

Persistence, Thought, and Animality

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§I.

Philosophical discussions of personal identity often put us in strange and dizzying territory. Though we start off with what seems like a coherent enough question, “What is essential to my being the same person at some later time as I was at an earlier time—what has to remain the same over time for me to be the same?” we can find ourselves, rather quickly, losing our bearings. We are often confronted with fantastic, and sometimes gruesome, scenarios, in which human brains are split down the middle and the resulting halves transplanted into new bodies, in which subjects’ memories and other psychological states are “wiped” and their brains “re-programmed,” in which persons’ heads are severed from their bodies, switched, and surgically re-attached. And when these scenarios have come and gone, we then face what can seem like even more fantastic conclusions—e.g., that we are not human animals but, rather, “the part of the animal that does the thinking”¹ or that we are essentially animals and, so, wholly dependent on the one bit of our bodies that regulates and sustains our vital processes.² At some point in the course of such a survey, then, it is only natural to pause and wonder, “How did we get *here*? At what point did we pass from the innocent to the incredible?”³

Now this, I think, holds particularly of some of the most recent and prominent exchanges in this ongoing conversation. The exchanges I have in mind concern two rival positions, the psychological continuity view, on the one hand, and animalism, on the other. The psycho-

¹Derek Parfit, ‘We Are not Human Beings’, *Philosophy* 87:1 (2012) p. 21.

²Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal* (Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 131-142.

³I, of course, have §308 of the *Investigations* in mind: “The decisive move in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one we thought quite innocent.”

logical continuity view, as its name suggests, is the view that what matters to a person's continued existence is significant continuity in her psychological states—enough connections of the right sort must hold between, for instance, the experiences she has at one time and the memories she has later on or the commitments she forms at one time and the judgements she makes later on. If enough such connections hold from one given time to another, or hold for intervals between these times—naturally, over the course of a life, some old connections break, and new ones are formed—the person at the earlier time can be said to be one and the same as the person at the later time, no matter what other changes might have befallen her in the meantime.⁴ The position's proponents thus trace their thinking back to Locke, for whom all that our identity consists in is something similarly psychological.⁵ Animalism is the newer view. It attempts to overturn a central assumption of the Lockean position—that our being persons is what matters to our continued existence, that this sets the conditions under which we can still be said to exist. It starts from the flat-footed observation that we do not begin life as persons, that we are not from the outset rational, self-conscious beings. Such beings are, rather, something that we grow into being. And this, the reasoning goes, means that we cannot be persons essentially. Persons were something that we *became*. And what we are essentially we must have been at all times throughout our existence, for it is being this on which our existence depends. This is just what being something essentially comes to. So, animalism claims instead that we are essentially animals, that we continue to exist so long as we remain such animals. And from this it follows, or so it is claimed, that

⁴This view, then, allows for all manner of things to be befall a person and for her still to survive. The limit case is, perhaps, one that Derek Parfit describes (Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1986)). You step into a teletransporter, a device which, in scanning your body part for part, destroys it. Seconds later, someone just like you in every way steps out of a similar device on Mars. She is the end product of this scanning procedure—just the same was you were seconds before but constituted, of course, out of different matter. Parfit, at least at one point, held that she, in being psychologically continuous with you, was you. This case and others like it will not, however, matter to our discussion here.

⁵John McDowell questions Parfit's reading of Locke and suggests that we needn't read him as recommending a reductionistic account of personal identity in the way that Parfit does (John McDowell, 'Reductionism and the First Person', in: *Mind, Value & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)). I will remain neutral on this. However, to the extent to which Parfit and other psychological continuity theorists approve of the Lockean distinction between persons and the human animals ("Men") out of whose mouths they speak, and the animalists do not, the former are Lockceans. Thus, I will henceforth refer to these theorists as such.

we might go so far as losing all psychological continuity with ourselves, or even all capacity for such continuity and reasoning and consciousness—that we might, in short, lose all that makes us persons—and still exist. Being a person, then, on this view, is only a phase of our animal existence, a phase contingent on our having certain psychological capacities. What really matters to our continued existence is our being animals. This sets the conditions for our continued existence. And however exactly it is we end up specifying these conditions, this much can be said at the outset—these conditions will not include our having any psychological capacities, for there are intervals of our animal existence where we have no such capacities whatsoever.

One particularly striking fact about this ongoing conversation is that the participating voices belong almost exclusively to Lockeans and animalists—so much so that it can look increasingly as though these positions are our only serious options. Taking a position at all, it can seem, means siding with one camp or the other.⁶ But this I find implausible. The two conclusions I mentioned above as exemplary of the strange and dizzying heights this conversation has reached are conclusions drawn in the recent exchanges I have in mind. Derek Parfit, siding with the psychological continuity view, claims that each of us is the thinking part of a human animal. Eric Olson, siding with animalism, claims that what matters to our persistence is a continuing capacity to regulate our vital processes, which for him comes to having an intact brain stem—whether the rest of the brain, and with it, our psychological capacities, remain intact is beside the point. Such conclusions should be met with some incredulity. They stray far enough from our understanding of ourselves that they should stop us in our tracks. We should not wait for further developments, further refinements, in these views. We should, rather, look back and ask, “Just how did we get here? Must we really continue down this path?” What we decide to say about personal

⁶For example, Carol Rovane, in responding to McDowell’s “Reductionism and the First Person,” unfairly lumps him with the animalists just because he questions the Lockean distinction between persons and human animals (Carol Rovane, ‘Personal Identity, Ethical not Metaphysical’, in: *McDowell and His Critics* (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) p. 101). But McDowell only says, quite sensibly, that it is not as though in the case of each such animal there are two lives being led.

identity is important. It matters to our conception of how our lives hang together and to our conception of the kind of thing that we at bottom are. What we say here carries over into how we are to conceive our place in the world.⁷ And so, I think, it is worth retracing some of the twists and turns that took this conversation to its present place and finding where, if anywhere, something went amiss.

