonal control. The Epithalamus then sits above the hypothalamus and is an important connection between the limbic system and other parts of the brain, therefore, the epithalamus is often associated with an emotional response to odors as a result of connecting the limbic system and the olfactory bulb (aids in the sense of smell). Lastly, the subthalamus which is below the thalamus is involved in integrating body movements (VanPutte).

Despite the whole physical and material nature of the brain, Campbell also suggests that, “a brain in which there are undetermined irregular physical events is a brain which, although acted on only by physical influences, is not at every point subject to the laws governing material things. It would not be a purely material object” (Campbell 18). So then, we consider “mind” as
the immaterial portion of the “self.” Nevertheless, what exactly is the mind? The mind can often be described synonymously with the “spirit.” For example, it is important to note that as Malcolm Jeeves suggests in his article, the words “brain” and “body” can be used interchangeably as well as the words “mind” and “soul.” These words will later be used interchangeably throughout the arguments (Stannard 131). In essence, these words are referring to our material selves (body or brain), as opposed to our immaterial, and, as some would suggest, our immortal selves (mind and soul).

Furthermore, Campbell indirectly defines the spirit “as something capable of consciousness, and consciousness is not more fully described than as ‘what it takes to think, feel, and act,’ that is, as what it takes to have a mind” (Campbell 21). Essentially, the mind is what differentiates man from other species on earth. Campbell suggests that there are four main qualities that belong to the mind: thinking, acting, feeling and character (4). Descartes defined the spiritual thing which is a man’s mind as “res cogitans, the thinking thing. By this he meant the thing which enters any conscious state, whether of thinking, feeling, or acting” (Campbell 20). Most important of the qualities that set humans apart is the capacity to reason and “make sense of things.” If this capacity to reason is an innate quality of human beings, is then it is in human nature to be rational (Stewart 236). Stewart suggests that “the fact that we are embodied seems to tell us that we belong to the world of matter; but the fact that we are rational and self-aware seems to tell us that our most important characteristics can’t belong fully to the world of matter” (Stewart 137). This is precisely what separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Our “mind” or “soul” then is the immaterial “thing” that separates us from other beings. Machuga reinforces this fact by saying, “We use concepts as tools to reason about that which cannot be observed. All other animals lack this ability” (7). Here is where the mind-body
problem becomes most relevant. It is important to study this famous debate to be able to distinguish us from other “levels of being.” Otherwise, if we based our reasoning fully on physical, material reasoning, humans and animals would possess a lot more similarities. Even when comparing the sequenced DNA genome of both humans and chimpanzees, it is evident that we are biologically similar. However, it is evident that we have something within us that separates us from this group of primates (Stannard 132). Emergentists look at the theory of evolution and wonder how it came be that humans became separated from other groups of animals. “The key point of evolution is its gradualism. At what point then does mind appear?” (Young) For example, some animals seem to be more intelligent than others. Young explains that “it could be argued that it depends on how much ‘mind’ a given creature has.” Machuga for example describes three different kinds of “souls” that are somewhat hierarchical: (1 those that make bodies alive; (2 those that make bodies sentient or have the ability to feel; and (3 those that makes bodies able to reason conceptually. Therefore, “plants are alive; many animals are both alive and sentient. Humans are both alive and conscious and are able to think conceptually about abstractions” (Machuga 37). That is to say, humans have one soul capable of all three levels of soul, as opposed to having three separate souls. The mind then, is that third tier of soul that humans possess that separates them from the rest of the animal kingdom. Furthermore, Campbell affirms that “if we hold that our minds are spirits independent of the flesh, or sparks of a divine spirit, or souls reincarnate in the cycle of life, then this must affect profoundly our view of the universe and man’s place in it” (Campbell 9). Thus, by studying the mind we can fully understand what it means to “be human.”

Now that both the “body” (or more specifically, the brain) and the “mind” have been discussed in detail, we are now able to look more deeply into this idea of the mind-body
problem. From this, the idea of interaction and causation are the aspects of the mind-body problem that come into grave importance. Do the body and the mind interact? Does the body cause mental effects or does the mind cause bodily effects? Young even questions “. . . how thoughts can cause actions or how unconscious fantasies can cause psychosomatic illnesses, such as ulcers, asthma and colitis” (Young). If the mind and body do interact, how is that possible if they are so different kinds of things? Many philosophers who have tackled this problem with various theories in an attempt to solve this dilemma. Only a few of these “major metaphysical options in the philosophy of mind” will be discussed here. One type of philosophy is known as monism, or the assertion that only one “kind” of thing exists in the universe. Therefore, although many philosophers find the mind-body problem and the idea of personal identity very important to study, many others still think it is an unnecessary part of philosophical thought. They assert this belief by simply eliminating or denying “body” or “mind.” Two main types of monism theories are idealism and materialism. Simply put by Stewart, “idealism is the view that only mind and its ideas and thoughts are real, and that matter is an unfounded illusion. Materialists, on the other hand, believe that only matter and its physical properties are real, while mind, thoughts and the like are simply manifestations of matter” (Stewart 107). Dualism on the other hand, holds that there are two “kinds” of things, both body and mind. This perspective is more concerned with the problem of interaction or the “mind-body problem.” Let’s now take a closer look into these types of perspectives and the various oppositions to them.

