Mariella Sypa

Professor Jaworski

Debate Paper: Animalism

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**Animalism**

Animalism states that we are human animals, members of the primate species Homo sapiens. One argument for animalism says that I am the one and only individual who has feature *F*; an animal has feature *F*; therefore, I am that animal. For example: (1) I am the only individual who is typing these words now; (2) a human animal is typing these words now; therefore, I am that human animal. I believe that animalism is true.

The two premises of the argument for animalism are defended empirically, which means that it can be easily observed that they are true. It can be proven using empirical evidence that I am typing these words right now, and that I am the only one individual that is typing these words right now. Premise (1) must be true because it can be defended using empirical evidence. It is also an empirical matter of fact that a human animal that is typing these words right now because an animal is using its body parts to hit the keyboard and type out the words. Premise (2) must also be true because it can be defended using empirical evidence. Since premise (1) and (2) are true, the conclusion must also be true: I am that human animal.

Critics of animalism attack the animalistic implication that we can exist without mental states. Critics say that in order for me to remain the same person over time, there must be some continuity between my psychological states. Critics defend their belief by using the psychological-continuity theory of personal identity, which says that in order to be the same person over time one must maintain psychological continuity over time. There is empirical evidence that shows that psychological capacities are linked with the cerebral hemispheres of the human brain. For example, if Person X and Person Y both exist at the same time and Person X’s cerebral hemispheres were transplanted into Person Y, then Person Y would now have the mental capacities of Person X. Critics of animalism would say that (I) Person A’s beliefs, desires, preferences, memories, and other mental states would go wherever the cerebral hemispheres were transplanted. (II) This can be best explained by claiming that Person X exists over time because of the continuity of his psychological states. Therefore, Person X exists over time, even in Person Y’s body, because of the continuity of his psychological states. It is conceivable that the original body of Person X can still function after the transplant because he has a functioning brainstem, which would allow him to perform basic activities. However, the original body of Person X would not be capable of having beliefs and desires, forming memories, having conscious experiences, and other mental states. These mental capacities would go with the cerebral hemispheres and, therefore, be attached to Person Y. According to critics of animalism, the psychological continuity of Person X’s mental states are what makes him the same person. This is why Person X can exist over time, even in Person Y’s body. Critics of animalism would then say that Person X is no longer in the body of Person X. Critics of animalism claim that Person X would believe that he is Person X, even while he occupying Person Y’s body. They claim that this is true because Person X still has his memories, experience, and other mental states. If this is not the case, then, according to critics of animalism, Person X is either an empty-headed animal to which his cerebral hemispheres were originally attached to or Person X no longer exists. However, both of these claims don’t make sense because it is evident that Person X has not ceased to exist, nor is he now an empty-headed animal, because his thoughts, memories, and personality characteristics are present in a body. Consider another example: If I, Mariella, enter a Matter-Energy-Matter Converter (MEM Converter), then my body would undergo extreme physical change. An MEM Converter is a machine that scans an object in its reaction chamber, records the positions and states of all the fundamental physical particles that compose it, then it destroys and disintegrates the original object, and finally, it builds an exact physical replica of the original object by reassembling fundamental physical particles according to the record it created when it scanned the object. For example, my body would reach 1 million degrees Celsius and ultimately be destroyed. Afterwards, in the machine, my body is reassembled and released from the machine. The outputted person is named, Mary. Mary has all of the same mental states; therefore, she has psychological continuity. The question at hand is whether or not Mary shares the same personal identity as Mariella. According to critics of animalism, person identity is dependent upon psychological continuity. Therefore, Mary would still be the same person as Mariella because, no matter what happen to her physical body, she maintained the same psychological continuity.

Critics of animalism argue that there is a difference between the persistence conditions of persons and the persistence conditions of animals. This claim can be defended by the philosophical principle known as indiscernibility of identicals. The principle of the indiscernibility of identicals would mean that animals and persons are not identical. The indiscernibility of identicals principle states that if x is identical to y, then x and y must have all the same properties. If x differs from y, then x and y are distinct. This argument against animalism attempts to show that persons and animals have different persistence conditions, thereby making the two distinct. Animalism object to this argument by proving that persons are animals.

