

8

Headhunters

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Advocates of the view known as “animalism” make the following straightforward claim: we are animals. This claim will strike some as hardly worth asserting, let alone defending. But since most contemporary theorists of personal identity still deny animalism, a defense is required after all.

8.1. The Thinking Animal Argument

On its intended reading, the “are” in “we are animals” does not reflect the “is” of non-identical constitution. Nor, on this view, are we animals in the sense of being embodied in animals, or sharing parts or stages with animals. Rather, the “are” in “we are animals” is typically taken to reflect the “is” of numerical identity.¹ The “we” picks out human persons such as you (the reader) and me (the author). And “human animals” refers to biological organisms of the species *Homo sapiens*.² Each of us—the walking, talking, thinking entities we are—just is a human animal. So says the animalist.³

The standard argument for this view is variously referred to as the “thinking animal argument,” the “too many minds objection,” the “two lives objection,” “too many thinkers problem,” and probably several things besides.⁴ It was first developed by Michael

¹ I use “typically” advisedly here. Olson (2015) has recently argued that it would risk less confusion if the “are” in the animalist’s claim were read as the ordinary copula—as reflecting the “is” of predication.

² For the purpose of this discussion, I will use “animal” and “organism” interchangeably, though I have come to believe that which of these concepts the animalist appeals to in formulating this claim has significant downstream implications.

³ The founding advocates of this view include Ayers (1991), Carter (1989), Olson (1997), Snowdon (1990), Wiggins (1980, 2001), and van Inwagen (1990). Other noteworthy proponents include DeGrazia (2005), Hershenov (2005), Mackie (1999), and Merricks (2001). A more synoptic (if already somewhat outdated) overview is given in Blatti 2014.

⁴ Respectively, Olson 1997, 2003; Shoemaker 1999; Campbell 2006; Parfit 2012 (also Chapter 2, this volume). How one characterizes the line of reasoning depends principally on one’s antecedent disposition toward its conclusion.

Ayers, William Carter, and Paul Snowdon, and later sharpened and popularized by Eric Olson.⁵ Here it is:

- (P1) There is a human animal currently located where you are.
- (P2) The human animal currently located where you are is thinking.
- (P3) You are the thinking being currently located where you are.
- (C) Therefore, the human animal currently located where you are is you.

While none of the premises is incontestable, nor is any of them easily denied. Except perhaps for far-reaching metaphysical reasons (e.g. an antecedent commitment to idealism), few would deny the very existence of animals, nor the fact that perfectly good specimens of the species *Homo sapiens* can be found wherever each of us happens to be. So (P1) looks safe.

Concerning (P2), since it would be odd to deny that human animals think while accepting that many nonhuman animals do, and since we can assume that the human animal sitting in your chair is not atypical of its kind, whatever reasons one has for accepting that various nonhuman animals think apply equally to the human animal sitting in your chair.⁶ There are those who, in various ways, deny that *any* animal—be it human or not—can think (e.g. Descartes, Shoemaker). But their positions either strain empirical credibility or depend on fairly sophisticated metaphysical machinery (or both). At first glance, anyway, (P2) is much easier to accept.

(P3) is also difficult to resist, since rejecting it would seem to require positing the existence of a thinking being other than yourself that is located where you are. For if (P1) and (P2) are true, and if it is true that you exist and are thinking, then denying (P3) results in the implication that you are but one of (at least) two thinkers thinking your thoughts. Such a view would face a host of difficult questions: practical questions (e.g. which of these beings owns the clothes on your back?), epistemic questions (how do you determine which of these beings you are?), linguistic questions (to which of these beings do instances of the first-person pronoun refer?), ontological questions (what is the relationship between you and the qualitatively identical being with which you are associated?), and so on. These challenges have not passed unnoticed, and serious attempts have been made to address them. But, the animalist says, the trouble can be avoided from the start simply by conceding the truth of (P3).

In sum then, the questions and problems awaiting one who rejects any of (P1) through (P3)—though not necessarily unanswerable or insurmountable—are considerable. So animalism has at least this much going for it.

