

Lecture 4 **Animalism**

1. Introduction

In last two lectures we discussed different versions of the psychological continuity view of personal identity. On this view, you are identical with whatever is uniquely psychologically continuous with you. And its plausibility, at least in part, from the intuition that we could survive the transfer of our brain or consciousness to another body. E.g. Locke's Prince and the Cobbler, brain transplant cases, fission cases.

Now, the psychological continuity view of our persistence entails that we are *not* identical with an animal. (For our purposes, we can operate on the ordinary notion of an animal as a living organism.) Consider the transplant and fission cases just mentioned. In those cases, it is true of the relevant X and Y that X is uniquely psychologically continuous with Y, but it is false that X is the same animal as Y. For instance, the animals of the individuals in a brain transplant case are numerically distinct but they are uniquely psychologically continuous (on the assumption that some of your psychological states travel with your brain). Further, consider a case where someone lapses into a persistent vegetative state; arguably the animal continues to exist in this case, but nothing psychologically continuous with you exists. Since two things are numerically identical iff they have exactly the same properties, and you have the property of ceasing to exist when in a persistent vegetative state, but your animal does not, it follows that you are not identical to your animal.

You might think—as Olson, and other animalists do—that this is an implausible result. Perhaps even an unacceptable one. How could I fail to be an animal? Our best science seems to suggest that we are wholly material; and if this is so, then how could it be that I am not identical with the material entity that 'follows' me around?

Animalism is the view that we *are* identical to human animals. However, the details can vary (for instance, those concerning the force of this claim).

2. Olson's Argument for Animalism

Olson begins by disambiguating the general statement of animalism just given. He is explicit that he is arguing:

Animalism_{NI}: Each of us is numerically identical with an animal.

This is distinct from:

Constitution: We are *constituted* by an animal with which we are not identical.

All Ps are As: All persons are animals; there are no non-animal persons.

All As are Ps: All animals are persons; there are no non-person animals.

Essential: We are *essentially* animals.

Body: We are identical with our bodies.

Thus, Olson's view is consistent with saying that there is more to being a person than just being an animal. From the above we can see that Animalism_{NI} is not committed either to the claim that being animal is necessary for personhood, nor that it is sufficient for personhood. But, in this case, what exactly does Animalism_{NI} amount to?

To answer this, we need a statement of who the 'us' in the definition refers to. Here is Olson on this:

I say that you and I and the other people who walk the earth are animals. If you like, all human people are animals, where a human person is roughly someone who relates to a human animal in the way that you and I do, whatever way that is.

(Olson 2002: 4, citation from <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/734/>)

The Thinking Animal Argument

Olson then runs a version of the thinking-animal argument. It runs as follows:

- P1.** There is a human animal sitting in your chair.
- P2.** The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking.
- P3.** You are the thinking being sitting in your chair
- C.** You are the human animal.

Now, nothing in the argument hangs on *you* in particular, so you could run this argument for any human person. Thus, we can infer from this that *all* human persons are identical with a human animal.

The argument is clearly deductively valid, so to refute this argument, one would need to reject at least one of **P1-P3**.

Against P1: There are no human animals

Olson suggests that the way you could plausibly reject **P1** is by denying that there are any human animals at all. Against this view he argues that “it is hard to see how there could be any organisms of other sorts” (14) if there are no human animals. While it certainly the case that some views on which this follows (e.g. the view that nothing can gain or lose parts), “few opponents of animalism” take this line. What is more, this position would challenge more than just animalism. It would pose a threat to, for instance, anyone who thinks that we are constituted by animals.

Against P2: Human animals can’t think

Olson argues that the only reason for thinking that there isn’t currently a thinking animal in your chair would be that animals cannot think. “If it were able to think, it would be thinking now,” he maintains. But if it’s the case that the human animal in your chair can’t think, despite having a functioning, highly sophisticated brain, then no human animal with such a brain can think. And if no *human* animal can think, then it certainly can’t be that other animals with less sophisticated brains can think. (Saying this would seem to commit you to saying that the presence of a person ‘in’ an animal prevents the animal from being able to think. But in this case, by what mechanism is the relevant person thinking?) It seems incredible to say that no animal can think. At the very least, there is a burden of proof on someone who wishes to say this: they must explain *why* animals can’t think despite seeming to have the necessary apparatus for doing so.

Against P3: You are not alone

If you are not the thinking animal in your chair, then there must be two thinkers in your chair! After all, *you* are certainly sitting in your chair and thinking. And the animal in your chair is sitting in your chair and thinking (provided you haven’t rejected **P1** or **P2**). So, if you aren’t identical with the thinking animal, then it immediately follows that there are two thinkers in your chair. Now, advocates of this view could argue that we should go about counting the population of your chair differently (cf. Lewis on identity-at-a-time) but that doesn’t do away with all of the problems with this solution, argues Olson. For instance: which thinker is the person? If it is you, what stops the animal from being a person? If it is a person, then it seems to follow that “each human person shares her location and her thoughts with *another* person” (Olson 2002: 19). But, if it is not a person, then “familiar accounts of what it is to be a person are all far too permissive” (ibid).

It is interesting to note that we can still ask a lot of the same questions about what it takes for persons to persist if we accept animalism. It is just that these questions become questions about what it takes for an *animal* to persist. Or, put another way, the question of our persistence becomes a question in the **philosophy of biology**.