In this paper, then, I will consider some of the recent exchanges between Parfit and Olson that lead them to these strange and dizzying heights. I will show that the conclusions at which they each arrive are not just incredible on first impression. These conclusions are in fact not to be believed—they warrant our incredulity. In doing this, it will not be my aim to put forward a new criterion by which to make judgements of personal identity.⁸ I want, rather, to bring out something that I think is shared between these two opposing views, something that distorts their understanding of us and so pushes them toward the incredible heights at which they now stand. This shared aspect of their views is in their approach to animality—both Parfit and Olson misunderstand the place of psychological capacities in the lives of animals. They wrongly suppose that it is enough for something to simply remain alive—to remain, however otherwise badly damaged, minimally self-regulating—for it to still be an animal. They wrongly suppose that an animal could survive the destruction of its psychological capacities. And this, I think, leads each, in his respective ways, to misunderstand how such capacities and animality can come together in us. Each insists on the essentiality of one of these dimensions of us to the exclusion of the other. But, as I will argue, neither of these can in us in fact be understood independently of the other. So, though these theorists profess to be speaking of, on the one hand, psychological states and, on the other, animals, they fail to say much about either. This is why the consequences of their respective views are so incredible, and this is why we need to take a different path in

⁷Sydney Shoemaker, for instance, certainly leans on his understanding of what personal identity consists in to defend his view of the relation in which persons stand to their bodies (Sydney Shoemaker, ‘Embodiment and Behavior’, in: *Identity, Cause, and Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2003) p.117).

⁸McDowell, I think, already gives us good reason not to pursue such a project (McDowell, *op. cit.*). But nothing I say in what follows relies on my sharing this view.

thinking about ourselves.

§II.

Parfit's claim—that each of us, a person, is the thinking part of a human animal—might seem to stand at some distance from the other commitments to which he is bound in holding that psychological continuity is all that matters to a person's persistence. It seems, really, that no such claim need follow from these commitments. And, indeed, as we will see, Parfit is only driven to it in feeling the pressures of a particular argument advanced by the animalists—this is where the exchange between Parfit and Olson gets its start. But before we get to this argument, I want to say a little more by way of background about personal identity and the psychological contintuity view.

Why should we suppose that there is a distinct question to be raised concerning the identity of persons? Why suppose that there are distinct conditions under which the same person now can be said to exist later, and why suppose that these are the conditions that matter to us? Here is one answer. Our being persons seems to mean that we are set to lead a distinctive kind of life—one in which we are capable of such things as taking responsibility for what we have done, making commitments, and worrying about the future. Now much, of course, goes into the leading of such a life, but one thing that stands out in particular is the temporal consciousness we have of ourselves—memory and the other forms of psychological continuity of which we are capable seem to confer on our lives a distinctive kind of temporal unity, and it is this that then seems to give our lives the shape that they have. Consider, it is only in our being able to remember what we have experienced and done and our knowing that we can that such notions as commitment and responsibility are even in our sight. Commitment now would be empty were we unable to bind our future selves, and responsibility for what had been done impossible to make stick. And, moreover, it is only in our knowing that we are likely to live well beyond tomorrow or the next day that we can appreciate certain options, options that would otherwise be beyond us. We needn't

heed whatever it is that immediately calls to us. We can think about the the long term and forego the things that would satisfy us now in pursuit of things more worthwhile. We can undertake meaningful projects and thereby give deliberate shape to our lives. We are, in short, in having temporal consciousness of ourselves capable of forging for ourselves distinct practical identities. And this suggests that to trace out the life of a person is not just to trace out a continuous path through space and time, as one might with a meteoroid or a dandelion seed. It is, rather, to trace out the path of a particular subject of experiences, whose existence as kind the of thing she is is bound together by her consciousness of this path and of the directions in which it might extend in the future. And since, it seems, this subject of experiences, this person, would dissolve were she incapable of such consciousness of herself—there would be no path for us to trace—the extent of her psychological continuity seems the extent of her existence. So long as this prevails, in one form or another, so does she. This provides for the path for us trace.

It is thinking along such lines that, I think, goes into the psychological continuity view. Struck by the importance of temporal consciousness to the lives we lead, its proponents come to think that the continuity of such consciousness is all that matters to our existence, that just through this continuity we can mark out a distinct kind of life. We can see this already in the considerations that move Locke on this matter. Famously, of course, he distinguishes between, first, living things and the matter out of which they are composed and, second, persons and the human animals (what he refers to as “Men”) out of whose mouths they speak. These distinctions, he thinks, are grounded in the different paths for each that we can trace out. An oak, for instance, can remain long after much of the matter of which it is now composed has, through growth and decay, been exchanged for different matter. This oak and this matter are thus on distinct and diverging spatio-temporal paths. One can fall away and the other continue. The conditions for their continued existence differ, and so they are not one and the same. Now, something similar is supposed to hold in the case of persons and human animals. Because a person’s path is constituted by her consciousness of it, by

memory and the other forms of psychological continuity which hold it together and make it a path of a certain kind, it seems that we can imagine the path of the person diverging from the path of the human animal out of whose mouth she now speaks. She might, for instance, awake to find herself in what seems to be someone else's body, having fallen into the hands of a mad scientist who, of course, has a predilection for brain surgery. Here, it would seem that she and the animal out of whose mouth she used to speak have parted ways. Perhaps, that animal has perished. They cannot then be one and the same. This person is something in her own right, something with distinctly psychological persistence conditions. And so it seems, at least to the psychological continuity theorist, that we have found our way to seeing that such continuity is what matters to persons and so is what ultimately matters to us.

