

Special Issue I
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Linguagem, Mente & Ação

Précis of The Human Animal
Eric Olson

Big-Tent Metaphysics
Lynne Rudder Baker

**Three Problems for Olson's Account
of Personal Identity**
Ned Markosian

Problems for Animalism
Dean Zimmerman

Replies
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Response to Eric Olson
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ABSTRACTA
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abstracta

Linguagem, Mente & Ação

Editorial

This is the first *special issue* of ABSTRACTA. It should be the first of many. Our *special issues* will be primarily dedicated to symposia in which a number of distinguished invited authors discuss some of the most relevant books published in Philosophy in recent years. Occasionally, when the relevance of the work justifies it, we might publish symposia on older titles. This is, in fact, the case with our present *special issue*. We are honoured to open our series of *special issues* by publishing the proceedings of a symposium that celebrated the 10th anniversary of publication of Eric Olson's book *The Human Animal* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

Since its publication, the book has been the object of a heated debate, with its controversial solution (revisiting Aristotle) to the problem of personal identity. The problem can be put in the form of the following question: Given the existence of a person at one time, and the existence of something at another time, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for that something to be identical to that person? In very broad terms, Olson's solution is to say that these two things are identical if and only if there is the right sort of biological continuity between them.

Ten years after its publication, the debate over *The Human Animal* has persisted to the point that an Author-Meets-Critics session of the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association was dedicated to a discussion of the book. The session took place on the 14th of April 2007, in San Francisco, California. Commenting on the *Human Animal* were three of the most distinguished contemporary philosophers working on personal identity: Lynne Rudder Baker (University of Massachusetts Amherst), Ned

Markosian (Western Washington University) and Dean Zimmerman (Rutgers University). Eric Olson wrote a précis of the book, and replied to all their comments.

The papers presented at this meeting had not been published up to this moment. We are proud to publish them, and thank Eric Olson, Lynne Rudder Baker, Ned Markosian and Dean Zimmerman for allowing us to do so.

THE EDITORS.

22nd February, 2008.

PRÉCIS OF THE HUMAN ANIMAL
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Eric Olson

The book starts by arguing that the problem of personal identity over time is often wrongly put. The problem is usually stated like this: if you've got a person existing at one time and a person existing at another time, what has to be the case – what is necessary and sufficient – for them to be the same person? It asks what it takes for a person to persist *as a person*.

I objected that this assumes, without any argument at all, that a person has to persist as a person. It assumes that if I exist at all at some time in the past or the future, I am a person then. It rules out the possibility that I might start out as a merely potential or future person, and that I might end up as a former person. This assumption is especially pernicious if being a person implies having certain mental properties. In that case, the assumption that I can only persist as a person amounts to the claim that I cannot exist in the past or future without having any mental properties. It follows I cannot have been an embryo, and that I could never end up in a persistent vegetative state. The principle that I can only persist as a being with certain mental properties may or may not be true. But it is not an assumption that we ought to build into the way we enquire about personal identity. It is something that needs to be argued for.

(For that matter, the usual question assumes that necessarily all people persist under the same conditions: if there could be gods, or angels, or intelligent computers, they would all have to have the same persistence conditions as we human people. That may also be true; but again, it's not something we're entitled to assume before we start inquiring about personal identity.)

I proposed that we ask not what it takes for you and me to persist as a person, but what it takes for us to persist *simpliciter*. In other words, if you've got a person – a human person – existing at one time, and you've got something existing at another time – whether or not it's a person then – the question is what is necessary and sufficient for them to be one thing,

rather than two.

I tried to answer the question of our identity over time by arguing that you and I are biological organisms: human animals. That is what we *seem* to be. And there appears to be a serious problem facing anyone who claims that we are *not* animals. There is a human animal for each one of us. My animal – the one standing here – has my brain, my sense organs, my surroundings, my education, and so on. That seems to suffice for it to have the same mental properties as I have. If this animal didn't think, or wasn't conscious, or differed from me in any psychological respect, it would be a mystery why there was this difference. Now suppose I believe I am not an animal. It follows from my belief that there are *two* thinking beings here, me and the animal. If that's not bad enough, it is hard to see how I could ever know which thinker *I* was: the animal or the nonanimal. Each would have the same grounds, it seems, for supposing that it is not the animal; yet only one of them can be right. For all I could ever know, it seems, *I* could be making this mistake. So even if I'm not an animal, it's hard to see how I could ever know it. The obvious solution to the problem, I argued, is to say that I am an animal. And if I am an animal, then what it takes for me to persist is what it takes for an animal to persist.

Most of the rest of the book is an attempt to work out the consequences of the claim that we are animals ('animalism') for our identity over time.

One consequence is that *our* identity over time does not consist in any sort of psychological continuity. Personal identity – or at least our identity – has nothing to do with psychology at all, despite what the vast majority of those writing on personal identity have said.

Why say that our identity has nothing to do with psychology? Because we are human animals, and no sort of psychological continuity is either necessary or sufficient for a human animal to persist. Not necessary, because each human animal starts out as an embryo, and could end up as a human vegetable. Human embryos and human vegetables have no psychological properties at all, and you can't be psychologically continuous with a being that has no psychology. If you are an animal, you can survive without any sort of psychological continuity.

The brain-transplant story, if it is possible, shows that no sort of psychological

continuity is sufficient for a human animal to persist. If your cerebrum gets put into another head, the one who gets that organ, and no one else, will be psychologically continuous, at that time, with you as you were before the operation. But the surgeons don't thereby move a human animal from one head to another. They simply move an organ from one animal to another, just as they might do with a kidney or a liver. We can have full psychological continuity between one human animal and another.

Thus, if we are animals, psychology is entirely irrelevant to our identity over time.

It also seems to follow from our being animals that we are only temporarily and contingently people. Or at least that is so if you have to have certain mental properties at a given time to count as a person at that time. If that's what it is to be a person, each human animal starts out as a nonperson and may end up as a nonperson.

Finally, I tried to give a positive account of what it takes for a human animal to persist. It seems to be the same as what it takes for animals of other sorts to persist. More specifically, I proposed, in the tradition of Aristotle and Locke, that an organism persists just as long as its biological life continues, where your biological life is the event or process that assimilates new matter, expels waste, fights infection, and generally keeps that complex organic structure humming along.

Eric Olson

University of Sheffield

Pacific APA, April 2007.

BIG-TENT METAPHYSICS

Lynne Rudder Baker

Eric Olson won the hearts of my graduate students by dedicating his book “to the unemployed philosophers.” (The students subsequently got fine jobs, but it’s the thought (or rather the sympathy) that counts.) As appreciated as the dedication was, however, I doubt that it was responsible for the wonderful reception that Olson’s book, *The Human Animal*, has had. Rather, the cleverness of his arguments, the vigor with which Olson writes, and the new interpretations of old thought experiments and arguments have deservedly captured a great deal of philosophical attention in the past ten years. Despite the fact that I hold significantly different views from Olson’s, I am happy to be here today to help celebrate the tenth anniversary of his important book.

One of the things that Olson’s book has inspired me to do is to reflect on how we ought to pursue metaphysics. I want to talk about this reflection, which has led me to what I call ‘big-tent metaphysics.’ Perhaps Olson, along with most mainstream metaphysicians, will not share my enthusiasm for big-tent metaphysics; but I think that he (and they) should.

Let me begin by mentioning two points of agreement between Olson and me: First, I agree with Olson that psychological continuity does not suffice for the persistence of you or me. But this agreement does not lead me to Olson’s Biological Approach. It certainly does not follow from rejection of a psychological-continuity theory of personal identity that a “radically nonpsychological account of our identity” is at all adequate to understand what kind of beings we are. (p. 16) If it did, then a world with organisms that lacked all mentality would be ontologically no different from our world.

