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# What does it mean to say that we are animals?

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**abstract** The view that we are animals--animalism--is often misunderstood. It is typically stated in unhelpful or misleading ways. Debates over animalism are often unclear about what question it purports to answer, and what the alternative answers are. The paper tries to state clearly what animalism says and does not say. This enables us to distinguish different versions of animalism.

## 1. Preliminaries

One of the main questions about the metaphysics of human people is whether we are animals: biological organisms. Snowdon, van Inwagen, and I say yes; Baker, Johnston, Parfit, and Shoemaker say no.<sup>1</sup> Snowdon has called the view that we are animals *animalism*, and the name has stuck. Sometimes 'animalism' means something else--a point I will return to--but I will use it in this sense.

Simple though it is, animalism is often misunderstood. It is typically stated in misleading ways--usually by its enemies, but sometimes by its friends as well. There is confusion about what it does and doesn't say. Debates over animalism are often unclear about what question it purports to answer, and what the alternative answers are. There are various propositions it has been taken to express, and arguments for and against it apply to different ones. My aim in this paper is to clear up some of these points. This will enable us to distinguish a number of different versions of 'animalism'.

## 2. Animalism versus Lockeanism

Animalism is frequently contrasted with 'Lockeanism'.<sup>2</sup> Lockeanism is another name for the psychological-continuity view of personal identity over time: that the persistence of a person through time consists in some sort of psychological continuity. That is, a person *x* existing at one time and something *y* existing at another time are one and the same just if there is an appropriate chain of causal

<sup>1</sup>Snowdon 2014, van Inwagen 1990, Olson 1997, 2003, Baker 2000, Johnston 2007, Parfit 2012, Shoemaker 1984, 2011. Other animalists include Ayers (1990), Blatti (2014), Carter (1989), and Luper (2014); other antianimalists include Campbell and McMahan (2010), Hudson (2007), Noonan (1998), and Unger (2000).

<sup>2</sup>This is illustrated in the title of Noonan's (1998) paper 'Animalism versus Lockeanism: A current controversy'.

dependence between the mental states  $x$  is in at the one time and the mental states  $y$  is in at the other time (Shoemaker 1984: 89ff.).

Animalists reject Lockeanism on the grounds that animals, even the human animals that they believe us to be, do not persist by virtue of psychological continuity. Lockeans reject animalism for the same reason. Everyone takes animalism and Lockeanism to be incompatible. And as they are perhaps the two most widely held views in the philosophy of personal identity, it's unsurprising that they are often contrasted.

But this contrast can be misleading, because the two views are answers to different questions. Animalism answers the question, *What are we?* Lockeanism answers the question, *What does it take for us (or for a person generally) to persist through time?* Call these the *personal-ontology question* and the *persistence question*. The point is easy to miss because both questions are called 'problems of personal identity', and that catch-all term can lead us to think that they come to the same thing. Yet there are at least half a dozen more-or-less unrelated questions called 'problems of personal identity' (Olson 2015: §1). It is possible to read lengthy discussions of 'personal identity' without having any idea what question they aim to answer.

Animalism does not answer the persistence question. Combined with an account of what it takes for a human animal to persist through time, it will *imply* an answer: that we persist by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity, perhaps. But it does not explicitly state any answer, and the implication is disputable, even if not many do dispute it. Nor does Lockeanism answer the personal-ontology question. In fact there is no simple or even reasonably uncontroversial way of inferring an account of what we are from Lockeanism: nothing analogous to the easy inference from our being animals to the view that our persistence consists in brute-physical continuity. Most Lockeans say little about what we are, and there is deep disagreement among those who say anything about our nonmental properties of metaphysical interest. (I will return to these points.)

This is important because seeing Lockeanism as the main rival to animalism gives Lockeans an unfair dialectical advantage. The usual way of defending Lockeanism is to see how well it conforms to our 'intuitions' about stories where different accounts of our persistence conditions give different verdicts about who would be who. The most famous of these is the brain transplant. If your brain (or cerebrum) were put into my head, so that the recipient were psychologically continuous only with you but brute-physically continuous in the relevant way only with me, Lockeanism implies that the resulting person would be you 'with a new body'<sup>3</sup>, whereas animalism (combined with the assumption that a human animal persists by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity, nothing to do with

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<sup>3</sup>The reason for the shudder quotes is that philosophers' talk of people's bodies is irredeemably loose and cannot be relied upon; see van Inwagen 1980, Olson 1997: 142-153.

psychology) implies that he would be me with a new brain. In many of these cases it's easy to find the Lockean verdict more attractive,<sup>4</sup> leading people to accept Lockeanism and reject animalism.

But this gives only half the picture. Animalism is attractive not because of what it implies for our persistence through time, but because it looks like an excellent answer to the personal-ontology question. We seem, on the face of it, to be animals. We don't seem to be *non*animals. So it's not enough for opponents of animalism to point out that it has implausible consequences about what would happen to you in a brain transplant. They need to defend their own view of what we are. Animalism should be contrasted not with Lockeanism, but with other answers to the personal-ontology question: that we are literally brains, for instance (which would explain why you would go with that organ if it were transplanted); or that we are nonanimals 'constituted by' animals, or temporal parts of animals, or Humean bundles of perceptions, or immaterial substances. These are the true rivals to animalism. Lockeanism can be true only if one of them is true as well. Each of them faces grave metaphysical objections, which anyone opposed to animalism ought to worry about (Olson 2007). But Lockeans are encouraged to ignore all this by the thought that they are answering only the persistence question. Many Lockeans are completely unaware of these objections, or at any rate feel no need to address them.