Now, I said at the outset that Parfit's claim—that each of us is the thinking part of a human animal—should rouse, on first impression, at least some incredulity. I want now to say a little bit about why this should be so. First, according to our common conception of ourselves, we are thinking animals, not the thinking parts of such animals, whatever this might come to. For, not only do we, as we ordinarily conceive ourselves, think—we raise our arms, grin wildly, kick stones, and make commotions. And these, it seems, are acts of which only animals (or at least some animals) are capable. So, to claim that we are not human animals, but only the thinking part of such animals, seems to require radical revision of how we think of ourselves. Second, though it seems that we have a reasonably good understanding of how in general the parts of an animal relate to the animal of which they are parts, it is not obvious how Parfit's claim fits into this. Some of what Parfit says suggests that we should understand ourselves, the thinking part, as just another such animal part. For instance: “Animals digest their food by having a part, their stomach, that does the digesting. Animals sneeze by having a part, their nose, that does the sneezing. [...] Human animals think, we can similarly claim, by having a part that does the thinking.”⁹ But he also makes clear that this thinking part is not an anatomical part of the animal. It is not,

⁹Parfit, ‘We Are not Human Beings’, *op. cit.* p. 14-15.

for instance, one and the same as the brain, however much it may depend on it.¹⁰ So, this analogy on which he repeatedly draws is not as easy to follow as he makes it seem. These concerns, of course, do not amount to objections. But they at least show, I hope, why we ought to delve further.

So, by what pressures is Parfit led to the claim that each of us is the thinking part of a human animal? One argument in particular, I think, puts him on this course. It begins from reflection on the Lockean distinction central to the psychological continuity view, that between the person and the animal out of whose mouth she speaks. If we accept this distinction, thereby acknowledging that the conditions under which each might be said to still exist are distinct, it seems to follow that each could exist independently of the other at different times. And, indeed, this, it seems, is something to which the Lockean must appeal in order to explain the ordinary course of events. For, arguably, in the case of each and every one of us, there was, from the Lockean point of view, a time when the animal out of whose mouth we now speak existed but we did not. Early on in its life, it had to have been on its own—there was no “thinking intelligent being” of the sort that Locke describes to speak of, no being “that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.”¹¹ And then, at some later point, there came to exist such a being, one of us. But this, the animalists observe, looks to be a stranger turn of events than any Lockean might have anticipated. For, what are we to say of the animal that was here first? Even before the person came on the scene, this animal, presumably, had something of a psychological life of its own—it, presumably, was perceptually aware of its surroundings, had pains, and perhaps, even, formed beliefs. (If we are willing to say this of other animals, why wouldn’t we say this in the case of human beings?) So, what, then, became of its psychological life when the person turned up? Distinguishing, in this way, between the person and the animal as things that might each exist independently of the

¹⁰Parfit, ‘We Are not Human Beings’, *op. cit.* p.15.

¹¹John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 335.

other seems thus to commit the Lockean to there being two thinkers here, two lives being led in tandem. But this, surely, is not what the Lockean wanted to say. For every thought that each of us has, there aren't two thinkers thinking it. There is just the one.¹²

In this face of this argument, then, Parfit is forced to confront persons' relation to the human animals with which their existence coincides in a way that he previously had not. He is forced to explain how if not only persons, but the human animals out of whose mouths they speak, can be said to think, and each can be said to exist independently of the other, there are not two thinkers thinking with each such human animal. Parfit responds by, in a way, rethinking the relation between person and animal—the person, he proposes, is a part of this animal, the thinking part.¹³ This, he supposes, constitutes a solution in that, with this arrangement, there is really only one thinker to speak of, the person. But, as is required, the animal too can still be said to think—it thinks in virtue of the person, a part of it, thinking. So, when this person thinks a thought, there is no second thought that the animal itself thinks in tandem with this thought. Its thought just is the person's thought. As Parfit puts it, the animal "is indirectly thinking this thought, by having a part [...] that does the thinking,"¹⁴ and it is this part with which we should identify ourselves. "We," as he emphasises, "are identical, not with the animal, but with the person, which is the non-derivative thinker, and the subject of our mental acts."¹⁵ Now, this, we should recognise, is not to totally rethink the relation between person and animal. Though, on this view, the person is in some sense supposed to be a part of the animal, such a person is, nonetheless,

¹²Paul Snowdon, another prominent animalist, is the first in fact to have made this argument, but for reasons that will become clear below (see, especially, fn. 19), I want to focus, for the most part, on Olson's contributions to the conversation (Paul Snowdon, 'Persons, Animals, and Ourselves', in: *The Person and the Human Mind* (Clarendon Press, 1990)).

¹³This is not the only route that a psychological continuity theorist could take in responding to the animalist objection. Another route, taken by Shoemaker among others, is to argue that persons and human animals stand in a relation of constitution, in a way loosely analogous to Locke's oak and the matter that composes it (Sydney Shoemaker, 'On What We Are', in: Shaun Gallagher, editor, *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford University Press, 2011)). Parfit, however, thinks that still on this view there are strictly speaking two thinkers, even if we typically count them as only one (Parfit, 'We Are not Human Beings', *op. cit.* p. 14). Unfortunately, I do not have the space to consider this position further.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁵Ibid. p. 19.

distinct from her animal in the following way—the conditions for her continued existence are distinct from those for the animal. So, if, for instance, the animal's brain were cut out of its head and subsequently transplanted into the head of another living animal, the person, on this view, would survive this procedure—she would survive as the thinking part of this second animal—while the animal of which she was once a part might not. So, still, as ever, what matters to our continued existence is, for Parfit, psychological continuity. That each of us is the thinking part of a human animal does not change this.

We now have Parfit's position in full view. But our concerns from the outset ought still, I think, to be with us. In particular, there is still much unclarity surrounding how we ought to understand the part-whole relation on which everything relies. Parfit tries to evade the animalists' snare by re-envisioning persons as parts of human animals. In this way, persons are likened to noses and other run-of-the-mill animal parts. Such parts, in being themselves capable in certain ways, make the animal of which they are parts similarly capable. And so there is, given this part-whole relation, no doubling of capacities, no doubling of performances. And it is in this same way, according to Parfit, that we are to understand human animals as unproblematically capable of thinking, as unproblematically having thoughts. As he says, "...just as there is only a single episode of sneezing when the animal sneezes by having a part, its nose, that does the sneezing, there is only a single episode of thinking when the animal thinks by having a part that does the thinking."¹⁶ There is, however, one further thing on which Parfit insists only in the case of thinking, and it is here, I think, that things start to come crashing down. Parfit is emphatic that thinking is in the first instance a capacity that belongs to the person, not to the human animal. This comes out in his saying that the animal thinks only in a "derivative" sense, that "the animal does not itself do any thinking."¹⁷ This leads to trouble. To see this, we need to further consider just what it is for an animal to do something only derivatively. Parfit, unfortunately, does not have much to say on this matter. But we have the case of thinking with which to work. So, in

¹⁶Parfit, 'We Are not Human Beings', *op. cit.* p.22.