The dualistic point of view tackled the mind-body problem by first saying that humans were made up of two different “kinds” of things, body and mind. Seventeenth century French philosopher and mathematician, René Descartes, was the foremost advocate for this type of
thinking (Stewart 137). Descartes believed that there were three different substances: one uncreated (God) and two created (mind and matter). This type of thinking is often known as “substance dualism” or “Cartesian dualism.” Cartesian dualism became important during the seventeenth century because of new scientific discoveries. As a result, dualism in some ways helped to rectify the disputes between science and religion. Descartes gave “the material world to the scientists and the mental world to the theologians.” (Searle 9) He initiated the idea that “minds were considered to be immortal souls and not a proper topic of scientific investigations, whereas bodies could be investigated by such sciences as biology, physics, and astronomy. Philosophy, by the way, he thought could study both mind and body” (Searle 10).

It was believed that, as humans, we had a soul and a body where the conscious soul was somehow “attached” to the body. Descartes held the idea that only the mind was conscious, while bodies were purely physical. In essence, “by saying that the essence of the mind is consciousness, Descartes is claiming that we are always in some conscious state or other and would cease to exist if we ceased to be in some conscious state” (Searle 9). Just as the dualist says my body has nothing to do with my personal identity, Descartes would say, “my identity consists entirely in the continuation of the same mental substance, the same soul, or res cogitans” (Searle 17). Nevertheless, Descartes “recognized that the mind caused events in the body and that events in the body caused events in the mental realm” (Searle 22). However, the mind-body problem still remained. How can two such different “kinds” of things interact? “How can the nonphysical give rise to the physical without violating the laws of the conservation of mass, of energy and of momentum” (6)?

Descartes’ solution to this problem came from studying anatomy. He came up with the idea that the connection between the mind and the body might be the pineal gland, located at the
base of the skull. “Descartes thought that this must be where the mental forces and the physical forces come in contact with each other” (Searle 23). He thought since the pineal gland was the only unduplicated organ in the apparent twin hemispheres of the brain that this must be the site of unification between the mental and the physical. This idea of trying to “find” the connection point between the mind and the body is still open for debate. Young tells us that, “modern interactionists take it as given that interaction between physical and mental events occurs, though they can in no sense explain it in causal terms.” In the end, although dualism gives some insight into the essence of a human (mind and body), it alone does not seem to be enough to fully explain this mind-body problem.

In contrast to dualism, is the monist point of view that only one “kind” of substance exists. The monist tries to circumvent the mind-body problem by saying that there is only one reality. The problem of the interaction between two different kinds of things is then futile. Searle states that, “idealism says that the universe is entirely mental or spiritual; there exists nothing but “ideas” in the technical sense of the word, according to which any mental phenomenon at all is an idea” (Searle 33-34). Some of the most famous idealists were Hegel, Bradley, Royce and most notably, Berkeley (Young). Berkley was an Irish clergyman who believed that the acceptance of matter led to atheism, which was what lead him to the proposal of idealism which claims that we can know only ideas. But why? Stewart provides Berkley’s answer to this question. “When we see a tomato, which is a physical object, we are only having sensations of redness, roundness, and so forth. Since sensations are ideas which exist only in the mind, then it follows that what we see is only an idea existing, as ideas must, in the mind” (Stewart 124). However, this argument is not sound because, although we need sensation to see the tomato seeing the tomato is not the same thing as having sensations. In other words, “having
sensations is a necessary condition for our knowledge of the world, but it is not a sufficient condition” (Stewart 124). This and other problems with idealism, such as how we know our own minds, caused the concept of idealism to not take hold and eventually died out.

Another type of monism however, known as materialism, asserts the opposite perspective of idealism. The materialist doesn’t have to deal with the problem of interaction because he believes that matter is the only reality and therefore anything about the mind is really about the body. There are different versions of the materialist perspective; however, materialism has been a big influence on philosophy of the mind throughout 20th century and into 21st (Searle 34). Fodor says that, “in materialist theories the mental is not distinct from the physical; indeed, all mental states, properties, processes and operations are in principle identical with physical state, properties, processes and operations.” In other words, materialists believe that the self is only the “body” or the material - that all causes and effects that occur within the human body occur as a result of the movement of chemicals, such as neurotransmitters, throughout the body, and the firing of neurons through the process of the action potential as described above. These types of materialists known as the “identity theorists,” believe that there is a mental state but is “identical with neurophysiological events in the brain” (Fodor). This belief thus makes studying the mind-body problem obsolete.

