

Personal Identity, Part IA: Metaphysics.

Lecture V, *Physical Approaches: Animalism*, 2nd November

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Last week, we looked at some ways physical approaches might push back against the motivations for psychological views and we looked briefly at one physical criterion: the bodily criterion. This was found lacking. This week, we'll look at a more sophisticated physical view: animalism.

1. *Animalism*

1.1. Animalism is the view that we are each numerically identical to an animal. Of course, that animal is a human being, or human organism. Thus, Animalism is the view that we are each numerically identical to a human organism. That organism is, according to animalism, numerically *you*.

1.2. Animalism is a physical view of personal identity because organisms are physical entities. Naturally, then, it diverges from psychological accounts: you can continue to exist despite significant psychological changes. But note how it also diverges from other physical views we have looked at. There are cases, for instance, where you (as an animal) continue to exist, even if there are significant changes with your body.

1.3. Animalism is neutral on a number of further claims one might make about animals, humans, and people. It is compatible with there being non-animal persons, e.g., God, Angels. The claim is only that we are animals. It's compatible with there being some animals which are not persons. Animalism leaves open what a person is. A Lockean view is, for instance, consistent with animalism.

1.4. How do these theses relate to the questions we have been concerned with—the identification and the reidentification question. The identification question is 'What is it for something to be a person?'. Animalism doesn't immediately answer *this*. Instead, it answers the question 'What are *you*?'. Nor does animalism immediately answer the reidentification question—what is it for something to be the same person over time? Instead, animalism answers: 'What is it for *you* to continue to exist?'. In fact, Olson (2002) complains that focusing on the identification and reidentification has *skewed* the debate against animalism.

They don't ask whether we are animals, or what we might be if we aren't animals, or how we relate to the human animals that are so intimately connected with us. Or at least they don't ask that first. No one who began by asking what we are would hit on the idea that we must be computer programs or bundles of thoughts or non-animals made of the same matter as animals ... The traditional problem ... asks what is necessary, and what is sufficient, for a person existing at one time to be identical with something present at another time

1.5. Resistance to animalism has often been motivated by the underlying assumption that we are essentially persons. Animalists reject this: you are an animal, your survival is a matter of animal survival, you are also a person, but you can survive without being a person. Ceasing to be a person is not ceasing to be.

2. *Some Quick Arguments for Animalism*

2.1. Here's 'The Embryo Argument': (1) You were once numerically identical to an Embryo; (2) If you were once numerically identical to an Embryo, then you are an animal; therefore: (3) You are an animal.

2.2. The argument is obviously valid. Is it sound? (1) is taken to follow from how we ordinarily talk. (2) is motivated by the fact that no other criterion of personal identity can seem to account for the fact that you were once numerically identical to an Embryo, e.g., Embryos have psychological traits, so this rules out psychological views; and your body is not identical to the 'body' of the Embryo, ruling out the bodily criterion.

2.3. There are other arguments like this. We could appeal to the fact that you are still *yourself* even in a permanent vegetative state. A psychological criterion of personal identity cannot account for this. Yet, if you are an animal, this is explained. Of course, the bodily criterion could explain this as well. But this can't explain why you're not identical to your corpse. Animalism can explain *both*.

3. *The Thinking Animal Argument*

3.1. One problem with both of these arguments is that the motivation for the first premise of each rests on how we ordinarily talk. Could this be a mere loose talk? A much more sophisticated argument is Olson's 'The Thinking Animal Argument', or 'Too Many Persons', see (Olson, 2002).

The Thinking Animal Argument

- (1) There is a human animal in your chair.
- (2) The human animal in your chair is thinking.
- (3) You are the thinking being in your chair
- (4) You are a human animal.

The argument is valid. We can see this using Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions:

Definite Descriptions: We analyze 'The *F* is *G*', e.g., 'The man is tall', as:

- (i) There is some *x* and *x* is *F* and *G*, e.g., There is some *x* and *x* is a man and *x* is tall.
- (ii) Everything which is *F* is identical to *x*, e.g., Everything which is a man is identical to *x*.

(1) and (2) entail that there is a *unique* human animal in your chair which is thinking. And (3) states that anything which is thinking (in your chair) is identical to you. Therefore, the thinking animal *is* you.

3.2. Those that reject animalism must therefore reject one of the premises (1)—(3). (1) seems undeniable, short of denying that animals exist. Some have, but we will not. It is certainly also hard to deny (2). After all, the human animal in your chair has precisely the same biological makeup as you. How could *you* think, but it could not? The weakest part of the argument seems to be (3).

3.3. Premise (3) is a uniqueness claim. Problem: this *over-generates*. There are plenty more entities besides you and the thinking animal which are thinking (in your chair) but not identical to you. Consider:

- (*n*) The Chunk_{*n*}: The animal in your chair made up of all *n* atoms comprising your body.
- (*n*-1) The Chunk_{*n*-1}: The chunk of matter made up of *n* - 1 of the atoms comprising your body.
- (*n*-2) The Chunk_{*n*-2}: The chunk made up of *n* - 2 of the atoms comprising your body ...
- (0) The chunk₀: Nothing.

At some stage (*i*) in (*n*)—(0), Chunk_{*i*} will not be thinking. But there are plenty of chunks before then which will be thinking, e.g., the chunk which differs from your body by one atom, by an arm, by a leg, etc. If (3) is correct, then all of these are identical to you. We should, then, reject (3).

References

Olson, Eric (2002). An Argument for Animalism. In: *Personal Identity*. Ed. by Martin and Barresi.