

Animalism

The problem of personal identity emerges from two incontrovertible facts about entities of our kind. First, each of us came into existence at some point in the past; each of us has persisted for some period of time; and each of us will cease to exist at some point in the future. Second, our ontological careers are marked by change. We grow and we diminish; we learn and we forget; we live and we die. The challenge is to account for these two sets of facts in an informative way: in particular, to persuasively articulate the conditions under which we come into, remain in, and ultimately go out of existence.

Various theories have been proposed to answer this challenge, among them the bodily criterion, the brain criterion, various dualist theories, various neo-Lockean psychological views, etc.. Also, Derek Parfit has challenged the evaluative significance of facts about personal identity (roughly) on the grounds that, rather than strict identity, one's survival in all important respects is what matters. (For more details on these views, see the entry on 'personal identity'.)

Though Aristotelian in spirit, animalism is a relative new-comer to this debate. The foundations of the animalist position were laid by David Wiggins (1967, 1980), who forcefully rejected John Locke's (1975) distinction between persons and animals in support of a proto-animalist position he called the 'animal attribute theory'. Subsequently, the animalist view has been developed by Michael Ayers, William Carter, David Mackie, Eric Olson, Paul Snowdon, Peter van Inwagen, Wiggins, and Richard Wollheim, among others.

Animalism's hallmark claim is that each of us is identical with a human animal. Moreover, on the plausible assumption that human animals are essentially and most fundamentally animals, it follows that each of us is essentially and most fundamentally an animal. The claim that we are essentially animals implies that we could not exist except as animals, while the claim that we are most fundamentally animals suggests that the conditions of our persistence derive from our status as animals. Since these persistence conditions are often supposed to be biological in character, animalism is sometimes referred to as the 'biological view' or the 'organism view'.

In addition to linguistic evidence and intuitive support, various arguments have been marshalled in support of animalism. The most standard – sometimes called the 'too many minds argument' or the 'thinking animal argument' – was developed independently by Carter (1989), Olson (1997, 2003), and Snowdon (1990). If presented as a *reductio*, this argument aims to demonstrate how the absurdities derived from supposing animalism's basic claim to be false thereby establish its truth. Thus, note that even one who denies that the animal presently sitting in your chair is you will grant that there is an animal presently sitting in your chair. Further note that it is increasingly implausible to deny that animals of many types think and perceive; and if any do, surely the type of animal sitting in your chair does. Moreover, you are sitting in your chair, and clearly you are thinking and perceiving. Now, if you were not identical to this animal, then there would be two mental lives simultaneously running in parallel: the thoughts and perceptions had by you and the qualitatively identical thoughts and perceptions had by the animal. But this is absurd. Therefore, animalism's basic claim is true.

While objections to animalism have come from a variety of sources, arguably the most forceful have drawn support from Locke's person-animal distinction. For instance, adapting Locke's discussion of the prince and cobbler, various 'body-transfer' objections invite us to imagine how a person might be transferred from the animal body with which she happens to be associated and installed into an altogether different animal body. If possible (in some sense), then such scenarios would seem to suggest that we are not essentially animals and that our persistence conditions are not those of animals. Other critics—notably, Lynne Rudder Baker (2001) and Sydney Shoemaker (1984)—deploy a fine distinction between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of constitution. On Baker's view, although we *are* animals in the sense of being non-identically constituted by animals, we are identical to persons, and persons are not animals.

Little consensus has been reached on these and related issues. Both the animalist position and objections to it remain under active development.

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