¹⁷Ibid. p.23.

what sense is thinking something that a human animal does only derivatively? As we know, Parfit's answer is this: the animal's thinking is derivative in that it thinks only in virtue of having a part, the person, that itself thinks. So, thinking, it seems, is something that this part can do independently of being a part of the animal. It is, on the whole, something we can say the animal does, but is, nevertheless, a contribution on the part of the person, which in being something that this person can do independently, is a separately analysable contribution—something for which we needn't have the animal in view. Now, this stands in contrast, I think, with the other capacities that Parfit mentions in making his point. For, though we can say that an animal digests only in virtue of having a stomach that does the digesting, this means something different in this case. Digesting is not something that a stomach can do independently of being a part of the animal. What digestion (in a stomach) consists in—the breakdown of organic matter by enzymes and acid—can, of course, take place, animal or no animal. But digesting itself is an activity only graspable with the animal in view. For, this activity is not just one of breaking down organic matter in such-and-such a way; it is this activity done as a matter of self-maintenance and growth, and this requires appeal to the animal. Digesting is something, then, that only the animal does, something that it does non-derivatively. What, perhaps, in this case the animal does derivatively is engage in enzymatic breakdown, for this, it seems, is something that can be understood apart from its life, something of which the stomach, apart from the animal, is capable. With this, then, we have, it seems, a better understanding of what it is for an animal to do something only derivatively—it is for this animal to do something only because it has a part which itself, independent of the animal, does this thing, as seems to be the case with stomachs and enzymatic activity. So, one question with respect to Parfit's view that we might ask is whether thinking is in fact a contribution that can be understood independently of a human animal's life or not. Only given such independence could Parfit reasonably suppose that human animals think only derivatively.

Though Parfit does not say as much, it seems that this is what he must think. Having

a psychological life is something that can be understood independently of having an animal life, which is why he thinks that a person can part ways from the animal of which she is a part. Now, though this is a commitment I think we should be uneasy with, I will not attempt to dispute it directly. Instead, I think, we should press forward with our part-whole concern and ask: in virtue of what on Parfit's account is a person to be counted as a part of the human animal? Establishing this, of course, is central to Parfit's success, for only then is he entitled to claim that human animals indeed think while also claiming that persons are distinct from the animals out of whose mouths they speak and that this does not troublingly double the number of thinkers present. But Parfit says surprisingly little about just how we should understand this part-whole relation. He makes it seem as though there is an easy comparison to make between stomachs and persons. But, given what we have just seen, how easy could this comparison be? A stomach, it seems we can say, is a part of the animal because it contributes to something of which only the animal itself is capable, namely, digestion. In contributing in this way, this stomach is a part of the self-maintaining, self-organising whole that the animal is. And so, it is in virtue of this contribution here that we can then say that what the stomach itself does—e.g., maintain such-and-such a level of acidity, break down organic matter by activating such-and-such type of enzyme—is something that animal does, if only derivatively. So, if this is how we should understand parthood when it comes to the stomach and other such animal parts, what can be said in the case of persons' being parts of human animals?

We need, it seems, to be able to identify some contribution that persons make to the lives of animals that is similarly non-derivative. Only then could a person be understood as a part of the self-organising whole that an animal is. But what is it that persons allow animals to do non-derivatively? We can rule out what seem decisively to be forms of thinking—remembering, believing, deliberating, imagining, intending, etc. But then what about the capacities that we take ourselves to have that are not purely cogitative, like feeling, perceiving, or acting? While such capacities have an obvious psychological dimension

to them, they also seem to implicate the animals out of whose mouths we speak. Could such capacities, then, be what human animals have non-derivatively in virtue of having a thinking part? It seems unlikely that Parfit could accept any such division of these capacities between us and the animal. First, with respect to acting in particular—though most action involves the movement of animal parts, action could not be something of which we are capable only derivatively. Persons are the locus of moral responsibility. We blame the person, not the animal, for having failed to keep a promise or for having acted out of self-interest. And this seems a part of the considerations that in the first place lead Parfit to take up the psychological continuity view. So, for him, it must be persons who in the first instance act, in willing the movement of animal parts. The animal acts only derivatively. Second, it does not seem as though we could attribute any non-derivative psychological activity to the animal without conceiving of it as itself a subject of experiences, a locus of psychological states in its own right. For, how else could we understand it as itself being capable of experiencing pain or of itself feeling the ground beneath its feet? And this outcome is, of course, what Parfit wanted to avoid in the first place. So, it seems that his view leaves little room for animals to, in virtue of having a person as a part, do anything non-derivatively. But then it hardly seems that Parfit is entitled to claim that persons are properly parts of animals. They do not contribute to the self-maintaining, self-organising whole that is animal life. They, rather, come from outside this whole and take it up as an instrument for their own ends. But then Parfit cannot say that human animals think, even derivatively. (When I write down a proof, the pencil with which I write does not thereby derivatively write down this proof. It is just that *with which* I write.) So, he cannot meet the animalist objection.

Parfit, in attempting to avoid having to say that there are two thinkers inhabiting one animal body, re-envisioned persons as parts of human animals, the part which thinks and is that in virtue of which such animals think. But he insists that even on this picture these animals think only derivatively, by having a part that itself thinks. This in effect makes thinking something that persons can do independently of being parts of animals. It is an

activity that can be understood independently of the life of the animal, unlike sneezing or digestion. And this, in keeping with the psychological continuity view, secures for Parfit the independent status of persons from the animals of which they are supposed to be a part. The persistence conditions for persons thus remain the same as ever, psychological continuity over time, conditions which can be understood without any animal in view and, thus, conditions which can still obtain long after any animal has perished. But this same move makes it difficult to fathom how Parfit's persons could in fact be parts of animals. Thinking is something done independently of animal life, and animals are their own self-organising wholes independent of any thinking. Thus, thinking, on this view, does not contribute to animal life, to this whole. It harnesses such life for other ends, the ends of the person. Persons, then, are an intrusion on animal life. So, Parfit cannot insist on his view of persons and, at the same time, say that they are parts of human animals. So, he is not entitled to say that animals think, not even derivatively. Thinking, on his view, may move animals, but this, obviously, is different from such animals themselves thinking.¹⁸

§III.