So restricting the debate to the persistence question and ignoring the personal-ontology question emphasizes Lockeanism's main strength--its attractive account of who would be who in certain thought experiments--while hiding its main weakness--the difficulty in saying what we are in a way that is compatible with that account.

Someone might think that Lockeanism *does* tell us what we are. Just as animalism says that we are animals, Lockeanism says that we are rational, conscious beings that persist by virtue of psychological continuity. And this does tell us something about what we are, though not much. An account of personal ontology ought to say whether we are material or immaterial. It should say whether we are substances or events or processes, and whether we have parts or are simple. It should say something about where our boundaries lie and what determines them, and of course whether we have any spatial location at all. These questions must have answers. Yet here Lockeanism is completely silent. Nor does it say or even straightforwardly imply anything about whether we are spatial or temporal parts of animals, things constituted by animals, bundles of perceptions, immaterial substances, or what have you. It does not by itself even rule out our being animals. It leaves the question of what we are almost entirely open (Olson

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<sup>4</sup>It's less attractive in others: for instance, Lockeanism implies that none of us was ever a five-month-old foetus. But these cases are seldom discussed. Snowdon (2014: 234) has argued that our intuitions even in the brain-transplant case are less robust than they at first appear.

2007: 17f.).

I concede that animalism does not give a complete answer to the personal-ontology question either: its implications about what we are depend in part on the metaphysical nature of animals, which is independent of whether we are animals. But it tells us far more about what we are than Lockeanism does. And there is far more agreement about the metaphysical nature of animals than there is about the metaphysical nature of beings that persist by virtue of psychological continuity.

### 3. The 'is' of constitution

I turn now to the question of how animalism should be stated, or what it means to say that we are animals.

Many people say that the simple statement that we are animals is ambiguous, and can express views opposed to animalism. The idea is that I could 'be' an animal in the sense of being *constituted by* one, where constitution is defined so that nothing can constitute itself. That would make me one thing and the animal sitting here another, which is precisely what animalists oppose. Thus, Shoemaker says, 'a person "is" an animal, not in the sense of being identical to one, but in the sense of sharing its matter with one' (1984: 113). Whether there is such a thing as the 'is' of constitution presumably depends on whether there is such a thing as constitution itself--that is, whether one thing ever constitutes another thing. But as that is an open question, we don't want to state animalism in a way that prejudges it.

And if we could 'be' animals in the sense of being constituted by them, we could equally be animals in the sense of having bodies that are animals: if there can be an 'is' of constitution, there can be an 'is' of embodiment. Our being animals in that sense is consistent with our being wholly immaterial--and no biological organism is wholly immaterial. Likewise, the view that each of us is a proper temporal part of an animal--a thing composed of all the stages of an animal except its insentient embryonic and foetal stages, say--is consistent with my being an animal in the sense of sharing stages with one.<sup>5</sup> Almost any account of our metaphysical nature allows that we 'are' animals in some sense or other.

So animalism must say that we are animals in a stricter sense than merely being constituted by or embodied in or sharing stages with them, and an adequate formulation of it needs to specify this stricter sense. In what sense of 'are', then, does animalism say that we are animals?

### 4. The identity formulation

The most common answer is implicit in Shoemaker's statement: animalism says that we are animals in the sense of being *numerically identical* to them. You and a certain animal are one thing and not two. On the constitution view and other rivals

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<sup>5</sup>Lewis said that if I share my stage located at time  $t$  with something, that makes me 'identical-at- $t$ ' with it (1976: 26f.).

to animalism, by contrast, each of us is numerically distinct from the animal that she 'is' loosely speaking. Call this the *identity formulation* of animalism. Some go on to say that when animalists say we are animals, they are using the 'is' of identity. We will see later that this is a mistake.

The identity formulation has an obvious attraction. Animalism really does imply that we are identical to animals, and rival views imply that we're not. So it is no mistake to state animalism by saying that we are identical to animals. It is, however, entirely unhelpful. The identity formulation cannot specify the strict sense of 'is' that animalism needs. The reason is that to be identical to an animal is to be identical to a thing that is an animal. ('An *F* is logically and grammatically equivalent to 'a thing that is an *F*.) And if the word 'am' in 'I am an animal' could be an instance of the 'is' of constitution, so could the word 'is' in 'I am identical to a thing that is an animal'. So if I could be an animal by being constituted by an animal, then I could be identical to an animal by being identical to something constituted by an animal. Or I could be identical to an animal in the sense of being identical to a thing that 'is' an animal in some other loose sense: a thing embodied in an animal or sharing stages with one, say.

Of course, this is not how the authors of the identity formulation intended it to be understood. When they say that I am (or am not) identical to an animal, they mean that I am (or am not) identical to something that is an animal in the strict sense, not something constituted by an animal or the like. But the identity formulation does not actually say this. It *could*: we could rewrite it to say explicitly that we are numerically identical to things that are animals in the strict sense of the word *are*. But that would be no advance over saying simply that we are animals in that strict sense.

So the identity formulation cannot distinguish animalism from its rivals any better than the simple statement that we are animals can. It needs to specify that the thing to which I am identical is an animal in the strict sense. But if we could do that, we could just as well say that we are animals in that sense and leave identity out of it. Bringing in identity is no help; what does the work is the right sense of the word 'is' or 'are'. I will return to this sense in the next section.