Second, I agree with Olson that we are animals; we are fully animals, not even animals with a special non-animal part (like an immaterial soul). Although we are fully animals, continuous with the animal kingdom, we are not *merely* animals. That is, our being animals is not the end of the ontological story about us. We are most fundamentally persons. (As a terminological point, I take ‘human being’ to denote human *persons*.) The

brains and vocal cords of certain animals developed in such a way that they gave rise to a new kind of being—a person capable of thinking of herself from a first-person perspective. This first-person perspective is, I believe, what makes possible all the unique features of human beings—ability to deliberate about possible courses of action, to decide how we want to live, etc. These features, being unique to us, are not shared by other species, but they are what make us persons the kind of beings that we fundamentally are. Being a person is an *ontologically* significant property. We are constituted by animals, but most fundamentally we are persons.

I disagree with Olson that our persistence conditions derive from our being animals. We could continue to exist without being animals. Why couldn't I survive having my lower-brain functions taken over by a prosthetic device? If I could, and if enough other parts of my body were replaced by inorganic parts, I would still exist but would no longer have a carbon-based body, and hence no longer be an animal. And it would be totally ad hoc to claim that I no longer existed. If you made any such claim, I'd certainly take you to court.

To sum up the metaphysical contrast between Olson's Animalist view and my constitution view:

On Olson's Animalist view, there is a particular animal *x* such that I am identical to *x*, and *x* has the property of being a person now. I am an animal essentially, and a person contingently. On Olson's view, whether or not I am a person is irrelevant to whether or not I exist.

On my constitution view, there is a particular person *x*, such that I am identical to *x*, and *x* is constituted by a particular animal now. I am a person essentially, and an animal contingently. On my view, I could not ever exist without being a person.

What is Big-Tent Metaphysics?

Olson's book raised for me a question whose relevance to Olson will become apparent momentarily: Should metaphysics be a narrow-gauge enterprise that excludes most of what

we all ordinarily take to be part of reality? Should metaphysics be sealed off from all practical and moral concerns? If so, why? I take metaphysics to be the study of fundamental reality. And I take fundamental reality to include all the objects and properties whose omission from ontology would render an account of reality incomplete.

According to Big-Tent Metaphysics, there exist many different kinds of things; each kind of thing has a nature, and the nature of any kind of thing includes what distinguishes that kind from other kinds and what is most significant and most distinctive about that kind. (Maybe from reading Plato at an impressionable age, I have retained the idea that reality and value go together: What something most fundamentally is should ground what is most significant about it.)

Big-Tent Metaphysics looks to a metaphysics of Fs to tell us the *nature* of Fs, what is *distinctive* or unique about Fs, and what is *significant* about Fs. What we consider to be real should not be independent of what we consider to be important. Else, why bother with metaphysics?

What Would Olson Say?

I'm pretty sure that this is not the way that Olson thinks of metaphysics. (Most metaphysicians seem to be of the pup-tent persuasion.) Olson wants to keep what is distinctive about us and what is most significant about us out of metaphysics. He does not discuss what is distinctive about us at all, and he consigns what is significant about us to a sphere of practical concerns outside the purview of metaphysics altogether. I'll illustrate Olson's indifference to what is ontologically distinctive about us by his discussion of human life, and I'll illustrate his banishment of what is significant about us from metaphysics by his discussion of *being the same person as*.

Olson's Conception of a Human Life

On Olson's Biological View, we are fundamentally organisms; but our being organisms does not reveal what is unique about us. There are numerous different kinds of animals. On my view, what's unique about us are the features that make us persons, not just animals—features that depend on the first-person perspective (like wondering how one is going to die

or evaluating one's own desires). Neither these features nor the first-person perspective that makes them possible have any ontological significance at all, on Olson's view. Indeed, Olson takes mentality in general not to matter to our identity: He says, "[P]sychology is completely irrelevant to personal identity." (p. 97) Indeed,

Perhaps we cannot properly call that vegetating animal a person since it has none of those psychological features that distinguish people from non-people (rationality, the capacity for self-consciousness, or what have you). If so, that simply shows that you can continue to exist without being a person, just as you could continue to exist without being a philosopher, or a student or a fancier of fast cars. (p. 17)

What distinguishes "people from non-people" is thus, according to Olson, of no more ontological significance than what distinguishes students from non-students, or fanciers of fast cars from non-fanciers of fast cars. According to him, the continued existence of you or me depends on biological continuity: "one survives just in case one's purely animal functions—metabolism, the capacity to breathe and circulate one's blood and the like—continue." (p. 16) It is noteworthy that these animal functions are not unique to members of the homo sapiens species.

Olson gives persistence conditions for organisms in terms of lives. He says that an "organism persists just in case the metabolic process that is its individual biological life continues to impose its characteristic organization on new particles."¹ (p. 137) A little later, he adds, "I say that a past or future being is you just in case it has your biological life." (p. 139)

Olson's conception of life in terms of organisms is both too broad and too narrow to be adequate for understanding human life. It is too broad since it does not make a place for what is distinctive about human lives. We have the same kind of metabolic processes as many other kinds of animals. It is too narrow since it defines human life wholly in terms of its biological aspects.

The word 'life' by itself is incomplete until we know what kind of thing that we are talking about. A *person's* life is a personal life, and the personal life of a human being has

¹ "The individual biological life of a particular living organism is a special kind of event, roughly the sum of the metabolic activities the organism's parts are caught up in." (p. 136)

biological aspects. A purely biological life, however, is the career of an organism. If the organism constitutes a person, then what would have been a biological life on its own becomes subsumed by, or incorporated into, a personal life.²

On my view, a person-constituted-by-an-organism does not have two lives, but one integrated personal life that has biological as well as nonbiological aspects. The connection between an injury to one's organs and one's resulting dread of a long recovery is a causal connection *within* a personal life.³ Biological life is what is continuous throughout the animal kingdom. But if I am right, biological life is only one aspect of personal life.⁴ In a strict and philosophical sense, your life is a personal life that includes your successes and failures, and loves and losses, as well as your high cholesterol. To equate human life, in a strict and philosophical sense, with biological life severely truncates what we intend to talk about strictly and philosophically. A wholly biological conception of your life is simply not adequate.

In short, Big-Tent Metaphysics does not relegate what is unique about us to some second-rate realm of the merely practical, but rather welcomes it into the domain of basic reality.

Being the Same Person

Olson explicitly divorces practical and moral concerns about persons from the identity of persons. (p. 70) In his view, it is only the identity of our biological aspects that belongs to metaphysics. Yet, what is significant about us—our rational, prudential and moral concerns—are tied to being a person, indeed to psychological continuity, not just to our being animals. According to Olson, as we have seen, there is nothing metaphysically important about being a person. Persons qua persons don't have persistence conditions. He writes, "*Being the same person...* is not a metaphysical relation." (p. 69) To say that A is the same person as B is to use 'same person' in a practical sense, with no metaphysical

² Nonhuman persons, if there are any, may have personal lives with no biological aspect at all.

³ Before a fetus comes to constitute a person, there is biological life; but there is no personal life.

⁴ Since organisms constitute persons, and not vice versa, persons are of a higher primary kind than organisms. Hence, it is not the case that a personal life is an aspect of biological life, except perhaps derivatively.

implications. For example, A is the same person as B if B is the future person to whom A's prudential concern is rationally directed. (p. 68)

Although Olson does not endorse relative identity, on his view, it is possible that I exist at t and at t' and am a person at t and at t' , and am the same animal at t and t' , but not the same person at t and t' —as long as we understand 'same person' not to imply identity, but only psychological continuity.⁵ Olson suggests that we could say, "roughly speaking, x is now the same person as y is later on just in case y is then psychologically continuous with x as she is now." (p. 69) So, there is not a single relation 'being the same F as' that has as instances both 'being the same animal as' and 'being the same person as': On Olson's view, 'A is the same animal as B' entails that A is identical to B; 'A is the same person as B' does not.