One other type of materialism, known as behaviorism says that the “mind is just the behavior of the body” (Searle 35). Often called, “stimuli and response philosophy,” behaviorists believe that observable responses are behaviors that result from various stimuli that do not have mental cause. Psychologists, John Watson and B.R. Skinner were the main proponents of this theory. “Materialists, known as behaviorists, maintain that all talk of mental causes can be eliminated from the language of psychology in favor of talk of environmental stimuli and
behavioral responses” (Fodor). In this “radical behaviorist” view the problem of explaining the nature of the mind - body interaction vanishes; there is no such interaction (Fodor). Logical behaviorists on the other hand do acknowledge the existence of mental states. However, “the basic idea is that attributing a mental state (say thirst) to an organism is the same as saying that the organism is disposed to behave in a particular way (for example to drink if there is water available)” (Fodor). Logical behaviorists apply the “if, then” statement. In other words, “‘if such-and-such conditions obtain, then such-and-such behavior will ensue’” (Searle). Logical behaviorists give a “materialist account for mental causation,” that is, being a behavioral disposition. This is something that the radical behaviorist could not do (Fodor).

The atheist could be considered a type of materialist. Atheists do not believe in any higher being and therefore do not believe in an immortal soul because they do not believe in an afterlife. They maintain that when our materials bodies die, we completely cease to exist. Atheists would find the mind-body problem and idea of personal identity irrelevant because they see us as mortal beings. If everything is matter, then the materialists would have a harder time making sense of a personal afterlife following a purely physical death. Moreover, if death is our ultimate end, then our personal identity and personal characteristics would not be valuable to the atheists or materialists. There would be no need to put forth a unique personal identity and ethical values, if we were just going to die in the end. As a result, both the atheist and materialist would not feel the need to bother with the mind-body problem and the idea of personal identity.

Some theories try to rectify the issue in another way, by developing ideas that are neither dualism nor materialism. Functionalism is one of these concepts but it is difficult to understand. It has become more recent in the last fifteen years and “has emerged from philosophical reflection of developments in artificial intelligence, computational theory, linguistics, cybernetics
and psychology.” All these are collectively known as the cognitive sciences (Fodor). In short, functionalism defines mental states “as states that have certain sorts of functions, and the notion of function is explained in terms of causal relations to external stimuli, to other mental states, and to external behavior” (Searle 43). Therefore, minds are characterized by their functional role. At the same time, “software based programs and computers can be programmed to inputs and behavioral outputs. As a result, “this argument concludes that it is only a matter of time before computers can be programmed to do everything humans can do and then some. Materialists of this persuasion say that what the uneducated call “souls” are really nothing but brains, i.e. complex machines” (Machuga 36).

Another type of philosophy of the mind that is neither dualism not materialism comes from John Searle in his book *Mind: A Brief Introduction*. He tries to rectify the differences between the dualist and material and assert his own “solution” to the mind-body problem. He believes that each position has true reasoning and false reasoning and that the true parts must be separated from the false. While the materialist says that consciousness does not exist, Searle is saying that yes, humans really are conscious, but it is a process going on in the brain. In addition, the dualist says that consciousness is over and above the physical, while Searle says it is not (Searle 88). Essentially, Searle says in his “biological naturalism” approach that events going on in the brain cause consciousness. Searle states, “we have conscious thoughts and feelings; they are caused by neurobiological processes in the brain; and they exist as biological features of the brain system” (79).

These theories show that there are many different derivatives of the materialistic view in addition to hybrids of various other theories. Overall, many philosophical thinkers have come up with different metaphysical theories of the mind in order to try to understand the essence of the
human person. Some arguments against materialism follow and show that a monist or one reality point of view may not be strong enough to explain the complexities of the rational human.

One particular argument against materialism involves the concept of consciousness. In a video, “A Conscious Mind,” Dr. David Chalmers argues that materialism is not enough to explain the mind-body problem. He asserts that consciousness is about the structure and function of human life. While materialism accounts for these physical attributes, the problem of consciousness involves subjectivity (personal identity). For example, Searle says that “the inner experiences might be different even though the external behavior is exactly the same” (3). In other words, there is not just an objective account of consciousness, but a subjective account. This subjectivity may account for the individuality of various human beings. Philosopher John Locke also maintained that “what is essential to a person is consciousness and thus the preservation of an individual is essential to the preservation of the identity of the person over time” (Stewart 144). The preservation of one’s personal identity becomes an important idea that tries to combat the materialist. The Pre-Socratic, Parmenides, believed that reality has to be unchanging. He would say that we are the same now as when we were three years old (Machuga 35). Therefore, although our physical state changes and grows, our personal identity never changes. This suggests also that our mind never changes and thus displays the “real us” (Stannard 134). This idea goes against the materialistic view that everything is purely matter.

Along these same lines, another argument against materialism that could be scrutinized is the “zombie argument.” A zombie has no mental activity and is not conscious, although is physically exactly like a human. Although not necessarily probable, this argument is logically possible (Searle 64). Ric Machuga states, in his book, *In Defense of the Soul: What it Means to be Human*, that our “immaterial souls are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for, our
existence. In other words, without an immaterial soul our rational abilities would be inconceivable” (18). By stating that our souls are not sufficient, Machuga is saying that a human needs a body as well. A soul can exist on its own, however this would not be a human being. Therefore, it is often said that “our nature is an essential unity of both the material and the immaterial. As it is sometimes said: we don’t have a soul, we are a soul” (Machuga 16).