On this point the other proposed statements that I will consider shortly are no better. Some state animalism as the thesis that we are animals *fundamentally* (see §5). But if the plain statement 'we are animals' could mean that we are constituted by animals, then the statement that we are animals fundamentally could mean that we are constituted by things that are animals fundamentally, which is again inconsistent with animalism. We could rule that out only by specifying that the second occurrence of the word 'are' is not an 'is' of constitution or the like. But if we could do that, there would be no need to speak of fundamentality. Stating animalism as the view that we are animals *essentially* (see §6) is unhelpful for the same reason.

I wish I could banish the 'is' of constitution from metaphysics. 'Being' an animal



in the sense of being constituted by one is not a way of being an animal. It is, rather, a way of being a nonanimal. The most perspicuous statement of the constitution view is that each of us is a nonanimal constituted by an animal.<sup>6</sup> For a constitutionalist to say that we are animals is just as misleading as it would be for a Cartesian dualist (one who takes us to be wholly immaterial) to say that we are material things--to say, paraphrasing Shoemaker, that a person 'is' a material thing, not in the sense of being identical to one, but in the sense of being embodied in one.

Although I doubt whether constitutionalists have deliberately attempted to mislead their readers by saying that we are animals, this statement has misled, by disguising the implication that we are something other than animals. It gives the appearance that constitutionalists and animalists disagree only over a subtle point, namely the manner in which we are animals. It encourages the thought: 'I am an animal; I'm just not identical to an animal.' That sounds far more comforting than the thought: 'I am a nonanimal sharing its matter with an animal.' But this comfort is an illusion. It's like saying that dualists and materialists disagree only about the manner in which we are material things. No dualist would take comfort in thinking, 'I am a material thing; I'm just not identical to a material thing,' rather than, 'I am an immaterial thing embodied in a material thing.' Dualists understand perfectly well that on their view we are not material things. Those attracted to constitutionalism do not always understand perfectly well that on that view we are not animals. Yet we are no more animals according to constitutionalism than we are according to dualism.

We can see the dangers of the 'is' of constitution in another way by noting its implication that every person is something other than herself. Suppose I am an animal in the sense of being constituted by one. Since nothing can constitute itself, that animal is something other than me. It follows that in whatever sense I am an animal, I am something other than myself. More generally, anything constituted by something is something other than itself. This is no contradiction: it does not imply that every person is something other than herself in the strict sense of the word 'is', or that one thing is numerically identical to another thing. But it shows that the 'is' of constitution needs careful handling. It doesn't always get it. Confusion is

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<sup>6</sup>Shoemaker (2011) has recently proposed that there are both 'psychological animals' with psychological persistence conditions and 'biological animals' with brute-physical ones. He says that we are psychological animals constituted by biological animals. So we are constituted by animals, yet we really are animals. But he denies that we are biological animals, which is what animalists and most of their opponents mean by 'animals'. This differs only verbally from the view that we are nonanimals constituted by animals: Shoemaker calls the things constituted by biological organisms 'animals' (so that there are two animals sitting in your chair); most other constitutionalists don't. Johnston says the same, but refuses to call the biological animal an animal at all (2007: 55).

inevitable.

And insofar as the statement that  $x$  is an animal could mean that  $x$  is constituted by an animal, *any* statement of the form ' $x$  is an  $F$ ' could mean that  $x$  is constituted by an  $F$ --implying, in most cases, that strictly speaking  $x$  is *not* an  $F$ . Thus, if animalism needs to be stated in a way that rules out the 'is' of constitution, so do the alternative views. Those who say that we are temporal parts of animals will need to ensure that this is not read, 'we are constituted by temporal parts of animals'. Even constitutionalists need to ensure that their statement 'we are things constituted by animals' is not read, 'we are things constituted by things constituted by animals'. All parties can avoid this trouble by sticking to the strict use of the word 'is'.

## 5. How the identity formulation is misleading

Quite apart from its failure to disambiguate the phrase 'we are animals', the identity formulation can be seriously misleading.

Animalism has the virtue of being an intuitively attractive answer to the question of what sort of things we are. Given the choice, most people find it easier to believe that we are animals than to believe that we are things constituted by animals, temporal or spatial parts of animals, immaterial substances, or nonanimals of any other sort. But some of this intuitive attraction is lost if animalism has to be stated by saying that we are identical to animals. That we are animals sounds right; that we are *identical to* animals sounds complicated and technical. It's like saying that 5 is identical to a prime number. We all know, without having to think, that 5 is a prime number. But is it *identical to* a prime number? We may be unsure. The technical phrase 'identical to' puts us on our guard. This is unfortunate because there is nothing complicated or technical about animalism. At any rate it's far less complicated and technical than any of its rivals. Nor is the immediate plausibility of our being animals merely the plausibility of our being animals in some loose sense of the word 'are' that is consistent with the alternatives to animalism. That we are animals sounds attractive compared to those alternatives. Stating animalism by saying that we are identical to animals makes a simple and intuitive claim sound complicated and difficult.