The unsoundness we have uncovered in Parfit's position should not, however, make us any more willing to accept the rival position that drove him to it. Animalism, in regarding us as in the first instance animals, and nothing mysterious over and above this, might seem to offer a more sensible approach to what we are and what is required for our continued existence. But, this, as I will argue, is not so. Animalism fails to recognise that our lives, even if animal lives, are essentially psychological.

According to animalism, we are essentially animals—it is our being animals, not persons, on which our continued existence depends. We exist so long as the animals we are exist,

¹⁸Matthias Haase voices a concern about Parfit's view along these lines, expressing puzzlement about how the thinking part of the human animal is supposed to fit into this animal's life when it is, on Parfit's view, already a complete functional unity apart from having this part (Matthias Haase, 'Life and Mind', in: Thomas Khurana, editor, *The Freedom of Life: Hegelian Perspectives* (August Verlag, 2013)). I take my argument here to be a fuller development of the concern Haase raises.

however exactly that is to be understood. Philosophers from Locke onwards have been mistaken in supposing that being a person, like being an animal, is something that one can be essentially—that being a person sets one's persistence conditions. And this is what gets them into trouble. If they did not suppose that persons were distinct from the human animals out of whose mouths they speak—animals who seem anyway to be psychologically endowed in their own right—there would not then seem to be in the case of each such animal two thinkers with which to contend. Being a person should, rather, be understood as a potential phase of our (but not necessarily only our) animal existence—something that one may come to be and later, perhaps, cease to be without then simply ceasing to exist. To the extent to which one is rational and self-conscious, able to think of oneself as the same thinking thing, at different times and different places, one counts as a person. But there was a time at which one was not this way. And a day may come when this again is the case. Nevertheless, according to the animalist, one remains the animal one is throughout. To say, then, that something is a person is just to say something about what it is capable of. It is not yet to say anything about what this something is.¹⁹ And the latter is all that matters to determining the conditions under which something still can be said to exist. So, psychological continuity theorists like Parfit are mistaken in taking the conditions under which we still count as persons to be the conditions for our persistence as such.

This, of course, raises the following question: what, then, according to animalism are the conditions for our persistence? The animalists, unfortunately, do not agree among themselves on the answer they should give. But for our purposes here, we should, I think, focus on Olson's account. It is the more developed, more plausible of our options.²⁰ Olson holds that life is the key condition of animals' persistence—something is only still an animal if it remains a self-regulating, self-organising biological whole.²¹ Thus, to sustain only an organ

¹⁹Olson, *op. cit.* p. 32.

²⁰Paul Snowdon, by contrast, defends no specific account of animal persistence but holds that dead animals are still animals. Animals do not cease to exist at the time of their death (Paul Snowdon, *Persons, Animals, and Ourselves* (Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 115).

²¹Olson, *op. cit.* p. 136-138.

taken from a human animal by artificial means would not be to sustain one of us. Such an organ, while itself made up of living cells and so capable still in a sense of living, would not just in itself have the capacity to self-regulate and self-organise. It therefore could not itself be an animal and so could not be one of us. We remain with these continuing capacities. So, by contrast, if one's lungs or one's kidneys were to fail, leaving one dependent in some respect on a machine, one would, in remaining capable of regulating the many processes through which one is a distinct, self-organising whole—metabolization, growth, digestion, etc.—remain one of us, an animal. It follows that one needn't retain any of one's psychological capacities to continue to exist. One needn't even have had any psychological capacities to begin with. All one needs really, according to Olson, is one's brain stem—this is what preserves one's capacities to self-regulate and self-organise. And, in continuing to have these capacities, one remains the animal one is, what one is essentially.

This I find difficult to accept. What still counts, on Olson's view, as an animal existence—"the metabolic process that is [the animal's] individual biological life continues to impose its characteristic organization on new particles"²² or "its capacity to direct those vital functions that keep it biologically alive is not disrupted"²³—surely describes vital existence of some kind, but it is not, I want to say, adequate to anything like *our* existence. Perhaps, such descriptions do not leave much to be desired in the case of some of the things that we classify as animals, e.g., oysters and sea sponges. But this hardly seems enough in the case of you or me. Perhaps, we needn't insist on the particularly demanding Lockean conception of ourselves considered at the outset, where one need retain a certain degree of temporal consciousness of oneself and of the particular path one has traced to still exist. Perhaps, we need to allow that there can be a radical loss in one's capacities and in the continuities in one's psychological states without then having to just say that one is no longer present. But still, it seems, one must retain some of one's psychological capacities to continue existing. What, for Olson, still counts as our existing is a bare biological existence. It does not rise

²²Olson, *op. cit.* p. 137.

²³Ibid. p. 135.

to being like anything recognisably ours. So, it is difficult to see how Olson's account even concerns us—it seems to have veered off into other territory.

Parfit expresses somewhat similar misgivings in the face of Olson's claims.²⁴ In so doing, he makes use of a thought experiment that goes along the following lines. Some of its details are ones with which we should already be familiar:

Suppose that you undergo a surgical procedure in which your brain is removed from your skull and transplanted into the empty skull of another living human body. The transplant takes, and the resulting individual who wakes up claims to be you, seems to have your memories, and tries to live her life as you did. Meanwhile, the body that once housed your brain is kept alive in a medical facility. Though, obviously, it cannot live the life it once did, it is arguably nevertheless alive. It, moreover, seems to remain an animal (rather than part of something that once was an animal) in that it still has a functional brain stem and so is capable of regulating the basic biological processes that prevent it from further deterioration. So, though it needs a feeding tube and other forms of artificial support, it still regulates its heartbeat, breathing, temperature, metabolism, etc. independently. It seems fair to say, then, that this animal is the same animal that once housed your brain. It persists after the surgery, however severely debilitated. But with which animal ought we to say that you survive—the one that has your brain, and with it, what seem to be all your psychological states, or the one that once had your brain but now has no psychological capacities to speak of at all?