Although we can be considered the union of both a mind and a body, at the same time, there can be a distinction made between an “embodied soul” and an “ensouled body.” The human person can be looked at differently under these two different views. According to Meilaender, “as ‘embodied souls’ we long for a fulfillment never fully given in human history, for the union with God that is qualitatively different from this life – which longing can never, therefore, be satisfied by a greater quantity of this life. But as ‘ensouled bodies’ our lives also have a shape, a trajectory, that is the body’s” (Meilaender 49). In other words, if it is in fact true that we have an immaterial soul, it is important to remember that the soul is not the only part of the person. In fact, without a body there would be no person (McLaughlin 493). In fact, this is a significant theme evident in the upcoming Johnny Depp movie “Transcendence.” This movie talks about if it is possible to have a conscious mind without a body.

It has been established that a person can often be considered both a body and a mind, however, why is this even an important topic to discuss? The first of the four main reasons of why determining personhood is important is based on the fact that human beings have a distinct separation from any other species on the planet. This alone suggests the importance of our unique personhood. As Schumacher concluded is his book, A Guide for the Perplexed, science alone is not enough to explain every aspect of life. Science is the study of the physical world and all that can be quantified and measured. As human beings we are above the material or physical
level of being. Schumacher describes in his Levels of Being Theory, “self-awareness” is the factor that sets humans apart from other forms of life. The concept of self-awareness suggests that we contain something more substantial, something more real. Other abstract qualities include the capacity to love, and the ability to think about thinking. These qualities are unable to be measured and therefore cannot fully belong in the scientific, physical world. Similarly, humans cannot fully belong to the material world. Therefore, it is not only important to study personhood to distinguish between the material and immaterial parts of a human, but also to determine how those parts are interrelated. Campbell, in his book, *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, suggests that, “our answer to the Mind-Body problem will make all the difference to our beliefs of human origins and human destiny” (Campbell 9). Therefore, if we understand the differences between the body and the mind and the interactions between the two then we can better understand what it truly means to be human and be above the “material level of being” as Schumacher suggests. Since we are “thinking” beings, we need to constantly be searching for the truth to fully understand the world around us.

Secondly, the idea of personal identity becomes important when discussing the significance of personhood. This topic involves the further individuality of every human being and deals with the question of what forms a person’s individual character. Stewart defines personal identity as “the problem of determining what makes a person the person she is and, relatedly, what makes a person the same person over time” (144). Just as the mind-body problem is essential in separating us from other species on earth, so is the idea of personal identity essential in distinguishing individuals from each other. Our personal identity is not solely based on matter and the physical, such as fingerprints and DNA it is also a correlation of our thoughts and personal character. An individual’s personal (non-physical) character and
values, such as trustworthiness, courage and loyalty are not quantifiable qualities. It can therefore be said that these qualities are not part of the physical world of matter. These characteristics must be a result of our free will and reason that come from our human nature, and therefore come from our immaterial mind.

Furthermore, each individual has a separate personal character that constitutes his or her personal identity. This statement can be defended using the example of identical twins. Even identical twins who have exactly the same DNA have distinct personal characteristics and thus their own personal identity. “Being a person is importantly connected to having a personality, and having a personality amounts to having a certain collection of beliefs, memories and psychological character traits. It amounts, that is, to having a certain psychological history and psychological makeup” (Stewart 143). If each individual did not have his or her own personal identity then every human being would have the same characteristics and personality. The world would contain no variety and thus be boring. Therefore the idea of personal identity is important to study in order to distinguish between individuals.

Here, Alzheimer’s disease opens an important debate concerning personal identity. When people have Alzheimer’s they begin to forget who they are and who the people around them are. They often forget simple life-sustaining tasks such as how to use the bathroom or how to feed themselves. It is often said that these people begin to lose their “personal identity.” If they forget who they are, then they are obviously not the same person they once were. Or are they? If someone with late stage Alzheimer’s were to spontaneously recover, wouldn’t we say to him/her something like, “Welcome back!” But where have they gone? This is an important debate brought upon by the question of personhood and the idea of personal identity which makes it worth studying.
Next, further discussions concerning “personhood,” bring up bioethical debates about death, dying, and end-of-life decisions, in addition to other controversial topics involving human nature including abortion and genetic engineering. In fact, “the language of personhood has been central to much of the last quarter century’s developments in bioethics” (10, p. 43). Therefore, these types of debates become relevant and essential. Meilander believes that “two competing visions of the person – and the relation of person to body – have unfolded as bioethics has developed. . .” (37). One view may say that “it is not the natural history of the embodied self, but the presence or absence of certain capacities, that makes the person. Indeed, we tend to think and speak not of being a person but of having personhood, which becomes a quality added to being” (Meilaender 50). Meilaender states that he believes that bioethics has lost the body. Conversely, he declares that “to have a life is to be *terra animae*, a living body whose natural history has a trajectory. It is to be a someone who has a history, not a someone with certain capacities or characteristics” (Meilaender 57). For example, Christ was divine and human, but one person. He did not have two sets of personal characteristics. Therefore, His personal identity was not formulated in term of capacities or characteristics. “They [Christians] could speak of His person only as an individual with a history, a ‘someone who’” (Meilaender 57). Meilaender believes that some people focus too much on the soul and not enough on the physical body of the person. In other words, “the person cannot be divorced from the body and its natural trajectory” (Meilaender 58 and 59). However, viewing the person strictly in terms of the body can also fail to provide the full picture. Here, Meilaender believes that “bioethics has lost the soul, our soul. By this I mean that it has, to some considerable degree, turned away from exploration of the most fundamental questions about who we are and should be” (Meilaender 2). It is important to keep in mind all of the aspects of a human that contribute to our “personhood.”
Bioethics often does not take into account the whole person when making decisions involving the beginning and ending of life.

