

## Lecture 3

### Animalism, Part I

#### 1. Introduction

Last time, we looked closer at psychological continuity. In part, we did this by listing some desiderata for an account of personal identity. These were as follows:

- (a) **Intrinsicness** (i.e. identity should be a relation that is intrinsic to its relata)
- (b) **Transitivity** (i.e. for all a, b, c, if a=b, and b=c, then a=c)
- (c) **Determinateness** (i.e. it is necessarily false that sometimes there is no answer as to whether X is identical to Y)
- (d) Preserve our **intuitions** about our **survival**
- (e) Preserve our **intuitions** about our ability to **change**
- (f) Maintain personal identity as an instance of **numerical identity**
- (g) Preserve our **intuition** that there are **roughly as many persons as bodies**

We saw that psychological continuity accounts found it difficult to meet all of these at once. In the last two classes, we'll examine **animalism** and evaluate whether it achieves any more success than does psychological continuity.

Broadly, **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<sub>NI</sub>**: 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<sub>NI</sub> 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<sub>NI</sub> 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. Objections to the Thinking-Animal Argument**

There have been a number of objections to Olson's argument. Some of these we will look at next time when we look at constitutionalism. The two arguments we'll look at now are the **Corpse Problem** and the **Thinking-Parts Argument**. Each of these consists in an argument that is analogous to the thinking-animal argument. Opponents argue that, by parity of reasoning, the animalist must also accept the conclusions of these arguments; but these conclusions are intolerable. So animalism, at the very least, cannot be defended via the thinking-animal argument.

### 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). What is more, animalism gives us no reason for thinking we are identical with the *entire* animal instead of just with some one of these parts.

### 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<sup>†</sup>**. There is body sitting in your chair.
- P2<sup>†</sup>**. The body sitting in your chair is thinking.
- P3<sup>†</sup>**. You are the thinking being sitting in your chair.
- C<sup>†</sup>**. You are the body.