⁵ Respectively, Snowdon 1990: 91; Carter 1988; Ayers 1991, vol. 2: 283; Olson 1997: 106–9; 2003: 325–30; 2007: 29–39. With some slight modifications, the following presentation of this argument rehearses expositions found, first, in Olson 2003 and 2007 and, subsequently, in Blatti 2014.

⁶ Note that, here and throughout, terms like “thinking,” “cognitive,” and “affective” are used to refer broadly and generically to the wide array of psychological events, states, activities, and capacities exhibited by minded creatures: knowing, feeling, believing, experiencing, imagining, suspecting, calculating, guessing, inferring, hypothesizing, reflecting, wondering, understanding, etc.

8.2. The Thinking Parts Problem

Of course, animalism's critics have not just folded their tents and slunk off home. Even notwithstanding the host of positive arguments in support of competing views, there has been much discussion in recent years about the thinking animal argument and what it does or does not show, with a host of philosophers weighing in with alternative theories and explanations.⁷

The response on which I shall concentrate here is typically called the "thinking parts problem."⁸ This rejoinder to the thinking animal argument threatens animalism with a line of reasoning that is structurally analogous to the one followed in that argument. In essence, the objection registers the fact that (P1) and (P2) can be replaced with parallel claims concerning other thinking parts. For example:

(P1)' There is a human head currently located where you are.

(P2)' The human head currently located where you are is thinking.

To these parallel claims, however, this objection does not add (P3) and draw the inference that you are your head. The problem here involves not one thinking *part*, but thinking *parts* (plural). Moreover, the critic aims to challenge animalism's identity claim—reflected in (C)—not to propose an alternative to that claim.

Instead, what the critic does is to recall the reasons that made (P3) so difficult to reject in the first place: all the ontological, epistemic, linguistic, and practical questions that would need to be answered if (P3) were false. Then she turns the knife by registering all of an animal's proper parts to which thinking is plausibly attributed: besides the head, the brain; the head plus the neck; the animal from the waist up; the whole animal save for the right leg (the right-leg complement); the whole animal save for the left hand (the left-hand complement); the whole animal save for the left hand and one atom in its spleen; the whole animal save for the left hand and a different atom in its spleen; and on and on. The roster of an animal's proper parts plausibly credited with thinking is (it seems) infinitely long. Besides (P1)' and (P2)', analogues of (P1) and (P2) could be formulated for all of these parts:

(P1)'' There is a brain currently located where you are.

(P2)'' The brain currently located where you are is thinking.

(P1)''' There is an upper half of a human animal currently located where you are.

(P2)''' The upper half of a human animal currently located where you are is thinking.

(P1)'''' There is a right-leg complement currently located where you are.

(P2)'''' The right-leg complement currently located where you are is thinking.

⁷ See, e.g., Baker 2000, Johnston 2007, McMahan 2002, Noonan 2010, and Shoemaker 1999.

⁸ The initial presentation of this objection is due to Olson (2007: 215–19). In this case, no one quibbles about the name since anti-animalists and animalists alike recognize it as a formidable challenge.

- (P1)'''' There is a left-hand complement currently located where you are.
 (P2)'''' The left-hand complement currently located where you are is thinking.
 Etc.

And since each of these proper parts thinks the same thoughts as the whole animal—including, notably, the mistaken belief that it *is* the animal—nothing appears to entitle the animalist to single out the whole animal, rather than any one of these parts, as *you*. This is the thinking parts problem.

Now, let us assume for a moment that (P1)' and (P2)' (and their cognate claims) are true and that the thinking parts problem succeeds in undermining the thinking animal argument. Assuming this to be the case, what exactly would this problem show? Interestingly, it would *not* show that we are not animals. What it would establish, in other words, is *not* that (C) is false. For even the critic must concede that nothing in the thinking parts problem rules out the possibility that the thinking being you are is, in fact, the whole animal. Rather, what the problem does is to reveal how difficult it is for us to *know* that this is more than *merely* possible—how difficult it is, in other words, for us to *know* that we *are* animals. Given (P1)' and (P2)', as Olson puts it, “for all you know, you might be your head.” Likewise, given (P1)'' and (P2)'', for all you know, you might be your brain. And so on, for each of the other pairs of possibilities. The thinking parts problem, then, should be understood as an epistemological problem—a skeptical question that animalism has thus far failed to answer, i.e. “Why suppose, then, that you are an animal, rather than a head or a brain or some other thinking part of an animal?”⁹