Olson makes this point because he is concerned to deny the so-called Transplant Intuition that seems to imply that I am identical to the being in the future who is psychologically continuous with me. Olson wants to deny that the person who inherits my cerebrum is me (since she is a different animal), but he wants to account for the Transplant Intuition by arguing that the person who inherits my cerebrum (though not really me) is the person I should care about and is the person who is morally responsible for my bad deeds. According to Olson, "Someone is now responsible for an earlier action if he is now psychologically continuous with the agent as he was when he performed the action (in the absence of the usual excuses)." (pp. 59-60) Olson goes on to add that "this principle is inconsistent with the claim that one is accountable only for one's actions." (p. 60)

But it is incoherent to suppose that a person who is not me is responsible for my misdeeds, no matter what apparent memories the other person has. It is a fundamental principle of morality that I am morally responsible for my deeds and not for yours. Olson's way of rejecting the Transplant Intuition is morally untenable. Since I agree with Olson that psychological continuity does not suffice for identity, I have no truck with the Transplant Intuition. But I think that it is deeply wrong to divorce identity from moral responsibility, or from what we care about. That's why I advocate Big-Tent Metaphysics.

⁵ Suppose that there is a human animal who exists before and after a cerebrum transplant. He is the same animal before and after, but not the same person before and after, on Olson's view.

Olson says, “Being the same person is a moral or practical relation, and there is no reason to expect it to have the same formal features as identity strictly so called.” (pp. 68-9) So, on Olson’s view, my being me in the future is not a matter of my being the same person in the future that I am now; it’s not even a matter of my being a person at all in the future. Olson is right, of course, that we often use ‘same person’ in a sense that does not imply identity—as when we say of someone who becomes a political radical, “He is not the same person that he used to be.” But we also use ‘person’ to imply identity, as in the phrase ‘personal identity.’ And, I believe, it is the latter that is the strict and philosophical use of ‘person’. But not Olson, who says: “[W]henever it is natural and pragmatically justified to treat someone as if he were a certain person, then he is that person.” (p. 64) But being ‘that person’ has no metaphysical significance whatever. There is a complete severance of reality from practical concerns. This is further evidence that Olson is Small-Tent Metaphysician.

Olson is not blind to the importance of practical concerns. Even behind the (disliked) Transplant Intuition, he says, there is a truth. “And a very important truth it is; [he says] “to anyone but a metaphysician it is more important than the truth about who is numerically identical with whom.” (p. 69) This remark raises the question: Why would anyone want to be a metaphysician if what counts as metaphysical is wholly cut off from what anyone except metaphysicians cares most about? *Metaphysically* speaking, on Olson’s view, we are animals, and that’s that. Big-Tent Metaphysics has room in metaphysics for what is significant about us and for what we care about.

A Word about Constitution

I was going to make some comments on my view of constitution, but I’ll omit this section in order to save time to reply to Eric’s comments. My view is worked out in *Persons and Bodies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and expanded in excruciating detail in *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

In conclusion: Whether a constitution view, a biological approach, a substance dualism or something else is the correct metaphysics of persons, there is no doubt that Eric

Olson has done a lot to make the biological approach one to be reckoned with. And his achievement is secure whatever the fate of Big-Tent Metaphysics.

Lynne Rudder Baker

University of Massachusetts Amherst

4/1/07.

THREE PROBLEMS FOR OLSON'S ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Ned Markosian

I take Eric Olson's account of personal identity to have two components. First there is his characterization of the problem of personal identity. Here's a paraphrase of some things Olson says on p. 23 of *The Human Animal*.

Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: For anything that is a person at one time, under what possible circumstances is something – anything at all – that exists at some other time numerically identical with that person?

The second (and main) component of Olson's account of personal identity is his answer to the above question, which he calls The Biological Approach. Here's my formulation of The Biological Approach.

The Biological Approach to Personal Identity

For anything, x , that is a person at one time, and anything, y , that exists at some other time, y is numerically identical with x iff there is the right kind of biological continuity between x and y .

I want to begin by raising a problem for Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity. The problem has to do with a story that I'll call The Mummy.

The Mummy

Once upon a time there was a man who lived a long and happy life. Then he died, and his body was preserved, as a mummy, for a million years. Eventually the mummy came to the attention of a powerful being, who gradually rearranged the particles that composed the mummy until they came to compose a living, breathing, human person, who happened to be a woman, and who had a psychology that was utterly different and discontinuous from the psychology of the man from the beginning of the story.

Here are two things about this story that I think are both true.

- (1) There is a single thing in *The Mummy* that is a man at the beginning of the story and a woman at the end.
- (2) The man from the beginning of *The Mummy* and the woman from the end of the story are different people.

But if we adopt Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, then we'll be forced to say that any theory of personal identity according to which (1) and (2) are both true is automatically false. To me, this seems like a major strike against Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity.

I think what this case shows is that there really is some notion of *same person* that is relevant to the problem of personal identity, and also that this *same person* relation is distinct from the relation that holds between any x and y iff x is a person at t_1 , y exists at t_2 , and y is identical to x . I also think that if we try to characterize the problem of personal identity without somehow incorporating the *same person* relation, then we will have mischaracterized the problem. I'll return to this point shortly. But first I want to mention a problem for The Biological Approach.

One of Olson's most convincing arguments against The Psychological Approach to personal identity (according to which the key to personal identity is psychological

continuity) involves what he calls The Fetus Problem. According to The Psychological Approach, nothing that is not psychologically continuous with you as you are now can be identical with you. But the unconscious fetus that was in your mother's womb way back when is not psychologically continuous with you as you are now. So according to The Psychological Approach, you were never a fetus. This puts the proponent of that approach in the awkward position of having to say that one of the following two things is true.

- (3) When you came into existence, you replaced a fetus that was in your mother's womb before you.
- (4) Ever since you came into existence, you have been sharing space (and parts, and matter, and sometimes even clothes) with a thing that was once a fetus, that has never been a person, and that has always been distinct from you.

That's The Fetus Problem for The Psychological Approach. It's a problem that I wouldn't want to have. But as W.R. Carter has pointed out, there is a similar problem facing The Biological Approach.¹ For according to The Biological Approach, nothing that is not biologically continuous with you as you are now can be identical with you. But the corpse that will result from your death is not biologically continuous with you as you are now. So according to The Biological Approach, you will never be a corpse. And this puts the proponent of The Biological Approach in the awkward position of having to say that one of the following three things is true.

¹ Carter, W.R., "Will I Be a Dead Person?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59 (1999), pp. 167-171.

- (5) When you die, you will go out of existence, and you will be replaced by a brand-new object – a corpse – that was not there before.
- (6) When you die, you will go out of existence, and the particles that previously composed you will not compose anything (not even a corpse).
- (7) You are now sharing space (and parts, and matter, and even clothes) with a non-living entity that will one day be a corpse (your corpse, in fact) but that has always been distinct from you.

Some proponents of The Biological Approach will opt for (5), and Olson will presumably opt for (6), but to my mind, all three of these alternatives are unappealing. For it seems clear to me that you are a physical object, with the persistence conditions for such objects; and that, moreover, when you die, you will continue to exist for as long as your body exists.

I will come back to The Corpse Problem, but next I want to talk about what I think is the best alternative to Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity. The alternative that I want to propose is based on the following three metaphysical assumptions.

- (A1) There are such things as instantiations of properties. (For example, there is the current instantiation of blueness by my shirt.)
- (A2) Instantiations come in episodes, which are event-like entities that can be extended in time. (My shirt has been instantiating blueness for a while now, and will continue to do so for some time to come.)
- (A3) It makes sense to talk about whether x 's instantiation of ϕ -ness at t_1 is part of the same episode of ϕ -ness as y 's instantiation of ϕ -ness at t_2 . (For example, we can ask whether my shirt's current instantiation of blueness is part of the same episode of blueness as its instantiation of blueness two weeks ago.)

Here is my proposal.

The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity (EPPI)

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the circumstances under which an instance of personhood at t_1 is part of the same episode of personhood as an instance of personhood at t_2 ?