Animalists would object to the transplant intuition claim by rejecting premise (a), claiming that Person X would remain the same animal after the cerebral hemisphere transplant. Person X would merely be incapacitated, similar to when a person has a limb removed and becomes incapacitated in a different way. Animalism rejects the psychological continuity theory by saying that our identity over time depends on whether or not we’re the same animal over time. Animalists reject this theory because they support biological continuity, which claims that I exist if and only if the life of this animal continues. Animalists would object to the MEM converter example by saying that Mariella and Mary are not the same person. Mariella was a human being and no human is capable of surviving the MEM conversion process. Therefore, Mariella could not have survived the MEM conversion. Therefore, since Mariella was not able to survive the MEM conversion, the output, Mary, is not identical to Mariella. Animalists reinforce this argument using biological continuity. Mariella was not biologically continuous after undergoing the MEM conversion. Since animalists claim that personal identity is dependent upon biological continuity, Mary is not Mariella.

Animalism also claims that the life of an animal can continue without psychological continuity, and even without any psychological capacities at all. Therefore, psychological continuity is irrelevant to my continued existence. There are many examples that support biological continuity, such as brain-damaged adult humans. A human does not stop being the same human after they suffer psychological discontinuity from brain damage. A brain injury can cause memory loss or amnesia, which would make the person no longer psychologically continuous with himself from before the injury. However, even though the person is no longer psychologically continuous, he is still the same person as before the injury due to biological continuity. Therefore, we do not exist over time because of psychological continuity, but because of biological continuity.

Animalists also argue that the claims that we have psychological persistence conditions have absurd consequences, such as the fission problem. Fission cases involve the possibility of one individual, Person A, with mental states M1, M2, …, Mn becoming psychologically continuous with two individuals, Person B and Person C, by transplanting one of Person A’s cerebral hemispheres into each of those individuals. Person A’s cerebral hemispheres would have to be functionally symmetrical in order for them to have the same psychological capacities. Once each cerebral hemisphere is transplanted into the body of person B and C both bodies, according to the psychological continuity theory, become psychologically continuous with Person A. If this scenario is possible, then personal identity over time cannot be dependent upon psychological continuity. Three different things cannot be identical to each other. Person A cannot be identical to both Person B and C because one thing cannot be identical to two. Therefore, one of the following situations must be the case: either (I) Person A is the individual with body B and not the individual with body C, (II) Person A is the individual with body B and not the individual with body C, or (III) Person A is neither of those individuals. If either (I), (II), or (III) is the case, then personal identity is not dependent on psychological consistency, and the psychological-continuity theory of personal identity is false.

In case (I), Person A is psychologically continuous with the individual with body B. However, Person A is not identical to Person B. Therefore, Person A’s identity over time cannot be due to psychological continuity over time because if it were, then that would mean that Person A and the individual with body B would have to be identical, since the two of them are psychologically continuous. Person A cannot be identical to the individual with body B just because they are psychologically Person A and Person B do not share the same properties because they have different physical properties and as stated by the indiscernibility of identical, if x is identical to y, then x and y must have all the same properties. The same theory applies to case (II): Person A is not identical to the individual with body C, even though Person A is psychologically continuous with that individual, because they are not identical. Case (III) says that there are two things with which Person A is psychologically continuous with, but not identical to. In all three of these cases, Person A is not identical with something he is psychologically continuous with. Therefore, the psychological continuity theory of personal identity must be false. Identity over time cannot consist simply in psychological continuity because psychological continuity is not capable of fully describing or explaining personal identity over time. The objections critics of animalism have were successfully refuted. Therefore, the original argument for animalism must remain true.

Animalism is true because the argument for it is valid and sound. The objections against animalism, which support the psychological-continuity theory of personal identity, are refutable by addressing the fission problem. The fission problem occurs from cases that support psychological persistence conditions. Animalism has been proven to be true since the main objection to animalism has been refuted and the argument for animalism has been proven to be valid and sound.