But *are* (P1)' and (P2)' (and their cognate claims) true?¹⁰ While (P1)' looks fairly uncontroversial, even animalism's critics should concede that (P2)' is a peculiar claim. After all, it is almost always the whole human person whom we credit with the exercise of our cognitive and affective capacities. Rarely, if ever, does one say that one's *head* thinks, or that her *brain* knows, let alone that his *left-hand complement* feels. Rather, we say that *she* decides, that *he* experiences, that *we* believe, etc. Of course, linguistic awkwardness and counter-intuitiveness hardly amount to conclusive evidence of a proposition's falsity, so (P2)' cannot be dismissed solely on this basis. Still, it is a datum that should be registered. In the final analysis, there may be sufficient reason to discount the strangeness of attributing cognition to proper parts of ourselves. But at the outset at least, the burden rests with animalism's critic to supply this reason: to say that the animalist does not have a good reason for not attributing thinking to an animal's proper parts is not to say that there is good reason to do so. In other words, the mere possibility that (P2)' *could* be true is not enough to motivate the skeptical question raised by the

⁹ Ibid.: 216.

¹⁰ Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, I will treat “(P1)” as referring equally to (P1)' and (*mutatis mutandis*) to its cognate claims, (P1)'', (P1)''', (P1)''''', etc. Likewise, “(P2)” will be treated as referring equally to (P2)' and (*mutatis mutandis*) to its cognate claims, (P2)'', (P2)''', (P2)''''', etc.

thinking parts problem. And in the absence of such motivation, the force of the objection diminishes.

At least two rationales for (P2)' suggest themselves. According to the first, thinking is just what brains do. Most, if not all of our internal organs have some function or other: the heart's function is to circulate blood throughout the body; the function of the kidneys is to remove waste material from the blood and to regulate fluid levels in the body; the function of the lungs is to facilitate bodily respiration by importing oxygen into the bloodstream and by exporting carbon dioxide from the bloodstream; and so on. So too, this line of argument goes, for the brain: the mental function of the brain is to think, i.e. to know, to feel, to believe, to experience, to imagine, to suspect, to calculate, to guess, to infer, to hypothesize, to reflect, to wonder, to understand, etc. It follows, this line of argument continues, that thinking is correctly attributed to all those proper parts of a human animal that include the brain: the undetached head, the brain alone, the animal's upper half, the animal's right-leg complement, the animal's left-leg complement, etc. Call this the "brain function rationale."

A second reason that (P2)' may seem plausible is that philosophers' fantastical thought experiments and science fiction tell us that if your head were detached from the rest of your body and artificially supported, it would be capable of thinking on its own. Likewise if your head-complement (i.e. all of the parts of your body from the neck down) were gradually pared away, the remaining head could—with the aid of supporting technologies—remain capable of thinking throughout. Since neither detaching your head from your body nor paring away your head-complement could be responsible for *imparting* cognitive capacities to this part, the conclusion that your head is thinking even while it is attached seems difficult to resist. *Mutatis mutandis* for a human animal's brain, its upper half, its right-leg complement, its left-leg complement, etc. Call this the "artificially-sustained-head rationale."

Given the *prima facie* case for the claims on which it relies, and given what it would show if successful, how much should the thinking parts problem worry the animalist? For his part, Olson is very worried indeed. While, he says, "animalists need to solve [it]," he concedes both that the skeptical question lacks an obvious answer and that, if it cannot be answered, "there will be no reason to accept animalism."¹¹ And in Chapter 2 in this volume, Derek Parfit agrees with this assessment. But whereas Olson remains fairly sanguine about finding a solution to the thinking parts problem, Parfit is persuaded that this objection is decisive: a knockdown refutation of animalism. In fact, on his view, the problem names its own solution. According to his "thinking parts solution" to the thinking parts problem, we are not animals, but proper parts of animals. Specifically, each of us is the smallest proper part of our animal that thinks nonderivatively—as opposed to all of the proper parts (e.g. head, upper half, right-leg complement) that think only derivatively, in virtue of having a smaller part that thinks. Now,