And here is how EPPI gets around the problem raised by The Mummy. EPPI allows us to say that there is a single thing throughout the story, but that the person at the end of the story is not the same person as the person at the beginning of the story. For EPPI allows us to say that the later instances of personhood in the story are not parts of the same episode of personhood as the earlier ones (despite the fact that the same object is involved in each case).

It seems to me that this is by far the most natural thing to say about what happens in The Mummy. And since EPPI allows us to say this, but Olson's Characterization does not, I take this to be a huge advantage of EPPI over Olson's Characterization.

Meanwhile, the good news is that adopting EPPI would solve The Corpse Problem for the proponent of The Biological Approach. For a proponent of The Biological Approach who takes his theory to be answering the question posed by EPPI will say the following.

Bio EPPI

An instance of personhood at t_1 is part of the same episode of personhood as an instance of personhood at t_2 iff there is the right kind of biological continuity between those two instances of personhood.

Which means that such a proponent of The Biological Approach can say that the same thing that will be a corpse after you die (namely, you) is now a person, even though the episode of personhood that is going on in your vicinity right now will have ended by the time you become a corpse.

So much for the good news. Now I want to turn to a different problem for both The Biological Approach and The Psychological Approach – a problem that I don't think either view can really solve. And this problem is also based on a story.

The Salamander

Once upon a time there was a human person named Ned, who lived a long and happy life. Then, when he was 100 years old, Ned began to morph like a character in a bad movie, but very slowly, until, after six months of morphing, he had turned into a salamander named Sally. (Ned/Sally remained conscious throughout this whole process.) Sally lived a long and happy life as a salamander, crawling around under rocks and logs and eating whatever salamanders eat. Then, when she was very old for a salamander, Sally slowly morphed back into a human person. The eventual result was a woman known as Lucy, who was utterly different in every important way from Ned.

Here's why this example is a problem for The Biological Approach: The proponent of The Biological Approach must say that the relation between Ned and Lucy is personal identity. (After all, there is biological continuity between Ned and Lucy.) And here's why this example is also a problem for The Psychological Approach: The proponent of The Psychological Approach must also say that the relation between Ned and Lucy is personal identity. (Because there is psychological continuity between Ned and Lucy.)

But it seems clear to me that this is not a story involving personal identity between Ned and Lucy. Whatever else we say about the story, we must not say that Ned and Lucy are the same person.

Notice that framing either The Biological Approach or The Psychological Approach as an answer to the question posed by EPPI will not help the proponents of those

approaches with this problem. For the different instances of personhood involving Ned and Lucy in the story are both biologically and psychologically continuous.

I suppose that the best response for a proponent of either The Biological Approach or The Psychological Approach is to point out that all of the following things are true in the story:

- (8) The thing that is Ned persists throughout the story.
- (9) Ned survives the events of the story.
- (10) This is a story about a thing that begins its career as a person, that later becomes a salamander, and that eventually comes to be a person again.
- (11) Both Sally and Lucy really are identical to Ned.

But here's why I don't like this response. I agree that (8)-(11) are all true. And I don't mind calling the relation between Sally and me "object identity" or even "organism identity." Similarly with the relation between Lucy and me. Nor do I mind saying that I survive for a long time in the story, and also that I turn into a salamander and then back into a human being. But I am not okay with calling the relation between me and Sally *personal identity*. Nor am I okay with calling the relation between me and Lucy *personal identity*. If there is a relation worth calling personal identity (and I think there is), then it is not any relation that can relate me to a salamander. Nor is it any relation that relates me to Lucy in the story.

The upshot, for me anyway, is that both The Biological Approach and The Psychological Approach must be false. I don't know what the right view of personal identity is, but I'm convinced by this example that it's not either one of these two.

Ned Markosian

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PROBLEMS FOR ANIMALISM

Dean Zimmerman

No one has done as much as Eric Olson — in *The Human Animal*, numerous papers, and his most recent book, *What Are We?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) — to chart the range of metaphysical positions one might adopt in order to resist the argument for animalism I will be discussing; and no one has so thoroughly tallied up their various costs and benefits.

My comments have two parts. I begin by laying out the argument that seems to me to be at the core of Olson's thinking about human persons; and I suggest a problem with his reasons for accepting one of its premises. The premise is warranted by its platitudinous or commonsensical status; but Olson's arguments lead him to conclusions that undermine the family of platitudes to which it belongs. Then I'll raise a question about how Olson should construe the vagueness that would seem to infect the boundaries of human animals.

I. Olson's Master Argument

Eric Olson, in *The Human Animal* and elsewhere, invites us to consider the following deceptively simple argument, an "Argument for Animalism". Here is a version adapted from his concise presentation of the argument in a recent paper. Suppose you are "alone" (as we would ordinarily say) in a room:

- (a) There is a human animal in the room (a thing with biological, not psychological, persistence conditions).
- (b) If something is a human animal in the room, it is thinking (after all, it has a brain in its head, just like you do, and that brain is doing exactly what your brain is doing).
- (c) You are the one and only thinking being in the room (if there were many, all thinking the same thoughts, how could you know which one is you?)

Conclusion:

(d) You are a human animal (a thing with biological, not psychological, persistence conditions).

Olson's argument is an instance of the following argument schema:

- (A) There is a human-shaped *F* in the room.
- (B) If there is a human-shaped *F* in the room, then it is thinking.
- (c) You are the one and only thinking being in the room.

Conclusion:

- (D) You are an *F*.

Several terms besides "human animal" can be substituted for "F" to yield premises with at least some plausibility.

(i) "Mere Body": Does an animal continue to exist after it dies? Presumably not; but something does, a body that was there before death and that has the same history as the animal. Call such things "bodies"; plug that in for "F". (Randall Carter has pressed the point that this substitution for "F" has just as much plausibility as Olson's.¹)

(ii) "Psychological Person": Is there something now shaped like this body but that would survive the transfer of the cerebrum? If so, and if an animal can't, then there is another candidate, call it a "psychological person"; plug that in for "F", and the premises again have some plausibility. Sydney Shoemaker accepts the premises and conclusion of an argument having this form, with "psychological person" taking the place of "human animal". Because he also accepts the original (a) (there is a human animal in the room), he concludes, on the basis of (c) and the fact that nothing with psychological persistence conditions can be identical with a human animal, that the human animal in the room does not think. So he rejects (b), affirming instead: animals don't think — at least not *human*

¹ W. R. Carter, "Will I Be a Dead Person?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59 (1999), pp. 167-71.

animals (and in fact he'll extend the moral to other animals with a sufficiently complex psychology — complex enough so that it seems plausible to ascribe psychological persistence conditions to something in the vicinity of the animal's body).²

(iii) “Mere Hunk of Matter”: Chisholm asks us to consider a version with “mere hunk of matter” in place of “F” (this is a slight fudging of Chisholm's actual argument — he doesn't explicitly link his notion of a mereologically stable “stand-in” or “*ens nonsuccessivum*” with that of a “mere hunk of matter”, though they may plausibly be identified).³ But he turns the argument on its head, making it into a *reductio* of the corresponding (B); and in fact he turns (A) and (c) and not-(D) into an argument for dualism.

Here's the schematic Olson-style argument with “mere hunk of matter” in place of “F”:

- (a*) There is a mere hunk of matter in the room, one that is shaped like your body (it is an aggregation of particles that recently was and soon will be scattered).
- (b*) If there is a mere hunk of matter in the room, shaped like your body, it is thinking.
- (c) You are the one and only thinking being in the room.

Conclusion:

- (d*) You are a mere hunk of matter (something that was and will be scattered).

Chisholm accepts (a*) and (c). He avoids the conclusion by denying (b*). He uses (a*) and (c) and the denial of (d*) to argue against Olson's conclusion (d), and in favor of the view that you're either a tiny particle or a monad. (Olson says that this is the most impressive sort of argument for dualism of which he knows; and I am inclined to agree — though I am looking for a better one.)