Now, as will come out below, I do not want to go along with how this scenario in all respects is described. Nevertheless, it does, I think, bring out something important in how we think of ourselves and our lives. It is meant, of course, to elicit a particular reaction from us—the conviction that we, in such a case, would live on, nearly the same was we always did, as the transplant recipient, the one who would have our brain and with it all of our memories, beliefs, and the like. And we are supposed to refuse to accept that the awful fate of the empty-headed donor would be our fate. Now, this reaction, I want to say, is not a mere reaction cleverly wrung from us. It issues from our understanding of ourselves, a part of this being that lives like ours are lived from a point of view, that nothing could count as such a life without it still having such a point of view. So, this, I think, is why the thought

²⁴Parfit, 'We Are not Human Beings', *op. cit.* p. 9-14.

experiment elicits the reaction it does. Our brain, we suppose, sustains the capacities that allow us to continue having a point of view, and so, we think, it with this brain that our life continues, wherever it may be housed. Our life does not continue with the empty-headed creature for whom there is nothing at all it is to be like. So, should that brain, rather than being transplanted into a different skull, have ended up on the floor of the operating room and unsalvageable, that empty-headed creature out of whose mouth we once spoke would still not be us. Our lives end when the point of view from which we've lived them is extinguished, when we are no longer capable of having a point of view. It would be perverse to insist to anyone who had known us that we lived on as that empty-headed creature, that anything really remained of what we were.

But these considerations, as intuitive as they are, cannot just in themselves overturn the view. Perhaps, we are radically mistaken about ourselves. Perhaps, animalism provides us with the most metaphysically coherent way of understanding ourselves. This, in fact, is the case that Paul Snowdon, another animalist, tries to make.²⁵ Though the reaction that brain-transplant scenarios like the above elicit in us is powerful, he argues, their impact is diminished once we have thought through the consequences of identifying ourselves with Lockean persons. As we well know—distinguishing between persons and the human animals out of whose mouths they speak leaves us in the case of each such animal two thinkers, and this, we must grant, is unacceptable.

But from our standpoint, this just means that we confront two rather unappealing options. We can, with Parfit, disavow there being any identity between us and the animals out of whose mouths we speak. But then we will find ourselves at loss when it comes to saying in what relation we stand to these animals. Or, we can, with Olson and Snowdon, embrace our animal identity. But on their understanding of what this comes to, this means accepting that we are not essentially psychological beings, that living and breathing is enough to lead an essentially human life. Given these options, I think, we should try to find our way to

²⁵Snowdon, *Persons, Animals, and Ourselves*, *op. cit.* p. 201.

a different view. We can begin by observing that the Lockceans and the animalists accept the same view of animals, human or otherwise—something can be an animal and not be essentially psychologically endowed. This explains why Parfits denies that we are animals. We, he thinks, are essentially psychological, and if human animals are not, we cannot be identical to those animals out of whose mouths we speak. So, if such animals must be said to have psychological states at all, this is best explained by these states’ being derivative, something they have only in our having them. And this, of course, also explains why Olson and Snowdon think that being a person—being, that is, a rational, self-conscious being—can only be a possible phase in the lives of animals like us. We are such animals long before we find our way to being rational and self-conscious and can remain so even after having lost the relevant capacities. This understanding of animals thus figures heavily in the shaping of these positions and their opposition to each other. So, naturally, we can see how this understanding could figure in the problems that each position faces. In Parfit’s case: there would be no difficulty in supposing that a human animal’s thoughts were one and the same as a person’s thoughts, if such animals were essentially psychological beings and so were just identical to the persons whose thoughts they shared. In Olson’s case: a bare living, breathing existence would not count as existence for animals like us, if such animals’ lives were essentially psychological lives—the life of the person and the animal would be the very same.

Neither Parfit nor Olson, however, seem even to recognise this as an option. This is not surprising. For, to claim that animal life is essentially psychological, or even, that human animal life is, seems to lead us into stranger territory still. To make the wider claim is to deny that biology has the last word on what animals are, that the biological sense of “animal” is the only sense that we need. For, in making this claim, we exclude from consideration those biological animals—e.g., sea sponges, oysters, sea anemones—that, in lacking such physiological sophistications as a central nervous system, lack any capacity for what by any measure could be considered psychological states. And to make only the narrower claim,

it seems, is still to face certain metaphysical difficulties. What, for instance, are we to say about the embryonic human being who does not yet have any psychological capacities and who, due, say, to genetic defects, may never have them? Does this mean that we begin life as non-animals and then become animals? But this, of course, would mean that we were not always animals and so could not be animals essentially. So, how, then are we to understand the sense of “essentially” in the claim that human animals are essentially psychological? Such difficulties, I take it, are what lead Parfit and Olson to avoid these claims in the first place.

To answer the first concern: claiming that there is another sense of “animal” on which the conditions for our continued existence might hang needn’t be as radical step as it may seem. Olson, to be sure, takes the position that such concepts as *life* and *animal* should be left to biologists to determine.²⁶ But this is a position that needs defending. After all, the claims being staked here are metaphysical. They concern kinds, it seems, in a different, deeper sense. In modern taxonomy, the considerations that go into making classifications are, for the most part, phylogenetic. Organisms are put in one group or another on the basis of common evolutionary ancestry. Thus, classifying organisms is a matter of tracing the way in which some part of evolutionary history happened to unfold. Now, it is not obvious to me that this tracks what we are after. But, of course, someone like Olson, who thinks that we should just follow biologists’ lead, will not see that there is something else we could be after. Taxonomic divisions, he will say, in having their basis in evolutionary history, reflect the empirical facts. By what other means could we better represent what there is than through these divisions?