The identity formulation is misleading in another way too. Suppose someone said that I was identical to a philosopher, or to a parent, or to a music lover. These statements sound not just complicated and technical, but wrong. (They are in fact true, as we shall see. But no one would ever say that I was identical to a parent, as opposed to simply being a parent, because no one ever supposed that I 'was' a parent in a loose sense that is incompatible with my being identical to one: that I was constituted by a parent, say.<sup>7</sup>)

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<sup>7</sup>Or almost no one: Matthews (1982) ascribes to Aristotle the view that a person's temporary properties--being musical, for instance, or being a parent--are always borne in the strict sense by something distinct from the person, existing only as long



For this reason, saying that I am identical to an animal is bound to suggest that I am an animal in a different and less familiar sense than that in which I am a philosopher, a parent, and a music lover. If being an animal in the strict sense amounts to being identical to an animal, then I must be a philosopher, a parent, and so on in some looser sense. My only genuine properties--those I have strictly speaking--are being an animal and those that follow from it: being a material thing, having a metabolism, and so on. I am *nothing but* an animal. My character, way of thinking, goals, memories, interests, interpersonal relationships--all the things I care most about--are at best superficial features of me. I have them only at arm's length. Whatever exactly this amounts to, it sounds deeply troubling.

But there is no reason for animalists to say any of this. They can say that I am an animal in exactly the same sense that I am a philosopher, a parent, and indeed a person. I am identical to an animal; I am also identical to a person, to a philosopher, and to a parent. And this is what every animalist that I know of does say. That's because being an  $F$ , for any value of ' $F$ ', is logically equivalent to being identical to an  $F$ . Nothing could be an  $F$  without being identical to an  $F$ , or be identical to an  $F$  without being an  $F$ . This fact is expressed in a theorem of standard predicate logic with identity:  $(x)(Fx \Leftrightarrow \exists y(Fy \& x=y))$ .

It may sound paradoxical to say that I am identical to a parent. I wasn't always a parent. I was once a nonparent. I was once identical to a nonparent. Since things cannot be one at one time and two at another, would it not follow that I am both identical to a parent and identical to a nonparent? And given the equivalence between being identical to an  $F$  and being an  $F$ , doesn't that amount to my being both a parent and a nonparent?

But none of this follows. Nothing is a parent *simpliciter*. To be a parent is to be a parent at a particular time: now, say. My now being a parent is not my now being identical to a parent--identity is not a relation that can hold temporarily--but rather my being identical to something that is a parent now. And my being a nonparent 20 years ago is my being identical to something that was a nonparent then. So something that is a parent now is identical to something that was not a parent 20 years ago. There is no paradox here: being a parent now is perfectly compatible with being a nonparent at some other time. Or at least it is if it's possible for anything to have a property at one time and exist without having that property at another--that is, to change. And animalism does nothing to suggest otherwise.

We can see now why the claim that we are animals does not employ the 'is' (or 'are') of identity. Animalism says that I am an animal in the same ordinary sense in which I am a parent and a music lover. But clearly the statement 'Olson is a parent' does not employ the 'is' of identity. Nor does the statement 'Olson is standing'. This is so even though being a parent is equivalent to being identical to a parent, and standing is equivalent to being identical to something standing. None of these are instances of the 'is' of identity because that expression can only occur between as the person can be loosely said to have the property.

two singular terms, as in 'Superman is Clark Kent' or 'water is H<sub>2</sub>O'. The 'is' of identity is a notational variant of the identity sign: 'Superman = Clark Kent' is a grammatical sentence; 'Olson = an animal' is not.<sup>8</sup>

The word 'is' in 'Olson is an animal' is the ordinary copula, otherwise known as the 'is' of predication--the same 'is' that features in 'Olson is standing'. And so is the word 'are' in the animalist's claim that we are animals, and in the anti-animalist's claim that we are not animals. I said that according to animalism each of us is an animal in a stricter sense of 'is' than merely being constituted by or embodied in or sharing stages with an animal. This strict sense is simply the most ordinary sense of the word.

So it may be no mistake to state animalism as the view that we are identical to animals, since that formulation is equivalent to the simpler one. But it encourages a number of thoughts that *are* mistaken: that the identity formulation is clearer than saying simply that we are animals, that it implies that we are animals in a stricter sense than we are people or parents, and that it employs the 'is' of identity.

## 6. The fundamentality formulation

Another common formulation of animalism is that we are animals *fundamentally* (or 'fundamentally animals'), where a thing's being fundamentally *F* is roughly its being *F* as part of its most basic nature. My being an animal fundamentally implies that I have my identity conditions by virtue of being an animal, rather than by virtue of being a person or a thinking being or a parent, so that what it takes for me to persist is what it takes for an animal to persist. It is also taken to imply that what determines how many people there are at any one time--or at least how many human people--is what determines how many animals at that time qualify as people.

The fundamentality formulation is inspired by the Aristotelian thought that of all the kinds I belong to--*animal*, *material thing*, *parent*, *music lover*, and so on--one is special. It is the most metaphysically rich and important such kind, and tells us more about my nature than any other. If I ask, in a metaphysical tone of voice, what I am, this kind will be the best answer. (Aristotle called it a *substance* kind or sort.) That we are animals is a candidate for being this answer; that we are essentially rational beings constituted by animals, temporal parts of animals, or simple immaterial substances are others.

But animalism is not committed to this Aristotelian thought. It may be that no answer to the question, What am I? is metaphysically privileged in this way. Yet it may still be the case that we are animals. Or it may be that we're not animals, but rather brains or immaterial substances or what have you. In the first case animalism is true; in the second it's false.

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<sup>8</sup>This means that the phrase 'is identical to' is sometimes equivalent to the 'is' of identity and sometimes not, depending on whether it is followed by a singular term such as 'Clark Kent' or an indefinite description such as 'an animal'.