How then, does this idea of bioethics specifically fit in with personhood? First, it is important to describe what exactly bioethics is. “In 1977 the philosopher Samuel Gorovitz defined bioethics as the ‘critical examination of the moral dimensions of decision-making in health-related contexts and in contexts involving the biological sciences.’ This definition is still a good one, for it highlights the interdisciplinary and social dimensions of bioethics” (Shannon 8). In order to understand fully the “interdisciplinary” quality of this area of study, it would be best to break the term up and define each separately. The bio portion of bioethics then of course refers to any medicine, life science, psychology and genetics. This area of focus centers on the physical aspects of life, and it is important to note that the sciences and technology are always continuing to change and evolve (Shannon 5). What then is ethics? Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the question of “what we ought to do.” Ethics examines moral problems; incorporates various values, and seeks to answer them using the Truth. Therefore, ethics never changes. Conversely, morality is simply a system of norms or rules of action that govern our relationships with people. These rules are dynamic and can change through time, culture or group. However, if we use ethics, and we formulate an ethical theory about various problems, then we will have consistency in our decision making and will not have to start from the beginning when presented with a new problem. Additionally, “if we are consistent and coherent in our decision making, we will have a greater degree of internal unity and integrity in our decision making” (Shannon 21).

One particular ethical theory suggests that we make decisions based on the consequences of a particular action. This decision-making process, known as consequentialism, can consider
oneself and/or others, and is usually used to determine what the best decision is for the greatest amount of people (Utilitarianism). In his decision-making process there are many different consequences to consider and the eventual decision will be based on the consequences of that particular action and how people will be affected (Schneider). However, this theory is flawed because it does not evaluate one outcome against another (Shannon 22).

Another decision-making process that can be utilized is the deontological moral theory. This theory bases decisions on whether a particular action would be generally accepted if applied to all people (Schneider). It scrutinizes one’s obligation or “moral duty.” An example of this is the “golden rule” or the principle of treating others as you would want to be treated. By following this decision-making process one would need to act under universalized principles. This theory is beneficial because it provides a set of universalized principles which serve as a starting point in making ethical decisions. However, by acting only out of duty, it does not take into consideration the consequences of a particular action (Shannon 23).

*Rights ethics* is yet another type of ethical theory which involves examining the individual rights and moral claims as it applies to a dilemma. It highlights the rights of each person: however, it does not show how to resolve conflicts of rights between individuals. “This ethical theory of rights is a popular one in our American culture” (Shannon 23). For example, Americans use the term autonomy as a key value or virtue when making ethical decisions. Autonomy is “a form of personal liberty of action in which the individual determines a course of action in accordance with a plan of his or her own choosing” (Shannon 24). Autonomy emphasizes a personal responsibility of one’s own life. But how do we decide “who is the subject of a right, and on what basis” (Shannon 37). Do animals have rights? Is consciousness enough to secure rights or does a being need to be self-conscious to have rights? Or is it the use
of language that declares one’s rights? Lastly, it can be argued that only persons are the “bearers of rights.” “Persons are generally understood to be moral agents with an enduring concept of self and the capacity of autonomous actions” (Shannon 37). With this the question of our personhood needs to be raised again to decide what aspects of our personhood are important in determining responses to various ethical decisions. For this reason, the words autonomy and rights become very important in the discussion of bioethical debates, especially abortion and end-of-life decisions (Meilaender, 107).

Ultimately, putting the two words together refers to the ethical decisions mainly in the medical field. However, the area of bioethics is very broad. Because bioethics deals with the territory of life and personhood, it is extremely diverse and complex. But when did this debate really begin? Albert Jonsen dates the “birth of bioethics” back to 1962 when an article, written by Shana Alexander, was published in Life magazine describing the controversy involving the Seattle dialysis selection committee. This controversy involved the ethical issue of this committee hand picking certain candidates who they deemed “worthy” to receive one of the seventeen spots for outpatient kidney dialysis. At the same time David Rothman dates the beginning of the bioethical era to 1966 when Henry Beecher’s article was published, exposing the abuses of human experimentation. Rothman also believed that other changes in American medicine at this time raised highly ethical debates. Overall, both men would agree that from about 1965-1975 was the “formative decade” of bioethics in this country and it still persists today in many different ethical debates, including ethical issues at the beginning of life, such as abortion and those at the end of life, including euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide (Meilaender 1).
Of these various ethical debates involving personhood, the foremost discussion should be on beginning-of-life decisions, such as abortion. In particular, “the Roe v. Wade decision was of great significance in shaping the language of “personhood” – a language that has proven to be of incalculable importance in bioethical argument” (Meilaender 107). Roe v Wade decided that no state could make any law against abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It further stated that only abortion regulations could be made in the first and second trimester if it related to the mother’s health, and laws against abortion could only be made with regards to the third trimester. Beginning with the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, many women believed that the laws against abortion that many states already had in place violated their constitutional rights. A particular case filed on behalf of “Jane Roe” went up against Texas federal court District Attorney, Henry Wade in 1970. The courts decided that the Texas law against abortion was unconstitutional, going against a woman’s “zone of privacy.” Needless to say there was much backlash about this decision, many believing that this law legalized the killing of a human being. Further biological, religious and ethical problems, including the issue of personhood erupted as a result of this decision (McBride).