The sense of *what there is* that interests us, we should remember, has to do with the conditions under which organisms of a given kind can continue to exist. Why the brute biological facts should matter, then, is unclear. Such facts can help us place where such organisms belong in relation to others on a phylogenetic tree. But this will not always help

²⁶Olson, *op. cit.* p. 126.

us with understanding what kind of life these organisms are capable of leading. And this, I think, is what is in fact important here. The kind of life of which organisms are capable determines the conditions for their continued existence. All organisms, to be sure, share a kind of existence that distinguishes them from non-organisms. This is something on which we can agree with Olson. All organisms are self-regulating and self-organising. They are all, in one way or another, capable of drawing on what belongs to the surrounding environment and channeling it into their own processes of maintenance, growth, and reproduction. In this way, the processes and activities that make up the life of an organism form a functional unity distinct from whatever else may be going on around it. Even Olson acknowledges this. “Not just any self-directing, homeodynamic, biological event is a life,” he says. “A life must contrast with its surroundings. This is not meant to be an empirical claim from biology, but part of the concept of a life.”²⁷ But what Olson fails to see as important are the ways in which the different capacities of an organism can change what leading its life, what engaging in vital activities and having vital needs, comes to. Olson treats all organic persistence as the same—for any given kind of organism, the conditions for its persistence obtain so long as there remains some capacity for self-regulation. But having psychological capacities, I want to say, changes what living is for an organism. And this it does radically—it does not just add to what was there with other organisms but changes the shape of what living is. *Pace* Olson, then, to say what something is capable of is in this case to say what it is.

We can see this if we consider some of the differences between, for instance, the life of a sunflower and the life of a vole. While both organisms, of course, have vital needs, which they address by engaging in the many vital processes of which each is capable, the ways in which they each manifest these needs and go about addressing them is very different. Each, for instance, is responsive to features in its environment. The sunflower’s leaves tend towards the sunniest spot, as growth begets more growth. And the vole is drawn to grassy thickets, where there is cover and plenty to eat. But only in the case of the vole can we

²⁷Olson, *op. cit.* p. 138.

say that it takes cover or that it seeks out the choicest shoots. For, the vole, unlike the sunflower, registers features of its environment. It registers them, however inchoately, as to be fended off or eaten or fled. It, in this way, does not just have but is confronted by its vital needs, in the fear or the hunger that floods it with whatever it faces. The sunflower's responsiveness, by contrast, is mere responsiveness, explicable in terms of localised physical and chemical responses that together address the organism's needs without it itself having to register or feel anything. Now, one might attempt to explain these differences as ones which stem from having very different physiological makeups, which in turn owe to having very different evolutionary histories. And all this would be very informative. However, the explanation would only be a developmental one, and what we are after is something else—a principle that stands behind all these differences. And this, I want to say, just is vole's having psychological capacities. For, with such capacities, the vole's environment can in fact be for it something that it confronts, something that threatens and tempts and startles. And, in turn, the vole's movements (unlike those, say, of a Venus flytrap, which are at best reflexive) can in fact be directed—at what is to be eaten or hid from or fled. What it is for the vole to have vital needs and to meet them is thus changed by its having a psychology. Its whole life is differently unified. Though this life is still one of self-maintenance and growth and reproduction, these all have different shapes.²⁸ In this way, I think, we can see our way towards giving a different sense to “animal,” one that better reflects what it is for certain organisms, ourselves included, to lead their lives.²⁹

²⁸It is for analogous reasons, I take it, that the sea sponge seems hardly an animal at all. Though it does not photosynthesize, it, like a sunflower, is more or less rooted in place. Feeding, for it, involves letting bits of organic matter carried by the current filter into its orifices. Its movement is limited to opening and closing these orifices. So, even though its tissues and way of drawing energy are decisively animal according to biology's standards, the form of its vital activity hardly seem distinct from the sunflower's. It registers nothing. It pursues nothing, just taking in and digesting whatever happens to wash its way.

²⁹It may seem that we have strayed rather far from where we began. When we first reflected on what it was to be a person and what it was to lead a life distinctively like ours, we considered at some length the temporal consciousness that we each have of ourselves and that seems important to holding a life like ours together. And now, our discussion is limited to far more basic psychological capacities. More, I grant, needs to be said about the differences between our psychological lives and those of other, non-human animals and how this bears on our respective persistence conditions. But for what it's worth, I am tempted to think that we can lose much of what is distinctive of us as persons (much of our capacity for temporal consciousness, much of our capacity to reason) and still continue to exist. And this, I think, shows in the concern that most

But even if this matter of what we ought in this context to call “animals” is settled, it can still look as though other metaphysical considerations prevent us from saying that animals are essentially psychological. Recall where animalism seems to get its foothold. Human animals begin life as embryos made up of only a few hundred cells and without any psychological features at all. So, though, it may be characteristic of such an animal to develop these further down the line, it is initially without even the capacity to think—its cells having yet to differentiate into the kinds of tissue that will support thinking. But this animal is one and the same as the animal that will in time be capable of thinking. And what is essential to it, what allows it to be the same through and through, must be something that it has all along. And since psychological capacities are something that an animal, if fortunate enough, *develops*, such capacities cannot be this essential feature. So, how can we say that psychological capacities are essential to the human animal? How can we say that they are that on which such an animal’s existence depends when they are capacities that the animal begins life without?

