

Understanding the Role of 'person' in Ethics: Buddhist and Singer Perspectives

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Recent approaches to applied ethics issues are dealt with an extensive deliberation on the issue of person. In the case of animal protection, abortion, euthanasia and the like, important discussions related to moral rightness of the action depends upon the concept of person. The key issue is how to define a person. One of the prominent thinkers, Peter Singer conceptualizes persons as those who are self aware and self motivated and are those who recognize themselves as individuals who continue over time. According to him, non-persons are those humans and non-humans who are sentient but whose mental capacities are limited to the here and now. Singer claims that this concept implies that some non human beings can be considered as person, while some human beings cannot be considered as person. Critics such as Bonnardel (2006) has criticized Peter Singer's concept of person as an abstract concept. The concept of person is neither concrete nor universal. There are other traditions, which conceptualize persons in different ways, for example Buddhism which considers degrees of personhood. If there are issues in how we are to define a person, then how can we judge the moral worthiness of the action on the basis of mere concept of person? In this context, we, through this paper try to argue that discussion of a "person" may be an issue in the applied ethics domain, but that is not the sole issue. We try to highlight this point from the Buddhist and Singer perspectives to show that though both are concerned about controversial ethical issues, while Singer's ethics pays much emphasis on the notion of person in order to judge the rightness or wrongness of the

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action, particularly with respect to abortion and euthanasia, Buddhist ethics pays much emphasis on the character of the moral agent, thus making it less vulnerable from those who criticize the person-based ethics approach.

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