² Shoemaker's latest thoughts on these topics appear in his book, *Physical Realization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ Roderick M. Chisholm, “Is There a Mind-Body Problem?”, *The Philosophic Exchange* 2 (1978), pp. 25-34.

II. Chisholm's *entia successiva* argument

I want to consider whether there is something self-undermining about Olson's use of the Master Argument for Animalism. I find it useful to begin by comparing his argument to an argument of Chisholm's for a very different conclusion — an argument that makes use of Olson's (c) and bits of the “hunk of matter” argument to reach the denial of Olson's conclusion.

Chisholm reasons roughly as follows:

1. If you are a human animal [i.e., (d)], then there is a mere hunk of matter in the room shaped like an animal only if the mere hunk of matter in question is thinking [i.e., (b*)].

Justification: the matter is shaped just like the animal, it has a brain in its head, etc. (Compare Olson's defense of (b): the animal thinks if the person does.)

2. There is a mere hunk of matter in the room, one that is shaped like a human animal (and that recently was and soon will be scattered) [i.e., (a*)].
3. So you are a human animal [i.e. (d)] only if the mere hunk of matter in question is thinking. (1 & 2)
4. You are the one and only thinking being in the room [i.e., (c)].
5. You are not a mere hunk of matter [denial of (d*)].
6. Therefore the mere hunk of matter is not thinking [denial of (b*)]. (4 &5)

7. Therefore you are not a human animal (nor, for that matter, any other “gross physical object” that can gain or lose parts, since the argument may be repeated for all such things) [i.e., not-(d)]. (3&6)

Because Olson is committed to (a), (b), (c), and justifies (b) by claiming that anything intrinsically just like you is thinking if you are, he must accept versions of (B) that substitute something for “F” that is inconsistent with being a human animal but that would apply to something sharing its matter with the human animal in the room (if it applied to anything). He accepts Chisholm’s Premise 1, and similar principles with “hunk of matter” replaced by “mere body” (in the sense I’ve stipulated), or by “psychological person”, or by any other plausible candidates. Consequently, he must reject the corresponding versions of (A) with these substitutions. So, Olson concludes, there are no mere hunks of matter, bodies, or psychological-persons — at least, none shaped just like me.

The impossibility of coincident objects of these sorts (and considerations of general theoretical neatness) draw him towards a view he calls “biological minimalism” (the only composites are organisms — a view first articulated and defended by van Inwagen, and endorsed by Trenton Merricks)⁴. At the very least, Olson must resist the idea that there are undetached proper parts of me that are big enough to “become me” or that could “come to constitute all of me” were some other part removed; there just can’t be any such things. They’re mere hunks of matter if they are anything, most of them (the exception being organs or biological systems that could come to constitute all of me, but that have a kind of unity and life of their own). Being mere hunks of matter, if there were such things, they shouldn’t be the kinds of things that would cease to exist because of merely extrinsic changes — changes in what’s attached to them. Olson is forced to conclude that there aren’t such things.

So what happens to Olson’s argument for animalism if he accepts restrictive principles of composition, like biological minimalism — principles that imply that there are no such things as brains (but doctors have seen them!) or rocks (but Dr. Johnson kicked

⁴ See Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), and Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

one!) or clouds (but we flew through one on the way here!) or...? It seems to me that accepting these conclusions would undermine an important aspect of Olson's Master Argument: namely premise (a), the one affirming the existence of an animal in the room.

What sort of support can one adduce for this premise? Why do I think there is an animal here? Or, better, why does Olson think this, with respect to himself, when he is alone in a room?

I think it's safe to say that Olson's main reason is: Because it's obvious, it's the sort of thing we all believe, it's a prime candidate for one of the "deliverances of common sense" — a belief that is "innocent-until-proven-guilty" and also something that would take a lot of proving to be found guilty. ("Common sense" here needn't be a name for any special faculty or way of coming to know something, and I don't think it's a term Olson ever uses; what I mean by it is just an epistemic status, having to do with how obvious something seems, and how widespread this seeming is.)

Is there some other source from which (a) could acquire its justification? I do not think the source of Olson's warrant for (a) can be anything like "Biology is a great science, it's statements are likely true; and they imply that there are organisms; so human animals exist." The fans of hunks of matter could cite mechanics and its subject matter; the fans of psychological persons could cite psychology, and the expectation that, given a lot better neuroscience, psychologists would be able to predict things about the preservation of a person's memories through cerebrum transfer, and would naturally describe their findings in terms of the things that a person would remember after such an ordeal. Any support Olson could adduce from biology could be countered by scientifically respectable considerations for alternative versions of the (A) schema that Olson must reject.

So I think it must be (a)'s status as part of "common sense" that justifies (a). But we have precisely the same sorts of reasons for believing in organs like the brain or the liver; in rocks and tables; and in mere masses of various stuff-kinds (which we talk about when we use mass terms, like "the water in the glass" or "the acid in my stomach" or "the ice in the sculpture" or, most saliently, "the matter in my body"). If we've been forced to accept biological minimalism, or some other restrictive view about composition which says

that we're wrong about vast numbers of these things, that should have some effect upon our confidence in (a).

Put it this way: grant Olson that you have no immaterial parts, and that you are located in the vicinity of your whole body; and grant that thinking isn't something a plurality could do, so that you must be an object made of the parts in the vicinity of your body. Now, what kinds of physical objects are there in the world, what are the candidates for a kind of thing you could be? Olson says, "Well, at least we all know this much: there are animals." But, antecedently, one would have said one knew that there were lots of different kinds of macrophysical things in our environment: lumps of clay and statues and rocks and organisms and organs and parcels of matter and... All these are, one would have thought, things that we can tell exist simply by looking around. But once this conviction is shaken, and we've absorbed the idea that most of the "physical objects" we "see" around us do not exist... why should merely "seeing" animals all around us give us confidence that they exist?

III. The Vagueness of Animals

Finally, I offer an argument intended to provoke Olson into saying something about vagueness.

A human animal is a lot like a cloud when you look closely. And, on one way of thinking about such vague objects, one of Olson's key principles (embodied in premise (c)) seems to provide an argument against animalism:

1. Animals are vague objects — and that means there are ever so many different hunks of matter with equal right to be identified with each animal (a crucial component of both semantic indecision and epistemicist theories of vagueness).
2. If I am an animal, then there are ever so many different hunks of matter with equal right to be identified with me. (From 1)

3. If there are all these hunks with equal claim to be me, then either each of them is conscious or only one is.
 4. But they can't each be conscious (there's only one thinker here, not many — one of Olson's guiding principles).
 5. And it's implausible to suppose that just one is conscious, but all the others not (another Olson-ish claim).
 6. So it is false that there are all these hunks of matter with an equal right to be identified with me. (From 3, 4, 5)
-

So I am not an animal. (From 2, 6)

Olson's response would, I think, be to deny 1 (and its consequence, 2): the vagueness of the boundaries of an animal cannot be a matter of there being many hunks of matter that are equally good candidates for being the animal.

Because he wants only one object where you are located, he is not free to treat this vagueness as semantic indecision among many things with only slightly different spatiotemporal boundaries. Nor could he adopt Timothy Williamson's epistemicism, since it too requires many good candidates in (nearly) the same place at the same time.⁵ So far as I can see, this only leaves two options: There is just one thing there, and it is super-precise (Merricks takes this route); or there is just one thing there, and it fades out, objectively (van Inwagen's conclusion).

I find this worrisome, because the types of vagueness that infect "animal" — both the vagueness in the spatial boundaries of an animal's body, and the vagueness in the

⁵ Williamson, *Vagueness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); John Hawthorne points out that epistemicism with respect to the (presumably) vague term "person" requires many overlapping candidates in "Epistemicism and Semantic Plasticity", *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 289-322.

temporal boundaries of the origins and ends of an animal's life — *feel* like the same kinds of vagueness infecting “ship”, “mountain” and so on. And these do not seem like cases that are best dealt with by positing super-precision (with exactly one object, its parts somehow very different from all the other collections of parts that *almost* make up a ship, a mountain, etc. — note that this is much worse than Williamson's variety of super-precision), nor by positing objective fade-outs.