Women at this time were also very conscious of their own autonomy, stating that they can do whatever they want with their own bodies. Those working under the rights ethics model believe that they, alone, have the rights over their own bodies, and have the responsibility to make their own informed decisions about what happens to their body. However, focusing too much on our own individual rights can isolate ourselves from our family, friends and the community. “While ultimately I am responsible for myself and my actions, the community also can be involved in my learning what my responsibilities are and can set obligations that I need to respect as I make my decisions” (Shannon 25 Additionally, the argument about “the personhood
of the fetus arises quite naturally and perhaps inevitably. After all, the claim that ‘it’s my body to do with as I wish’ becomes more worrisome if that body is nourishing another human life equal in dignity” (Shannon 108). But the question arises, is the fetal life really a person equal in human dignity?

As established previously, self-awareness and rationality are two things that set humans apart from other species. However, “there is a difference between the characteristics that distinguish the human species, and the qualifications for membership in the species. It may be that among the distinguishing characteristics of humans are features such as rationality and self-consciousness. But one can be human without exercising (or even having the capacity to exercise) such characteristics” (Meilaender 110). To be human is be born of human parents. Therefore, those who lack these capacities are the lowest and weakest “members of the community.” Therefore, “the fetus should be cared for and protected not because of any ‘personal’ capacities, but because weak and vulnerable human beings-who, lacking some of our qualities, do not lack equality with us-are the weakest members of the human community” (Meilaender 110). So, if a fetus is one of us, does a woman have a responsibility to provide for it within her body? It is a personal sacrifice? However, men can’t get pregnant. Therefore, if we make abortion illegal are we institutionalizing sexual inequality? During the 1970’s women were bringing up his and many other types of autonomy questions which made Roe v. Wade so central to the bioethics discussion. “It has given autonomy-via the language of ‘privacy’ – centrality, and it is hard to imagine that discussions about dying patients would have followed the course they have without that language” (Meilaender 107). Therefore, it is fitting that further discussions about death and dying should be discussed next.
Before the bioethical debates involving the end-of-life can be discussed, first a formal definition of death should be laid out. In other words, what exactly does it mean to call a person dead? Part of this definition must include the biological sense of the human, neurologically and physically; however, the other part incorporates the meaning of life and includes various ethical questions. Veatch proposes that “the philosophical issue that needs to be defined is: What is lost at the point of death that is essential to human nature” (16)? Veatch continues by offering a “strictly formal definition of death” that can be applied not just to humans, but all beings, as “a complete change in the status of a living entity characterized by the irreversible loss of those characteristics that are essentially significant to it” (17). Therefore, we must think of the death of a human being as the loss of those essential human characteristics and not just the death of a heart or a brain. The death of a person as a whole needs to be considered as opposed to just the death of particular organs or organ systems.

As a result, Veatch discusses four concepts of death in order to help determine when someone is considered dead. First, he discusses what he calls the “irreversible loss of flow of vital fluids,” that is the breath and the blood. In essence, this concept is illustrating the death of the heart and/or lungs. However, if technology were to create a heart-lung machine that could be carried around and that sustained these organs a person would be considered alive even if these vital organs were nonfunctioning on their own. Would this type of machine go against human dignity? This is definitely a question worth considering (Veatch 20).

The second concept of death that Veatch considers is the “irreversible loss of the soul from the body.” This concept fits in well with what has already been discussed. This concept holds onto the notion that what makes us human or is important in our personhood is more than just the physical, but a non-material mind or soul as previously discussed. Therefore, death
occurs when the two, body and soul, are separated. However, here the question can be asked, “Does the soul separate from the body at the time that the “fluid flow” ceases, or if the soul is released from the body does the “fluid flow” stop because the soul is no longer present?” What is really essence in this concept is the "loss of the soul, not the loss of the fluid flow” (21).