Even if the Aristotelian thought is right, the fundamentality formulation of animalism can be just as misleading as the identity formulation. The phrase ‘fundamentally *F*’ suggests that a thing can be *F* in two ways: it can be either fundamentally *F* or nonfundamentally *F*. And being nonfundamentally *F* can sound like a loose or second-rate way of being *F*. Since no one thinks that we are fundamentally philosophers, parents, or music lovers, this suggests that according to animalism we are animals in a stricter sense than we are philosophers, parents, or music lovers. Once more, my true nature consists simply in being an animal, and I have my other properties at arm’s length.

But this again is a mistake. My being an animal fundamentally and a parent nonfundamentally does not entail that I am a parent in a looser or weaker sense than I am an animal. Being *F* fundamentally is not a different way of being *F* from being *F* nonfundamentally, or from simply being *F*.<sup>9</sup> I am no less a parent than I am an animal. I bear exactly the same relation to both properties: having, exemplifying, or instantiating.

Despite appearances, to say that something is fundamentally *F* is not to say that it is *F* in some special sense. It is, rather, to say two things: that the thing is *F* (in the ordinary sense of ‘is’), and that being *F* is a special sort of property, namely a fundamental kind: roughly one that determines the metaphysical nature of the things that have it, including their identity conditions. So the view that we are animals fundamentally is the conjunction of the claim that we are animals with the claim that *animal* is a fundamental kind. (To say that I am a parent fundamentally would be to say that I am a parent and that *parent* is a fundamental kind.) But these two claims are entirely independent: whether we are animals or nonanimals is independent of whether *animal* is a fundamental or a nonfundamental kind. More generally, the view that we are animals says nothing about the metaphysical nature of animals, other than that they are capable of thought. As it happens, most of those who think we are animals think that *animal* is a fundamental kind; but then so do most of those who think we’re not animals. Both sides agree that animals are animals fundamentally, and that we are animals (in the ordinary sense) if and only if we are animals fundamentally.

Here, then, is another reason not to state animalism as the view that we are animals fundamentally. Either animals are animals fundamentally or they’re not.<sup>10</sup> If not, then we are not animals fundamentally. On the fundamentality formulation, this would make animalism false. Animalism would be false even if we were animals. Yet the animalists’ only mistake would be in taking *animal* to be a fundamental kind--something their opponents also believe. The mistake would be

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<sup>9</sup>Not unless ‘being nonfundamentally *F*’ means ‘being constituted by a thing that is *F*’. But that would make being nonfundamentally *F* a way of not being *F*: another confusing use of the ‘is’ of constitution.

<sup>10</sup>If some are and some aren’t, consider those that we should be if we were animals at all: the animals that animalists think we are.

incidental to claim that they accept and their opponents deny. To say that this would make animalism false is like saying that someone who believed falsely that being a parent was a fundamental kind would be wrong to say that I was a parent.

What if *animal* really is a fundamental kind? Then nothing could be an animal without being an animal fundamentally. Being an animal and being an animal fundamentally would be logically equivalent, making the qualification 'fundamentally' superfluous. The only reason to say that we are animals fundamentally would be to rule out the view that we are animals *non*fundamentally. But for the reasons we have seen, that point is better made by first saying that we are animals and then saying separately that *animal* is a fundamental kind.

Stating animalism by saying that we are animals fundamentally is thus a mistake if *animal* is not a fundamental kind and superfluous if it is. The fundamentality formulation obscures the real point of contention between animalists and their opponents--whether we are animals--by tying it to the entirely independent matter of whether *animal* is a fundamental kind. It gives the false impression that animalists and their opponents agree that we are animals, and disagree only over a fine point to do with fundamentality. It is better to contrast the view that we are animals with the view that we're not, and leave fundamentality out of it.

## 7. The essentialist formulation

Some take animalism to be the view that we are animals essentially and not merely accidentally: we could not exist without being animals. This is no better than the fundamentality formulation. The view that we are animals essentially is really a conjunction of two claims: that we are animals, and that animals are animals essentially.<sup>11</sup> These two claims are independent: we could be animals whether or not animals are animals essentially, and animals could be animals essentially whether or not we are animals. Most animalists probably accept the second claim; but so do most of their opponents. Stating animalism as the conjunction of the two makes it controversial for reasons that have nothing to do with whether we are animals. It obscures the central point of disagreement between animalists and their opponents--whether we are animals--by tying it to the unrelated matter of whether animals are animals essentially. It gives the false impression that animalists and their opponents agree that we are animals and

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<sup>11</sup>Constitutionalists sometimes say, or appear to say, that some animals are animals essentially and some are animals accidentally, rendering the second clause ambiguous. But their statement that something is an animal accidentally means only that that thing is accidentally constituted by an animal. They take the animal itself to be an animal essentially. Saying that according to constitutionalism we are animals accidentally is like saying that according to substance dualism we are material things accidentally. This is yet another misleading use of the 'is' of constitution.

disagree only about the modal status of this claim. Whether we are animals has nothing to do with essentialism.

We can illustrate this by noting that someone could be sceptical about modality in general but still have a view about whether we are animals. Suppose I doubt whether there are any modal properties at all, and thus reject both the claim that animals are animals essentially and the claim that they are animals accidentally. Yet I might still take us to be animals, or to be spatial or temporal parts of animals, bundles of perceptions, or what have you. That would make me an animalist or an anti-animalist, depending on which of these views I held.