Both super-precise lone candidates and lone candidates with objective fade-outs are incompatible with the idea that the vagueness can be “resolved” by linguistic revision; or that there is nothing wrong with people who draw these boundaries in slightly different places. Both super-precision and objective fade-out are incompatible with these ideas, unless we are idealists of a sort — and both Olson and I have been properly brought up; we'll have no truck with idealism! I am sure Olson will have something interesting to say about these worries, and I look forward to hearing it.

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REPLIES

Eric Olson

Reply to Baker

Whenever I try to talk about Baker's philosophy I find it hard to know where to start. We disagree about so many things. We even disagree about how to describe each other's views. When I read Baker's description of my views, I find myself wanting to say, "No! that's not what I think," or at best, "That's a misleading and tendentious description of my view." And when she reads my description of her views, she has precisely the same reaction.

For example, Baker says that "Olson's ontology doesn't mention persons"¹ (or, in ordinary English, people). That sounds like I deny the existence of people, which I don't. The truth behind her shocking headline is that on my view people have the same identity conditions as certain things that aren't people: for instance cats.

Another case: Baker says that I "define human life wholly in terms of its biological aspects" (Big Tent Metaphysics, section 'Olson's conception of a human life', p.11). That makes it sound like all there is to our careers, on my view, is our biological functioning--that the whole story about a person is a story about sodium ions and liver cells and connecting tissues. It sounds like I'm saying that we ought to throw out all the books of psychology and politics and replace them with biology books, and shut down all the psychology departments and give the money to the biologists. But I never denied the existence or the importance of the non-biological events that figure in our careers. I only said that they are not relevant to our persistence over time.

Baker thinks that if all her parts were gradually replaced with artificial gadgets, resulting in an inorganic machine with mental properties just like hers, she herself would be that machine. She says that my view, which denies this, is "totally ad hoc" and probably

¹ The earlier draft of Baker's comments on which this reply was based said, "According to Big-Tent Metaphysics, an ontology that didn't mention chairs, flowers, and persons would leave out kinds of things that are really there." She clearly took these remarks to apply to my view.

illegal (Big Tent Metaphysics, p.9). But there is nothing ad hoc about it. I think that Baker is a biological organism. I've explained why I hold that view. And Baker agrees that a biological organism could not come to be an inorganic machine.

I think Baker often misdescribes her own view too. For instance, she says she agrees with me that we are animals (p.8). That *can't* be right. Baker really does agree with what I say about the persistence of animals. At any rate, she agrees with me on the important points, such as that a human animal starts out as an embryo and may end up as a vegetable. Now if I am an animal, and every animal starts out as an embryo, it follows that *I* start out as an embryo. That's an instance of the following valid inference form:

1. x is F.
2. Every F is G.
3. x is G.

(Or: $Fa; (x)(Fx \rightarrow Gx);$ therefore $Ga.$) But Baker doesn't agree that I was once an embryo. That's because an embryo has no first-person perspective, and therefore doesn't count as a person; and she thinks I am a person essentially. She can't say that I am an animal, and every animal was once an embryo, yet *I* was never an embryo.

At one point Baker suggests that although we agree that I am animal, we disagree about whether I am *merely* an animal (p.8). (As long as I'm not merely an animal, apparently, it doesn't follow that I have the properties that all animals have, such as starting out as an embryo.) But that doesn't help. Suppose Descartes is a philosopher, but not merely a philosopher. And suppose that all philosophers are wise. Doesn't it follow that Descartes is wise? Consider this inference form:

4. x is F, but x is not merely F.
2. Every F is G.
3. x is G.

This is valid no matter what we mean by the qualification 'merely'. It would be valid no

matter what the second conjunct of 4 were.

When Baker says that I am an animal, she means that an animal “constitutes” me. Very roughly, a certain animal is located exactly where I am, and it’s in circumstances that suffice for it to coincide with something of my kind: a person. The precise details don’t matter. What does matter is that on Baker’s view I am not the animal standing here. If I were, I should have started out when the animal started out, as a microscopic embryo. So on her view, I am not an animal. Not really. Being an animal is not one of my properties. Otherwise I should have to have all the properties that being an animal entails, such as possibly existing without a first-person perspective. My property is not *being an animal*, but *being constituted by an animal*.

Baker wants to describe her claim that an animal constitutes me by saying that I *am* an animal. But that is misleading. It doesn’t mean what it seems to mean. We may sometimes say that someone is something he’s not really. For instance, in discussing Hollywood epics I might say that Charlton Heston is Moses. What I mean, of course, is that Heston played the role of Moses. When Baker says that we are animals, she means something rather like this. Imagine that there are people in California who think that Heston really is Moses, resurrected in the modern world. It would be wrong to say that I *agree* with them that Heston is Moses. Yet that is what Baker is doing when she says she agrees with me that we are animals.

What about Baker’s “big-tent metaphysics”? It’s the idea that “reality and value go together” (section 2, p.10). Every property that is distinctive or significant determines an essential kind. She doesn’t mean every property that is *metaphysically* distinctive or significant; that would make her idea trivial. She means that every kind of thing that’s distinctive or important to us in *any* way must be ontologically important--a kind that things belong to essentially if at all. All value carries ontological significance.

This is where Baker gets her view that we’re not really organisms, but are merely constituted by them. Baker thinks that having a first-person perspective is important and distinctive. It follows, according to big-tent metaphysics, that the kind *thing with a first-person perspective--person*, for short--is an essential kind. So every being with a first-person perspective has a first-person perspective essentially. Being an organism, or being

biologically alive, is also an important and distinctive property; so the kind *organism* is an essential kind. Every organism is essentially an organism. But no organism has a first-person perspective essentially. The kinds *person* (on her definition) and *organism* are incompatible. It follows that the organism standing here is one thing; the person standing here is another. Baker says they're not *separate* things. (I'm not sure what she means by 'separate'.) But they're numerically different. The person and the organism have to be numerically different because they have incompatible properties. (How I'm supposed to know which one I am is still a mystery to me.)

Maybe there are other important and distinctive properties that I in some sense have. Sentience, for instance. That seems important. If so, there is a third being standing here that is essentially sentient but doesn't essentially have a first-person perspective. And the list is unlikely to stop there. There are a lot of things in Baker's ontology. She needs a big tent to fit them all in.

Big-tent metaphysics is certainly an interesting idea. Why accept it? Baker says that unless metaphysical categories map exactly onto the kinds of things that are distinctive and significant in other ways, metaphysics loses its point. There's no point in doing metaphysics unless categories like *person*, *sentient being*, *artifact*, and whatever else we find important come into it. Any worthwhile metaphysics must say something about people and artifacts *as such*.

This argument doesn't move me. We don't expect other areas of inquiry to capture all the categories of things we find important. We don't expect physics or chemistry or meteorology to say anything about people as such. Physics is in the business of discovering physical truths. The kinds and categories that figure in those truths might match up with the kinds and categories that are important outside of physics; but there's no reason why they have to. In fact it would be very bad for physics if it were constrained to say something about people as such--if a physical theory that treated all massive objects alike were for that reason unacceptable. Does that make physics a waste of time? Surely not.

Metaphysics, as I see it, is in the business of discovering metaphysical truths. The kinds and categories that figure in metaphysical truths *might* match up with the kinds and categories that are important outside of metaphysics. But again, I see no reason to suppose

that they have to. In fact it would seem to be very bad for metaphysics if it were constrained to say something about the categories that figure outside of metaphysics. A metaphysical theory shouldn't be rejected just because it treats all organisms alike, any more than a physical theory should be rejected if it treats all massive objects alike. Metaphysics shouldn't try to tell the whole story of everything, any more than physics should.