A third important concept that Veatch discusses is the “irreversible loss of the capacity for bodily integration.” This concept is using whole brain death as the point at which a person is considered dead. The Harvard Ad Hoc Committee to Examine the Definition of Brain Death played a hand in deciding on reasons for this concept of death. First, the patient has little to no chance of recovery, and is thereby nonresponsive or able to be socially, physically or psychologically integrated in society. Secondly, the patient’s other organs cannot be used for organ transplants because of the controversial nature of this concept of death. Those operating under this concept of death would say that whole brain death or lose of function of the brain stem, the cortex, and the neocortex, make death significant. These patients would essentially lose consciousness, the ability to reason, and other bodily functions indicative of life that the brain aids in as described earlier. However, “although there are occasional suggestions that it is the anatomical structure of the brain that is important, now almost anyone arguing for a brain-oriented definition of death will accept that it is not technically the death of the brain that is critical, the irreversible loss of the functions normally carried on by the brain” (Veatch 24). Therefore, under this view, if these functions indicative of human life are lost, the patient can essentially be considered dead.

On the other hand, what if a person suffers brain damage that does not span to the whole of brain, where only higher brain centers, such as the cortex, are destroyed, but lower brain centers, such as the brain stem, remain? The brain stem, described more fully earlier, is the main
center for the involuntary or autonomic nervous system, which controls vital bodily functions such as heartbeat and breathing. If the brainstem is still working, then the body can automatically control internal reflexes. Therefore, a fourth concept of death needs to be considered and the question that becomes important is determining “what brain functions are essentially significant to man’s nature” (Veatch 25). Veatch describes this fourth possible concept of death as the “irreversible loss of the capacity for consciousness or social interaction.” Under this definition, people would have lost the essential character of humanness and . . . they would be dead even if they had capacity for integration of bodily function” (25). Shannon goes on to say that “by using this definition we are confronted with a cadaver that is still breathing under its own power, so to speak. The disposition of such a cadaver presents tremendous religious, philosophical, and psychological problems, such as dualism and other mind-body relation issues” (81).

One particular and relevant example of this concept of death is the case of Theresa Marie Schiavo back in 2003. Terri, as many people knew her by, was a fun, shy and light-hearted individual. She was a hefty 250-pound teenager but worked hard to transform herself to a slim, attractive young woman. She later married her first boyfriend, Michael Schiavo and the two moved to Florida. At this point, she continued to lose weight and six years after their marriage she weighted only 110 pounds. Then on February 25, 1990, Terri suffered a heart attack, in her Florida home, most likely brought on by her reported eating disorder, which deprived her brain of oxygen for a full ten to twelve minutes, causing irreversible and profound brain damage. Her husband even took her to California to undergo experimental electrode brain implants; however, this did not work and she was left in a persistent “vegetative state.” She was put on a nutrition/hydration tube and left under the care of her husband and her mother, Mary Schindler.
“It was a family tragedy. But that tragedy erupted into what may have been the most litigated end-of-life case in history,” when her husband, Michael Schiavo, who had guardianship rights, initiated the movement to remove her feeding tube in 2003 (Caplan 15) Court battles ensued, and many politicians got involved, in addition to the press, Even the head of the Catholic Church at the time, Paul John Paul II spoke out on Terri’s behalf However, the judgments on end-of-life decisions at this time were placed in the hands of the states, which was a decision that the U.S. Supreme Court made following the Cruzan case, another controversial case. Therefore, the Florida courts stood by Michael Schiavo’s decision to remove the feeding tube, because of the state that Terri was in. However, Terri’s parents, who were very religious Catholics, believed in the sanctity of life and were not in agreement. Nevertheless, “despite a furious campaign by Terri’s parents to discredit him, reviews by Florida courts and various court-appointed guardians found no basis to challenge Michael Schiavo’s standing as her primary decision maker or the medical diagnosis and prognosis that she was in a PVS state” (Caplan 22). Overall, “the ‘lessons learned’ from the Schiavo experience will for years be subject to interpretation by legislators, scholars, medical practitioners, ethicists, and theologians. Many Americans were outraged because of this, which shows that deep divisions are evident when it comes to these end-of-life decisions. According, to the fourth concept of death, Terri Schaivo was not conscious and was therefore dead; however, she was still breathing and her heart was still beating. As a result, the question about personhood still remains at the forefront. Overall, the question here that arises is ”should a person be kept alive even when one’s “personal” capacities are irretrievably lost?”

The broader ethical problem that is evident here is the issue of euthanasia. Euthanasia can be described as “the intentional ending of one’s life primarily, but not exclusively, to end the pain from a terminal disease such as cancer” (Shannon 103). A distinction can also be made
between direct euthanasia, or direct killing, and indirect or passive euthanasia – treatment forgoing or withdrawal. These types of decisions can be made when a person is conscious or unconscious (no brain activity) as in the case of Terri Schaivo. Essentially, “there are two relevant and important moral principles at stake: preservation of an individual life, and preservation of the dignity of an individual by being able to distinguish a dead person from a living one” (Meilaender 51). From this, a distinction can be made between the concepts of the right of life and the quality of life. Many would argue that everyone has a right to life and therefore, life should be valued and kept safe. However, the quality of life is important as well and in some cases is even more important than the right to life. For example, conditions in which a person lives can play an important role in human dignity. As a result, both of these concepts must be considered when making end-of-life decisions (Shannon 91).