## 8. Weak animalism

There are other claims often combined with the view that we are animals. One is that animals do not have psychological persistence conditions: no psychological relation, even 'non-branching', continuously physically realized psychological continuity, is either necessary or sufficient for an animal to persist through time. Another is the more specific claim that animals persist by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity. A third is that no animal is a person essentially, where being a person at a given time is having certain special mental capacities then. (A human animal appears to start out as an embryo with no mental capacities at all, and can exist in a vegetative state.) The truth of these further claims is entirely independent of whether we are animals, and anti-animalists are as prone to accept them as animalists are. If they *are* true, then our being animals implies that we don't persist by virtue of psychological continuity, but rather by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity, and that we are only accidentally and temporarily people. But even if that is so, the view that we are animals does not actually say any of this, and disputing the implication does nothing to cast doubt on it.

So the simple view that we are animals is frequently combined with further claims such as these:

Animals are animals fundamentally.

Animals are animals essentially.

Animals do not persist by virtue of psychological continuity.

Animals persist by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity.

No animal is a person (in the Lockean sense) essentially.

This enables us to distinguish several varieties of animalism. We could call the bare claim that we are animals (in the ordinary sense of 'are') *weak animalism*. (This is what I have been calling 'animalism'.) Call its conjunction with the further claims *strong animalism*. There are intermediate versions as well, incorporating some but not all of the further claims. It would help, in debating animalism, if it were clear which version was at stake.

Someone might suspect that weak animalism is *so* weak as to be uninteresting.

If it doesn't tell us whether we are animals most fundamentally or essentially, or anything about the metaphysical nature of animals, what does it tell us? Isn't the distinctive position that animalists actually defend one of the stronger versions?

This suspicion may be reinforced by the fact that the main objections to animalism are aimed at strong animalism. The most common is that animalism rules out Lockeanism--any psychological-continuity view of personal identity over time. Thus, animalism is taken, by its friends and enemies alike, to imply that you would not go with your transplanted brain. The operation would not give you a new body, but would give me a new brain. Presumably the resulting person would be psychologically continuous with you: he would have memories of your past, and would be firmly convinced that he was you. But he would be me. Ever since Locke described thought experiments like this more than 300 years ago, philosophers have rejected these consequences. Whatever its merits, this is an objection not to weak animalism as such, but to its conjunction with the further claim that animals persist by virtue of brute-physical continuity--sameness of biological life or the like.<sup>12</sup> This is what implies that the surgeons remove the brain from one animal and make it a part of another, just as they might do with a liver or a kidney. The mere claim that we are animals does not rule out saying that the surgeons transfer an animal from one head to another so that the recipient of the transplant is the same animal as the donor, undercutting the objection.

The same goes for most of the other objections to animalism. One is that person (in the sense of being a thing with certain special mental properties) has to be a fundamental kind, so that every person is a person essentially. We could not be only accidentally and temporarily people. When a person appears, this is not merely a thing's gaining a new property, as when I become a parent, but a thing's coming into existence. Nor is a person's disappearance just a matter of her changing by losing a property (Baker 2000: 219f.). But this again is not strictly an objection to our being animals, but to its conjunction with the claim that human animals are never essentially or fundamentally people. Others say that animalism has unacceptable implications about how many people there are at any one time. In certain cases of conjoined twinning, for instance, they say that there are two people but only one animal, implying that at least some human people are not animals (Campbell & McMahan 2010). This requires an assumption about what determines how many animals there are at any one time that is independent of whether we are animals.

Without the further claims, few of the contentious consequences of animalism would follow, and the question of whether we are animals or nonanimals would lose much of its interest. We may even wonder whether there is any reason to reject weak animalism. Of course, many philosophers do reject it. Weak animalism is incompatible with our being things constituted by animals, spatial or temporal

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<sup>12</sup>Van Inwagen (1990: §14) gives a detailed account of this further claim. I have called this version of strong animalism 'the biological approach' (Olson 1997: 16f.).



parts of animals, bundles of perceptions, or immaterial substances. It rules out all the anti-animalist answers to the personal-ontology question. But most of those who reject animalism do so because they accept at least one of the further claims. They have no quarrel with weak animalism as such. It's strong animalism they don't like.

Weak animalism is nevertheless an important view, even without the further claims. If it were false--if we were not animals--it would follow almost inexorably that no biological organism could ever have any mental property. Otherwise normal, adult human animals would be conscious and intelligent. They would presumably be psychologically indistinguishable from us. Our not being animals would then imply that there were two conscious, intelligent beings wherever we thought there was just one. I should share my thoughts with an animal distinct from me. In fact that animal would be a person by any familiar definition: it would be 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places' (Locke 1975: 335). I could never know, it seems, whether I was the animal person or the nonanimal person: whatever grounds I may have for believing that I am the nonanimal would equally be grounds for him to believe that *he* was too.

To avoid this absurd picture, most opponents of animalism deny that human animals think or are conscious.<sup>13</sup> But what could prevent a normal, adult human animal from using its brain to think? The only serious answer would seem to be that it is metaphysically impossible for any biological organism to have mental properties. It follows that what appears to be a thinking animal is really two things: an unthinking animal and a nonanimal thinker. This could reasonably be described as a sort of substance dualism. It is not Descartes' dualism of mind and matter, but a dualism of mind and life. Psychological properties would be not only distinct from biological properties, but metaphysically incompatible with them.