Baker clearly thinks that metaphysics is not at all like physics or meteorology. Something about metaphysics requires it to capture all the categories that are important outside of metaphysics. But I don't know what that something is.

Reply to Markosian

Markosian has three objections to my view.

First, he says, it can be the case that I am a person now, and some being is a person in the future, and I *am* that person, but I am not the *same* person as he is. I might not be the same person now as I myself am at some later time. To put it in an awkward way, you can have numerical identity between people who aren't the same person. Markosian doesn't say whether I might be the same person as someone else--someone numerical different from me--but he might. He says that this "same-person-as" relation ought to figure in my statement of the problem of personal identity.

As far as I can tell, this complaint doesn't imply that anything I said in the book is actually wrong, but at most that I left out something important. The book was about numerical identity over time: what it takes for us to persist. Markosian is talking about something else: the same-person-as relation. Nothing I said about our identity over time rules out the existence of Markosian's same-person-as relation. My question was what it takes for earlier and later beings to be us; his is what it takes for earlier and later beings to be the same person as us in his special sense. These questions are not in competition.

Second, Markosian says my account gives the wrong result in the Salamander story. He thinks that he persists throughout the story, and changes from a human being to a salamander and then back again. So the original person and the later person are one. But

he says they are not the *same* person. He thinks I'm committed to saying that they *are* the same person: that the relation between them is "personal identity".

I don't think I am committed to this. I may be committed to saying that the original person *is* the later person: that "they" are numerically identical. (I hesitate because the story is very strange, and I have doubts about whether it's possible.) Because my view says nothing about Markosian's same-person-as relation, however, it doesn't imply that the human being at the end of the story is the same person as Markosian. I don't endorse (or deny) the claim he calls Bio EPPI.

Our only real disagreement (Markosian's third objection) is about whether we can become corpses. I said that death is the end of us (religious beliefs aside); Markosian thinks you might carry on existing for a million years as a mummy. Since he agrees with me that you and I are animals, this means we disagree about what it takes for an animal to persist. I say an animal persists by virtue of its biological life continuing; he thinks that's not necessary. He doesn't say what it *does* take for an animal to persist, but he takes my account to be wrong.

A surprising number of readers of *The Human Animal* have been happy to accept what I took to be the important claims--that we are animals and that our identity has nothing to do with psychology--but have objected to my positive account of animal identity. I'm not going to lose any sleep over this. If someone has a better account of animal identity than mine, I'll see that as a friendly amendment to what I said. But I haven't yet seen one.

Why do I say that an animal stops existing when it dies? Well, when I think about what it would take for a corpse to persist (supposing there are such things as corpses), it seems to be something completely different from what it takes for living organism to persist.

What it takes for a corpse to persist would seem to be much the same as what it takes for any other inanimate material thing to persist. Suppose we have a life-size alabaster statue of Markosian. (And suppose that there are such things as statues.) What does it take for that statue to persist? What sort of thing would bring its existence to an end? I suppose it persists, very roughly, as long as its shape is preserved. As long as enough of its atoms continue to be arranged more or less in that shape (contrasting with their surroundings), it still exists. Or maybe some of its atoms could be replaced, as long as it's done gradually

and the distinctive Markosian-shape remains. Something like that. What it takes for a corpse to persist will be analogous.

Now, what does it take for a *living* organism to persist? For enough of its atoms to remain arranged in a certain shape? Certainly not. A living organism can survive changes of a sort that no statue or corpse could survive. A human organism starts out as a microscopic embryo shaped like a frisbee. In the course of its development it increases in size by a factor of several trillion. Both its outward shape and its internal structure change radically. It could also survive dramatic losses. It could survive the loss of its arms and legs. Given enough life-support machinery, it may even be able to survive being pared down to a head. I don't suppose a statue or a corpse could survive this. Why could an organism persist through all this? It *seems* to be because its biological life continues.

The sort of thing a living organism can survive seems to me *so* different from the sort of thing a corpse could survive that I can't think of any plausible set of persistence conditions that incorporates both. In other words, I can't think of a good account of animal identity that is compatible with an animal's growing from embryo to adult, and also with its persisting for a million years as a mummy. If there is such an account, though, I'll welcome it.²

Reply to Zimmerman

I agree with nearly everything Zimmerman says. He has given two serious objections to the view that we are animals.

The first is the *rival-candidates problem*. I think there's an animal standing here, and I see no good reason to deny that it thinks my thoughts. That's why I say I'm an animal. But what if there are other things standing here too? A "mere hunk of matter", for instance, or a "mere body"? (I'm not sure what a "mere body" is supposed to be, but if it's not an animal, it's trouble.) Or a thing that persists by virtue of psychological continuity? Zimmerman might also have mentioned my head and my brain. They may not be *standing* here, exactly,

² I say more about this topic in 'Animalism and the Corpse Problem', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82 (2004), pp. 265-74.

but they sound like rival candidates for being me--rival candidates in that if they exist, it looks like they ought to think just as the animal does. That makes it hard to see what could make it the case that I am the animal and not one of the other things, and how I could ever know it if I was.

If I am to continue saying that I am an animal, I have three choices. I can deny that any of the other candidates think in the way that the animal does, and try to explain what prevents them from thinking. Or I can accept that the other things think just as the animal does, and try to give an account of how I could still know that *I* am the animal. Or I can deny that the other things exist: I could say that the only candidate for being me is the animal. (Or I could combine these options, and say different things about different rival candidates. I could even say something still wilder: endorse some sort of relative identity, say. Let's put that to one side.) So if you ask me, How do I know that I'm not my thinking head?, I can answer that my head doesn't think, or that it does but I can still somehow know that I'm not it, or that there are no such things as undetached heads.

These choices are not very nice. I've never seen a good explanation of why my head (if it exists) should be unable to think just as I do, or a satisfying account of how I could know that I'm not my thinking head. Nor am I happy about denying the existence of heads.

The rival-candidates problem worries me a lot more than the usual, familiar objections to my view: the objection that it has implausible consequences about what happens to us in brain transplants or robotic replacements, for instance, or that it implies that we are only temporarily and contingently people.

It's not my problem alone. *Any* sensible account of what we are faces its own version of the rival-candidates problem. It's just as much a problem for Baker's view that I am a thing constituted by an animal, for instance. It's no easier for her to solve the problem than it is for me. So the problem doesn't make my view any worse than the alternatives. But it does threaten to show that it's no better than the alternatives.

What if the problem had no solution? What if there were an animal standing here, *and* a hunk of matter, *and* a being that would go along with its transplanted brain, *and* an undetached head, and so on, and all those beings were psychologically indistinguishable, and there were no way for me to know that I was one of them and not any of the others?

That would be a mess. It would make it either indeterminate or unknowable what sort of thing I am. It would be indeterminate or unknowable whether I am an animal, or a hunk of matter, or a head. That would make it indeterminate or unknowable how big I am: whether I am 175cm tall, or small enough to fit into a shoe box. It would be indeterminate or unknowable what it takes for me to persist: what would happen to me if my brain were transplanted, or if all my organic parts were replaced with clever prostheses. For that matter, it would be indeterminate or unknowable whether I was a human-shaped thing a month ago, or whether I was a widely scattered cloud of particles then. No one is going to like that view.

I don't have a good solution to the rival-candidates problem. Zimmerman is right to say that I am inclined to solve it by denying the existence of the rivals. I'd like to say that there is no hunk of matter standing here, and no being with psychological persistence conditions, and--this is the bit I like least of all--no head. There is only an animal, and a lot of particles. I am inclined to accept a sparse ontology of material objects. Why? Well, because the alternatives look even worse. This is not a nice thing to have to say, but I can't see any good way of avoiding it. If you don't like it, tell me how *you* would solve the rival-candidates problem.