3. Implications of Animalism

Before considering objections, it's worth noting one important implication of the animalist view.

The animalist and the psychological continuity theorist will both agree that a person is a thinking thing. However, roughly, they will disagree about how we should go about counting those thinking things. More technically, they disagree about the *kind of sortal concept* the concept PERSON is. (I'll use SMALL CAPS to indicate that I am referring to the concept named rather than a thing that satisfies that concept.)

We'll call a concept *C* a **sortal** concept if you can sensibly ask "how many *C*s are there?". So FOOTBALL is a sortal, but PLUTONIUM is not. Compare: 'How many footballs are there?' and 'How many plutoniums are there?'. The latter only makes sense if you take it to be elliptical for 'How many plutonium atoms are there?', where ATOM is a sortal.

There are different kinds of sortal. Call a concept *C* a **substance sortal** if it is the case that anything that satisfies *C* only exists when it satisfies *C*. By contrast any concept for which this is false we can call a **phase sortal**. If you like, phase sortals are only satisfied by some 'time-slice' of objects, whereas substance sortals are satisfied by *all* time-slices of objects. Some paradigmatic examples include the following:

Substance Sortal	Phase Sortal
Dog	Puppy
Lump of clay	Statue
Human being	Student

According to animalism, **PERSON is a phase sortal**. So, the substance sortal you satisfy is ANIMAL and the phase sortal you satisfy is PERSON. Thus, in the same way that you will continue to exist after you cease to be a student (promise!), *you will continue to exist after you cease to be a person*.

In this way, the animalist agrees with Parfit that personhood is not what is relevant to survival. However, they disagree about what *is* relevant to survival. The former takes 'the same animal as' relation to matter. The latter takes psychological connectedness to matter.

4. Objections to the Thinking-Animal Argument

There have been a number of objections to Olson's argument. We'll consider a few here.

(1) The Corpse Argument

This argument depends on the claim that human animals are **not identical with their bodies**. Why should we accept this? Well, on death, the body remains (most of the time), but we cease to exist. But, on animalism human persons are identical with human animals. Thus, the animalist must accept that human animals are not identical with their bodies (or else accept, incredibly, that persons continue to exist after death).

It also depends on the claim that **bodies can think**. The argument for this is comparable to the argument that *animals* can think. After all for every human animal that is thinking, there is a body that shares all of its microphysical features with that animal (and so shares with the animal a functional, operating brain). To parallel Olson's argument, if bodies cannot think, animalists owe an explanation for *why* this is so. Accepting these claims, the argument then runs:

- P1[†]. There is body sitting in your chair.
- P2[†]. The body sitting in your chair is thinking.
- P3[†]. You are the thinking being sitting in your chair.
- C[†]. You are the body.

The strategy here is to argue that, if the Thinking Animal argument compels us to think that we are identical to our human animals, then by parity of reasoning, the Corpse Argument compels us to think that we are identical to our bodies. The objector then argues by modus tollens: we should not accept that the Corpse Argument compels us to think we are identical to our bodies, so we should not think that the Thinking Animal argument compels us to think that we are identical to our human animal. In other words, the objector claims that the two arguments stand or fall together. The animalist then has a choice:

- (a) Deny that they stand or fall together, by demonstrating how the Corpse Argument can be unsound while the Thinking Animal argument is sound.
- (b) Accept that they stand or fall together, and then show how your being identical to your body and identical to your human animal are not inconsistent (as they appear to be).

(2) The thinking-parts argument

To work, this argument depends on the claim that there are **human-animal parts** that are thinking. For instance, the part of the human animal that is made up of everything except the feet of the entire animal. And the part that is made up of everything except the parts below the knees of the entire animal. And so on... We have good reason to think that these human-animal parts are thinking since, after all, we don't think an animal loses its ability to think when it loses its foot. Now consider the following:

- P1***. There is an animal-minus-feet part sitting in your chair.
- P2***. The animal-minus-feet part sitting in your chair is thinking.
- P3***. You are the thinking being sitting in your chair.
- C***. You are the animal-minus-feet part.

But, of course, nothing turned on the part in the argument being an animal-minus-feet part – there are infinitely many human animal parts in your chair! And this argument would go through for any of them. From this it follows that you are identical with infinitely many ***non-identical human-animal parts***. But this is impossible (since the parts are themselves non-identical, you could be identical with at most one of them).

From there, the form of the argument is as it was in the Corpse Argument. The animalist must either explain why the Thinking Animal and Thinking-Parts arguments come apart, or else say why their conclusions are not inconsistent.

(3) Unexplained Intuitions

Recall that, at the start of the lecture, we said that the psychological continuity view was motivated by our intuitions in the fission and transplant cases. In particular, it was motivated by the intuitions in those cases driven by the *first-person perspective*. When I imagine undergoing a brain transplant, I have a strong intuition that I will wake up in another body post-surgery.

The trouble is, animalism seems to leave these intuitions unexplained. At the start of this course of lectures we said that there were two things a theory could say about a set of intuitions: (1) that they reflect the facts or (2) they do not reflect the facts, but can be explained by them. The animalist has to claim that our intuitions in the transplant and fission cases *do not* reflect the facts. But in this case, they incur an explanatory burden: *why do we have these intuitions?*