None of this reasoning relies on the further claims. It is the basis of the most popular argument for animalism, the 'thinking-animal argument' (Olson 2003): There is an animal writing these words and thinking about philosophy. But *I* am the being here thinking about philosophy. It follows that I am an animal. If I were not an animal, one of three things would have to be the case: (1) there is no animal here--presumably because there are no ordinary material things at all; (2) that animal is not thinking about philosophy--presumably because it has no mental properties; or (3) I am not the only thinker here: there is a thinking animal and there is a thinking nonanimal, me. The case for animalism lies in the repugnance of these alternatives.

This is an argument for weak animalism. It does nothing to support the further claims incorporated in the stronger versions. We can illustrate this by replacing

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<sup>13</sup>Or at least most of those who consider the metaphysical implications of their view, rather than just thinking about brain transplants. Good examples are Shoemaker (1984: 92-97, 2011) and Hudson (2007).

'animal' with 'person', 'philosopher', or 'parent'. The resulting argument is sound if the thinking-animal argument is sound. And indeed I am a person, a philosopher, and a parent, even if not essentially or fundamentally, and the argument makes no claim about what it takes for me to persist through time or about my metaphysical nature generally. The reason why no one has ever advanced the 'thinking-philosopher argument' is simply that its conclusion is of no philosophical interest.

So the objections to animalism are aimed at strong animalism, and the main argument in its favour supports only weak animalism. For that matter, the fact that we appear to be animals before the arguments are given supports only weak animalism. This suggests a hopeful thought. What if we could reject the further claims and endorse weak but not strong animalism? We might call the conjunction of weak animalism with the denial of the further claims *new animalism*. (Its conjunction with those claims themselves was strong animalism, and weak animalism is neutral with respect to the further claims.) New animalism is the view that we are animals but not fundamentally or essentially, that we have psychological rather than brute-physical persistence conditions, and that we have essentially those special mental properties that make us people. (Or rather, there are different versions of new animalism, combining weak animalism with the negation of one or more of the further claims.) This is because human animals are not animals fundamentally or essentially, and they have psychological persistence conditions and are essentially people in Locke's sense. The hopeful thought is that new animalism would please everyone. The opponents of animalism will be happy because it lacks the implications they object to. And the animalists will be happy because it avoids the dualism of mind and life. It would have all the virtues of animalism without its drawbacks.

I don't know whether anyone has ever actually accepted new animalism.<sup>14</sup> In any event, I will devote the rest of this paper to examining it.

## 9. New animalism

I won't consider all the further claims that distinguish strong from weak animalism, but only the most controversial. I take this to be the claim that animals persist by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity. Suppose they persist instead by virtue of psychological continuity, or at any rate that some sort of psychological continuity is sufficient for us to persist. Suppose the animalists are right to say that you are a biological organism, and the Lockeanes are right to say that you would go with your transplanted brain or cerebrum<sup>15</sup> (supposing that its

<sup>14</sup>Wiggins (1980: 160, 180) and McDowell (1997: 237) make dark statements that sound a bit like it, but I am unsure how to interpret them.

<sup>15</sup>Van Inwagen (1990: 169-181) thinks a detached brain *would* be an organism. A cerebrum clearly would not be, and the point of the thought experiment is the same either way, as psychology is realized for the most part in the cerebrum. Whether van Inwagen is right is disputed: see Shewmon 2001.

continued functioning suffices for psychological continuity). The operation does not move an organ from one animal to another, but moves an organism from one head to another. More precisely, it cuts away the peripheral parts of an organism: not merely the arms and legs, but the torso and the vital organs within it, the skull, and even the brainstem. The surgeons pare down an animal to the size of a naked cerebrum, move it across the room, and finally provide it with new parts to replace the ones it lost. So if your cerebrum were transplanted into my head, the resulting person would be exactly who he thought he was: you with a new body, and not me with a new cerebrum and false memories of someone else's past. The transplant objection would not apply. This is the version of new animalism that comes most readily to mind.

It would imply the falsity of several further claims characteristic of strong animalism. Human animals would not be animals essentially. A detached cerebrum is no more an organism than a detached liver or a severed hand is an organism. It is a mere hunk of living tissue--living in that it consists of living cells. The operation would change you from an organism to a nonorganism and back again. Nor could *animal* or *organism* be a fundamental kind. The metaphysical nature of human animals would not follow from their being animals; they would have a fundamentally different nature from other animals, or at least from some other animals: oysters, for instance.

Whatever its superficial attractions, this proposal is remarkably unpromising. For one thing, it looks unprincipled. No organism would go with its transplanted liver: remove an animal's liver and that organ simply ceases to be a part of it. (So it seems very strongly to me, anyway. If it's wrong, I know nothing about the persistence conditions of organisms and all bets are off.) Why would an animal go with its cerebrum but not with its liver, or heart, or left hand? If anything, an animal looks less likely go with its transplanted cerebrum than with its transplanted liver, as it needs a liver to remain alive but not a cerebrum: a human being can survive for years with a nonfunctioning cerebrum (as in vegetative cases), but liver failure soon causes death by blood poisoning.

Another problem arises from the fact that a human animal can persist without any psychological continuity. This happens in cases of irreversible vegetative state, as well as in ordinary prenatal development. Each human animal begins its life as an embryo with no psychology at all: even the most basic mental capacities do not appear until after mid-gestation. What does the persistence of a human animal consist in in these cases? What makes it the case that the precognitive foetus or human vegetable continues to exist for months or years, rather than existing only for a moment and then being replaced by another momentary organism? It appears to be some sort of brute-physical continuity: perhaps the continuation of the organism's biological life, as Locke and van Inwagen have proposed. But whatever it is, it ought to hold between a normal, adult human animal and the empty-headed animal that would result from removing its cerebrum.

