

PERSONAL IDENTITY LECTURE 4

1. According to the psychological view you are what is uniquely psychologically continuous with you. For Olson (*The Human Animal*) this implies unacceptably that you are not an animal. An animal is just a living thing: something that regulates its own state and sustains itself by taking in matter and excreting it in a more disordered state. Olson assumes materialism: that is, you and I are wholly material: we are not Cartesian souls or bundles of immaterial entities.
2. That you are *not* an animal follows from the psychological view by Leibniz's Law. Suppose you lapse into a persistent vegetative state (PVS). The only animal that you *could* be (that sitting in your chair) continues to exist but (on the psychological view) you do not. The animal survives but you do not. So by LL you are not an animal. (Does this argument commit the fallacy in Descartes's argument for dualism?)
3. The leading argument for animalism is the so-called 'too many thinkers' argument (P. Snowdon, 'Persons, animals and ourselves'). The argument is as follows: (1) The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking; (2) You are the thinking thing sitting in your chair; therefore (3) you are a human animal.
4. The argument is valid given Russell's theory of descriptions, so Locke, and neo-Lockeans like Parfit, must reject one of the premises. Shoemaker rejects premise (1): see his paper 'Functionalism and personal identity'. According to Shoemaker, the correct account of thought is functionalist: what it is to have this or that mental state is to be in a state with this or that type of cause and effect; and moreover the effects have to be (at least at first) effects on *you*. This in turn means that you must go wherever your brain (i.e. your cerebrum) goes, because it is via your brain that all of your thoughts have their effect on anything. This means that it is the brain, and not the animal that has thoughts.
5. We might also object to the uniqueness claim implicit in premise (2), on the grounds that there is a whole variety of things in your chair that might be said to be thinking: the animal, its brain, its head, its right-little-finger complement, and any of many other things. Notice that if we agree that *all* of these objects are thinking, then we must give up the uniqueness claim in (2). But if we weaken (2) to say 'You are a thinking thing sitting in your chair' then the argument is no longer valid.
6. Animalism can also seem an unsatisfactory halfway position. After all, couldn't we equally say that if the animal is thinking, so is the *matter* that composes you? So why aren't you that matter? A similar line of thought threatens (or promises) to show that neither persons nor animals, nor in fact any composite objects, exist at all: there are only more fundamental physical items that get arranged in various ways. Once God has fixed the physical distribution of particles in the universe for all time, what further difference could it make whether any subregions of the distribution are *persons*?

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7. What made the psychological approach plausible? It was the first personal perspective. What convinces you that you persist is the experience of the continuity of experience. What Locke (*Essay* II.xxvii.13) and Kant (*CPR* A363) both saw was that *this* experience could be sustained by psychological connectedness alone. But just think how it would look 'from the inside' to the Prince in Locke's thought experiment, supposing now that nobody lost consciousness at any stage. It would look as though he had lost some bodily parts and gained others: what better reason could there be to say that that *is* what happens? And the animalist says little to make this widespread and compelling intuition go away.
8. Turning from these grounds for animalism to its consequences: note first that the animalist can agree with Locke's account of what a *person* is, namely a thinking thing. And he can agree with Locke that *you* are a person. To see (a) how this can be so, and (b) the nature of the disagreement between the animalist and the Lockean, we must understand the crucial distinction between substance concepts and phase sortals.
9. I'll call a concept F *sortal* if we can ask: how many Fs are there? I'll call a concept F a *substance concept* if anything that ever satisfies it only exists when it satisfies it. And I'll call F a *phase sortal* if it is sortal but *not* a substance concept: something can satisfy it at one time and not another. Animalism is the position that you (or at least some persons like you) fall under the *substance concept animal* and the *phase sortal thinking thing* (i.e. the phase sortal *person*). You existed since not long after conception and will continue to exist until after you enter a persistent vegetative state, should that happen. You may spend only some of your existence as a thinking thing (and, on the view known as *somatic animalism*, you may spend only some of it alive).
10. Animalism *may* therefore leave open at least some questions that made the issue interesting in the first place. E.g. it is compatible with animalism that only thinking animals matter, so that although you were once a foetus, *you* only started to matter when you became a thinking or feeling foetus. Similarly although animalism may tell us when death happens, the psychological view may tell us when what matters about death happens, if anything matters about death.
11. On the other hand, animalism does appear to underwrite one significant argument against abortion, that due to Don Marquis ('Why abortion is immoral'). According to Marquis, what makes abortion wrong is that it deprives the foetus of a future like ours; he argues for this on the grounds that it is what makes infanticide wrong. Now for the animalist it *is* true that abortion deprives the foetus of a future like ours, because every one of us *was* a foetus. For the Lockean, however, none of us were fetuses and no foetus has a future as a person.

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