This is only a problem if we suppose that for something to be essential to an animal’s existence it must be something present in the animal throughout—it must be something that the animal in fact has. Now, denying that this is the case might seem to have a puzzling air about it—how can something be essential to an animal’s existence, if the animal can exist without having it? To see that it need not, we need to consider the teleological character of animal existence. Olson already acknowledges that we must turn to teleological explanation in order to speak about the functional unity of the matter and processes that constitute an individual animal. We individuate *the animal* as that which has a life—and not just its upper half or one of its kidneys, wherein, presumably, some biological, self-organising activity is going on—because it is only at the level of the animal that there is a full explanation of

of us would have for ourselves in the future, were we told that this will be our situation. We, for instance, would make arrangements to ensure that we are still treated well and that we do not suffer, even knowing that we will be almost unrecognisable to those that knew us. So, though, perhaps, we ought to distinguish more carefully between the lives of which non-rational animals are capable and those of which we are, what I say here and below still, I think, bears on our lives, even if I am sometimes speaking of animals more widely.

the relevant biological processes and structures.³⁰ Though we can, to be sure, explain some of these processes and structures at, for instance, the cellular level, it is only when we get the whole animal into view that we can even speak of kidneys and intestinal tracts and digestion—these structures and processes are only intelligible as such in their contributions to the life of the whole animal. Thus, seeing the animal as a functional unity, as a persisting thing—despite the constant change and instability in its microstructures—requires some teleological explanation.

But the use of such explanation in this way only provides us with a glimpse of the animal—it explains the unity of the animal at one moment in its life. And so, it is most natural to speak of self-maintenance and self-organization. We can explain the various processes taking place within the animal as processes that contribute toward sustaining it as a whole. But the life of an animal, as the life of any other organism, has another teleological dimension to it, viz., growth. The animal begins its life in one form, and supported by the many processes which contribute to its self-maintenance, it matures, developing the features and capacities definitive of its kind. Now, Olson supposes that it is enough to explain the unity of an animal over time by appealing only to the minimal capacities for self-maintenance that it exhibits throughout its life. But these capacities do not explain the developmental changes that the animal goes through, and surely, these sorts of changes belong to the functional unity of the animal as much as any other of the changes that it naturally and necessarily undergoes (e.g., from sleeping to wakefulness, from hungry to sated). Developmental changes, we want to say, are internal to the animal in a way that certain other sorts of change (e.g., disease) are not. This temporally extended teleological explanation is simply an extension of the kind of explanation that Olson already accepts. He admits that we cannot understand certain processes and structures except as they relate to the animal, and this seems true too in the case of an animal's maturation. Though we might on one level be able to describe something as being cell differentiation or division, we only understand it as a part of the animal's life

³⁰Olson, *op. cit.* pp. 130, 131, 138.

processes if we understand it as growth, as a step in its maturation. In this way, then, teleological explanation not only gives unity to the material processes and structure of the animal at one time but to the same over the course of its life. And if we accept that such explanation is applicable to the animal in this way, it should not be hard to see how some capacity of an animal can be essential to it without it always in fact having had the capacity. Even as an embryo, when the animal has hardly any capacities in its own right, it has these capacities *potentially*. For, being what it is, an animal, it has the potential to develop these capacities. We understand the changes the animal undergoes as growth precisely because we understand that the animal, as an animal, always had in it the potential to change in just these ways. So, it is right to say that it would be absurd for some feature to be essential to an animal if the animal could exist without it. But this is not so with an animal's psychological capacities. For, even as an embryo, the animal has these capacities potentially, and so it is these capacities that explain why the animal changes as it does and, as we have already seen, structures the way in which it has and meets its vital needs. It is in this sense that an animal's psychological capacities are essential to it. It unifies all the changes, processes, and structures that properly belong to the animal across the span of its life.

This leaves us with one last significant metaphysical question to consider. What are we to say about a human animal that loses its psychological capacities? This question, I think, becomes particularly pointed when considered in the context of brain-transplant case from above. According to the view that has taken shape here, we are essentially animals, where this is to be understood as meaning that we are essentially psychologically endowed. But the brain-transplant case is one wherein, according to the Lockean, an animal is separated from the organ on which it causally depends for its psychological capacities, and so we must choose with what our continued existence lies—with the empty-headed animal or with the brain housed in a different living body. Now, we have already said in criticism of the animalist view that it is a mistake to hold that the subject who undergoes this procedure stays with the animal. This empty-headed creature is not her. She goes with the brain. But on what

grounds can we say this? How can we make this judgement without reverting to some form of the psychological continuity view? The answer, I think, must be as follows. An animal once it has lost its psychological capacities is no longer an animal. In being incapable of feeling the pull of its vital needs as it once did, in being incapable of registering the world around it and directing its movements, it ceases to be an animal. So, though, to be sure, something living, and even capable of self-organising continues to exist, these are just the sloughed-off remains of the animal, more like a severed arm or a lone kidney. Without the animal's psychological capacities, this creature has no unity. It lives but only in a biological sense. So, the transplant case is misdescribed—with these living remnants, there is no animal with which the subject can be identified. Instead, I want to say, the animal, the subject, goes with the transplanted brain. This is not as wild as it may strike some. Of course, a brain on its own is not an animal. It does not have the vital needs or capacities that an animal does. So, how can a subject who is essentially an animal be for the moments that it would take for a brain to be moved from one body to another be just that brain? This subject is not just a brain—this again misdescribes the situation. All that remains of the subject at this point is her brain. And if, of course, this brain never makes it to the other body, there would soon be nothing left of her. But psychological capacities, we must remember, make the animal. So, when her brain gets housed in the other body, it is her life, her animal life that continues there. The living body in which her brain is now housed might have once been the body of another human animal and therefore part of another human life, but its life is now her life. Together they form the functional unity that is her continued animal existence.

Animalism seemed attractive only so long as it, in making trouble for Lockceans like Parfit, seemed the most metaphysically coherent of our options. But, as I hope to have shown, this gambit fails. For, though, the animalists, in leaning on the Lockean distinction between persons and the human animals out of whose mouths they speak, reveal its incoherence, they, at the same time, throw their lot with a hopeless view. In supposing that we, at our embryonic stage, are as essentially ourselves as we'll ever be, they give up on the idea that

there is such a thing as leading a distinctively human life, that our having certain capacities can change what leading a life amounts to. And so they are stuck trying to convince us that the bare existence of an empty-headed body is as human a life as there is. But things needn't come to this. If we can just see ourselves as being essentially psychological from the start, if we can just see the way to our mindedness and our animality's being one and the same, we can avoid all this. And while this paper certainly does not take us all the way there, I hope that it at least makes the destination visible in a way that before it was not.

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