That is, whatever enables a human animal to survive without any psychological continuity as a foetus or a vegetable ought to enable it to survive the loss of its cerebrum if that organ were transplanted. But then new animalism would imply that in such a case you would be both the recipient of that organ and the empty-headed animal left behind. Since these are clearly distinct, one thing would be numerically identical to two, which is impossible.

New animalists could try to avoid this consequence by saying that psychological and brute-physical continuity each suffice for a human animal to persist only in the absence of the other, and the first trumps the second when both are present. But even if this could be stated precisely<sup>16</sup>, it is hard to believe. It implies that if your cerebrum were removed from your head in good condition and then destroyed, you would die: the organism would be cut down to a cerebrum and shortly thereafter cease to exist, even if the resulting brainless animal remained alive. If your cerebrum were destroyed without being removed from your head, however, the organism could survive in a vegetative state. So you could kill an animal by removing its cerebrum and then destroying it, but not by destroying its cerebrum in its head: a completely baffling result.

Another problem arises when we consider the empty-headed thing left behind after your cerebrum is removed. It may still be alive, able to survive indefinitely without artificial life support. In that case it would be a living organism. Would it not be the organism from which the cerebrum was removed? It would apparently have the same life, in Locke's sense of the word (Locke 1975: 330f.), that the original animal had: the original animal's life-sustaining functions would have continued uninterrupted throughout the operation in the brainless remainder. And if an organism's biological life carries on, we should expect it to continue to be the life of that same organism. How could an organism be outlived by its own life? But according to new animalism it cannot be the original animal, since that being goes with its transplanted cerebrum.

This would make it pretty mysterious what the persistence of an organism could consist in. Our usual judgments about what happens to an organism when parts are cut away would be seriously unreliable. Think about how many human animals there would be in the transplant story. Everyone takes there to be two: the donor and the recipient of the cerebrum. But according to new animalism there are four.

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<sup>16</sup>The most obvious suggestion is this: if  $x$  is a human organism at time  $t$  and  $y$  exists at time  $t^*$ ,  $x=y$  iff  $x$  is (uniquely) psychologically continuous, at  $t$ , with  $y$  as it is at  $t^*$  or no being is psychologically continuous at  $t^*$  with  $x$  as it is at  $t$  and  $y$  has the appropriate sort of brute-physical continuity, at  $t^*$ , with  $x$  as it is at  $t$ . But this implies that if your cerebrum were removed from your head and then destroyed, while the brainless animal left behind survived in a vegetative state, you would first go with the cerebrum and then discontinuously 'jump' to the brainless organism, even though there would be neither psychological nor biological continuity across the jump.

One animal--you--starts out full-sized, is then pared down to a cerebrum, and later acquires my noncerebral parts, thereby regaining its previous size. The empty-headed animal left behind when your cerebrum is removed is a second organism. I am a third. Removing my cerebrum to make way for yours reduces me to a naked cerebrum, leaving behind a fourth animal, which is then displaced when the surgeons put you into its empty head.

These organisms would come into being and pass away in curious ways. Think about the empty-headed animal that results from removing your cerebrum. It could not be you, the original animal. But there was only one human animal within your skin before the operation, which according to new animalism went with its transplanted cerebrum. (Nor, presumably, did any nonanimal become an animal when your cerebrum was removed: you can't make a nonanimal into an animal by removing its cerebrum.) It follows that removing your cerebrum from your head creates a new animal. Removing my cerebrum to make way for yours must create a new animal in the same way. But can you really create an animal merely by cutting away an organ belonging to another animal--one not even necessary for life?

Likewise, putting your cerebrum into my head would have to destroy an organism. The resulting being--which according to new animalism would be you--would not be the animal into which your brain was transplanted--the one that previously had an empty head as a result of my cerebrum's being removed to make way for yours. *You* never had an empty head. Nor are there two human animals within your skin after the operation--or two things that are or once were animals. It follows that the empty-headed animal created by removing my cerebrum must perish when your cerebrum is put into its head. But how could you destroy an animal merely by supplying it with the organ--again, not even a vital organ--that it was missing? It would be metaphysically impossible for a human organism to lose or gain a working cerebrum, even though such losses and gains need not disrupt its life-sustaining functions. Whether this would go equally for other animals, and if so which ones, is anyone's guess.

These consequences are completely at odds with any account of the metaphysical nature of biological organisms that I know of. You may reply that this is because everyone assumes that human animals must persist by virtue of some sort of brute-physical continuity. This goes along with the assumption that human animals have their metaphysical nature by virtue of being animals (or organisms), and not by virtue of their being people or thinking beings or the like--that is, that *animal* is a fundamental kind. And that is precisely what new animalism denies. To free ourselves from these dogmas, we need to unlearn everything we thought we knew about what it takes for human animals to persist and what determines how many there are. If it sounds badly wrong to suppose that there must be four human beings in the transplant story, that is because we are in the grip of a false metaphysics of biological organisms. I am unsure what to make of this reply. What

new animalists need to do is provide a metaphysics of organisms that makes sense of it. I don't say that this can't be done. But it will be hard to take new animalism seriously until it has been.

There may be other versions of new animalism with more going for them. Or maybe new animalism is a complete loss and animalists should be strong animalists. Either way, it's important to know that there are different animalisms, with weak animalism as their unifying feature.<sup>17</sup>

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