Now denying the existence of the non-animal rivals really would solve the rival-candidates problem. But as Zimmerman points out, it raises a hard question: Why suppose that there are human animals, but no hunks of matter or undetached heads or other rival candidates for being me? Why suppose that there is exactly *one* candidate for being me? And why suppose that it's an animal? Why not suppose instead that there are undetached heads but no human animals, say? For that matter, why not suppose that there are only simple particles, and no composite objects at all? The view that there are animals, but no other rival candidates, may sound like wishful thinking.

I think there *is* a principled reason for saying that the only candidate for being me is an animal. You won't like it, but it's the best I can do. Consider the general question of when smaller things add up to some bigger thing. If we have some particles, what has to be the case for them to be parts of something bigger? This is van Inwagen's "special composition question". One answer is that smaller things *automatically* add up to a bigger thing, no

matter what they are like in themselves, or how they are arranged or situated. Composition is universal. That would give us a lot of candidates for being me, and threatens to lead to the view that it's indeterminate what sort of thing I am. Another answer is that smaller things *never* compose anything bigger. There are no composite objects, but only mereological simples. That implies that *I* am a mereological simple--either that, or I don't exist at all.

Most of us, I think, will not want to say either of those things. We'll say that whether smaller things compose something bigger depends on what they're like and how they're arranged and situated. Some smaller things compose bigger things, and others don't. There are some composite objects, if you like, but there are not arbitrary, gerrymandered ones. That is, we'll want to give an "intermediate" answer to the special composition question. We will say that things compose something just when they are *unified* in some way. But it's very hard to give any plausible account of what sort of unity it is that makes things compose something bigger.

I claim that if there are any composite objects, there are organisms. The particles that make up a live cat are unified if any particles are. A live cat is the very opposite of an arbitrary or gerrymandered object. If you don't believe there are organisms, you might as well say there are no composite objects at all. So I feel confident that there are animals if there are any composite objects. I'm a lot less confident about the existence of any of the rival candidates for being me: undetached heads, mere hunks of matter, or things that persist by virtue of psychological continuity. So I think there is a reason to say that we are animals, and no reason to say that we are anything other than animals--except maybe mereological simples. That's not a very good answer to the rival-candidates problem, but at least it's an answer.³

Zimmerman also mentions the *vagueness problem*. His version of it says that because animals have vague boundaries, there are vastly many animal-like "hunks of matter" wherever we say there is an animal. Moreover, those hunks are the only candidates for being you or me. Each hunk, he says, would be conscious if any is. But they can't all be conscious. The conclusion seems to be that no material thing is conscious, in which case

we are not material things at all, and therefore not animals.

This too is a troubling objection. Zimmerman is right to say that I want to deny the existence of all those hunks. (I also doubt premise 4 of his argument: if there really were all those hunks, I suppose they would all be conscious.) I think there is just one animal-candidate there, with fuzzy boundaries: there are particles at its periphery that are neither definitely parts of it nor definitely not parts of it. The best account of this that I've seen is in §17 of van Inwagen's *Material Beings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). I am aware that this is an unfashionable position--it is at least as unfashionable as the sparse ontology of material objects. But the vagueness objection is a hard one to answer, and the other answers don't look any better to me. Nor is it clear that the objection is worse for the view that we are animals than it is for any other account of what we are. (I don't consider the view that it is indeterminate or unknowable what we are to be an account of what we are.) The only exception--the only view that is immune to the vagueness problem--is that we are mereological simples, presumably immaterial ones. But that view raises troubles at least as bad as those facing my own proposal.

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³ I say more about this in *What Are We?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 215-36.

RESPONSE TO ERIC OLSON

Lynne Rudder Baker

I was taken aback (to say the least) when Eric said, “Lynne often misdescribes her own view,” and then accused me of making a simple logical error. These are such serious charges that I feel that I must try to make my view clearer. (Otherwise, I wouldn’t go into the technical detail that follows.)

The technical apparatus of my Constitution View contains a well-defined distinction between ‘having a property nonderivatively’ and ‘having a property derivatively’. Roughly, (omitting reference to times), x has F *nonderivatively* iff x ’s having F does not depend on x ’s constitution relations, and x has F *derivatively* iff x ’s having F depends on x ’s having constitution relations with something that has F nonderivatively. Now call the distinction between having a property nonderivatively and having it derivatively the ‘Key Distinction’.

My thesis is this: x has F iff x has F nonderivatively or x has F derivatively. The Key Distinction shows how some F s have their persistence conditions in virtue of being F s and other F s do not. If F is a primary-kind property, then nonderivative F s have their persistence conditions in virtue of being an F ; derivative F s do not. My body is an animal nonderivatively and has its persistence conditions in virtue of being an animal; I am an animal derivatively and do not have my persistence conditions in virtue of being an animal.

One more technical point: not all properties may be had derivatively. Several classes of properties are excluded from being had derivatively. One of them is the class of properties expressed in English by ‘constitutes’ or ‘is identical with.’ Other excluded properties are those rooted outside the time that they are had, such as what is denoted by ‘starting out as an embryo’. Such properties are not shared; they are either had nonderivatively or not at all.

Application of the Key Distinction to Eric’s criticisms rescues me from each of them. To wit:

Eric formulates a valid argument form:

- (A) I am an F
 Everything that is an F is a G
 So, I am a G

and he offers an instance of it as a counterexample to my view:

- (1) I am an animal
 Every animal started out as an embryo
 So, I started out as an embryo.

I deny the conclusion of (1), but (1) is a problem for me only if the premises are true. Are they? The first premise is true: Since I'm an animal derivatively, I'm an animal.

But the second premise is false: Only nonderivative animals—not *all* animals—started out as embryos. (Recall that anything that started out as an embryo, started out as an embryo nonderivatively.) So, given the Key Distinction, (1) is unsound because it has a false premise.

However, we can make the second premise true:

- (2) I am an animal
 Everything that is an animal nonderivatively started out as an embryo.
 So, I started out as an embryo.

Given the Key Distinction, the second premise of (2) is true. But in that case, (2) is invalid and hence not an instance of the original argument form (A).

So, either: the second premise is false (as in (1)) or the argument is invalid and not an instance of (A) (as in (2)). Either way, the valid argument form (A) provides no counterexample to me, nor did I misdescribe my own view.

Application of the Key Distinction also (a) defuses Eric's worry about 'separate existence'; (b) defeats Eric's claim that if x constitutes y at t, then x and y are

numerically different; (c) answers Eric's question: If I am not identical to this organism, how do I know which one (the person or the organism) I am?

In short: There is a single thread of misunderstanding that runs through Eric's remarks. On my view, identity is necessary; however, if *x* and *y* are *nonidentical*, *x* and *y* may be related in either of two time-indexed ways: (i) by being constitutionally related at *t*, and (ii) by having separate existence at *t*. The different ways of being nonidentical embody the Key Distinction. There's no mystery here since the Key Distinction, as well as '*x* constitutes *y* at *t*' and '*x* and *y* have separate existence at *t*', are all explicitly defined in familiar terms.

Eric never mentions the Key Distinction. It's not that he argues that there's something wrong with the distinction or that it can't do the work that I propose for it; he simply doesn't acknowledge it—although it takes up a whole section of a chapter of *Persons and Bodies*.

As to whether or not I have misunderstood Eric's own view, I certainly understand that he thinks that there are persons. But on his view, being a person is no more fundamental to what we are than is being a fancier of fast cars. On his view, there is no *ontological* distinction between us and earthworms. His approach to metaphysics tells us nothing about what is distinctive about us. By contrast, I think that metaphysics should tell us about what is fundamental to our being the kind of thing that we are (as opposed to earthworms), and about what is significant about us.

By the way, it is most assuredly *not* my view that "*all* value...carries ontological significance" or that "any kind...that's distinctive or important to us in any way has to be a kind that's *ontologically* significant."

I'll not remark further on Big-Tent Metaphysics. I knew that it would not appeal to Eric, but I hope that it does appeal to some of you.

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