A further distinction can be made between ordinary treatment and extraordinary treatment. Ordinary therapies are normal treatments given with high hopes of benefitting a patient, without extreme pain, expense or any other inconvenience. While extraordinary treatments are risky therapies that are over and above the normal, and may cause pain or other inconveniences. It is generally accepted that patients should accept ordinary treatments but can forgo or withdraw from extraordinary therapies when they deem fit. This decision can be made because further treatment may cause a lower quality of life, and therefore go against human dignity, and/or because further treatment is essentially futile. However, because medical technology has expanded what we would normally call extraordinary treatment is starting to become somewhat routine, thus, making these kinds of decisions even more difficult (Shannon 89 and 90).
One possible way to get around these ethical debates is by getting people to state their wishes ahead of time in a “living will” or an “advance directive.” “Then, if the day comes when others must make decisions for them, we will not have to delve into disputed background beliefs about the meaning of personhood” (Meilaender 51). The term “living will” was coined in 1969 and the nation’s first living will law was passed for California in 1976. Then in 1991, the federal Patient Self-Determination Act went into effect which said that patients, upon admission to the hospital, had to be advised of their rights to an advance directive. In this end, some may choose to live, while some may not see the point in doing so. The key, however, is autonomy (Meilaender 51).

Nevertheless, “some have argued, treatment that preserves ‘continued biologic life without conscious autonomy’ is qualitatively futile. It is effective in keeping the earth that is the body animated – effective, but, so the argument goes, not beneficial, because what is central to being a person cannot be restored” (Meilaender 47). However, if a physician makes the decision to end a futile life he is right and wrong. He is wrong because he is separating the person from the body. “In supposing that care for me becomes futile when I have lost my powers of reason, they express a vision of the person that divorces personhood from organic bodily life” (Meilaender 54). Overall, it can be said that our life is like a story. Therefore, decisions at the beginning-of-life and at the end-of-life can be summed up by saying “that story begins before we are conscious of it, and, for many of us, continues after we have lost consciousness of it. Yet, each narrative is the story of a “someone who” – someone who, as a living body, has a history” (Meilaender 59).

Lastly, the question of personhood brings us as important importance the idea of life after death (Stewart 142). Christians believe in a higher being, God, who created the world and
intercedes for us when we call upon him. Christians also believe that we possess an immaterial, immortal soul and that when we die our soul is separated from the body and is united with God in the afterlife. Consequently, Christians would be concerned with the idea of the mind-body problem and personal identity because they believe that our personal characteristics are what help us attain eternal life with God after death. At the same time, dualists hold a similar belief, that humans are made up of two different realities. However, the problem of how these realities interact if they are so different then comes into play under the mind-body problem. Therefore, both the dualist and the Christian would believe that is it important to determine what is means to be a person.

What then will happen at the end of time with the anticipated resurrection of the body? What does this mean for the idea of personhood? Will it be the same person? Will the body and “soul” be reunited? Many Christian Fathers have concerned themselves with the question of the anticipated resurrection of the deceased at the end of time. If the human person is in fact the union of a soul and a body, then both parts are essential in making us human. Therefore, what will the resurrected body look like? Will the body and soul be reunited or will the resurrection be purely spiritual? Different ideas of resurrection and what will the resurrected body look like have been proposed by various religious figures throughout time. Saint Augustine himself questioned in particular what the resurrected body of someone who died in childhood will look like. He believed that they would not be resurrected with the tiny bodies that they died with, but instead arise matured by God’s grace. Another early Christian theologian, Origen considered that the resurrected body would be a purely spiritual eidos, which he believed was the unchanging form of the body. However, he did not consider the eidos to be the soul, instead it was the bodily form united with the soul in this life and, again, in the resurrection” (Meilaender
The material body, on the other hand, was the constantly changing portion of the self. Origen also put forward that our resurrected self would be at our “optimal stage of development” and freed from all defects. Another view, held by Methodius of Olympus, was “that the body itself – not just its form – would be restored in the resurrection” (Meilaender 39). He based this claim on the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was raised in the same body and same condition in which he was crucified. At the same time, Saint Thomas believed “like Christ’s they will have flesh and bones, but in these bodies there will not be ‘any corruption, any deformity, any deficiency’” (Meilaender 40). Overall, there were many views on what the resurrected body would be and how it would look at the end of time. This debate fits well into the debate over personhood by discussing how the mind and body interact not just during life but also following death.

In the end, it has been shown that a person can be described in many different ways. The fact that our self-consciousness separates us from other animals on earth shows are uniqueness. Additionally our unique personal identity and ability to exert our own individual characters shows that we are extraordinary beings with a “personhood” that is over and above our ‘humanness.” This leads us to the contemplation of a soul and thus brings into importance ideas about an afterlife and a potential resurrection at the end of time. Lastly, ethical debates involving humans, particularly abortion and euthanasia provide key practical issues which make discussions of personhood so significant. As a result, it is important to come to a unified understanding of what it means to be a person so that we can more fully understand metaphysics or what is true reality. We can then better understand the world as a whole and be able universally to make various ethical decisions involving the person.
Works Cited