¹¹ Olson (2007: 216). Olson also asserts both that "a solution is not beyond hope" and eventually concludes that the situation "is at least as bad for its main rivals" (ibid.: 219).

whatever the prospects of his solution—the “embodied part view”—what I wish to emphasize here is that, according to Parfit, *the main reason* to prefer his view is that it “is the only view on which the [thinking parts problem] disappears.”¹² So, by the lights of animalists and anti-animalists alike, the stakes are very high indeed.

With the fortunes of their standard-bearer argument hanging in the balance, then, how should animalists respond to the thinking parts problem? Generally speaking, there are two sorts of approaches one might pursue. On the first, the animalist concedes the truth of (P1)’ and (P2)’ (at least provisionally, for the sake of argument) and answers the skeptical question directly. Doing so would require providing a principled reason for supposing that you are the entire thinking animal, rather than one or more of its thinking, proper parts. Alternatively, the animalist short-circuits the objection by challenging (P1)’ and/or (P2)’. If one or both of these claims can be shown to be false, then the thinking parts problem cannot even get off the ground.

In Sections 8.3 and 8.4, I will outline some ways that each of these two approaches might be pursued. If even one of them is successful, the chief argument for animalism will be insulated from (what is taken by some to be) its most formidable objection.

8.3. Answering the Thinking Parts Problem

Perhaps the most straightforward answer to the skeptical question raised by the thinking parts problem is also the most direct. You suppose that you are the whole thinking animal, rather than any of its thinking parts, because many of the properties you ascribe to yourself (the self-ascription of these properties being a cognitive act, an instance of thinking) are instantiated by the whole animal but not by its parts. You have two feet, as does the animal; your upper half does not have two feet. You are right-handed, as is the animal; your right-hand complement is not right-handed. Your brain weighs three pounds; you take yourself to weigh exactly as much as the animal weighs, which is much more than three pounds. You are the offspring of your mother and father, as is the animal; your head is not. And so on. What is more, the foregoing list exemplifies the array of properties that your thinking parts *wrongly* ascribe to themselves. Your left-arm complement falsely believes itself to have ten fingers; your undetached head falsely believes itself to be an accomplished guitarist; your brain falsely believes itself to have green eyes; etc. In sum, even if (P1)’, (P2)’, and their cognates were true, none of the thinking, proper parts mentioned in these claims instantiates all of the properties that you do; and all of these parts will self-ascribe properties that they do not in fact instantiate. The whole human animal, by contrast, *does* instantiate all of the properties that you self-ascribe (when these self-ascriptions are true). This is not to say that you are infallible in the properties that you ascribe to yourself, but only that,

¹² Parfit, Chapter 2, this volume: p. 40. Parfit regards his embodied part view as the only view insulated from the thinking parts problem because he assumes that nothing larger than the smallest thinking part thinks except in a derivative sense.

when you err, it is not because only a thinking, proper part of the whole animal, rather than the whole animal, instantiates the self-ascribed property.

A similar point can be made concerning your sensory, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic experiences. Whereas all of these experiences are detected in some part of the whole animal, some of the tactile, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic experiences your proper, thinking parts have are detected in parts of the whole animal that are not included in themselves. Both the whole human animal and its upper half have the experience of having their legs crossed, for instance, but only the former has its legs crossed. Both the whole human animal and its brain have the experience of touching a rough surface, but only the former touches anything. And so on. In fact, there is no thinking, proper part of a whole animal that detects only the tactile, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic experiences it has in itself; in principle, any such part can detect at least some of these experiences in parts of the whole animal that are not parts of itself.

These, then, are two reasons for supposing that you are the thinking animal rather than any of its thinking parts. Yet neither of these reasons will, by themselves, worry the critic of animalism one bit. Indeed, the thinking parts problem does not question these facts—that the whole animal has two hands while the undetached head does not, that the whole animal has its legs crossed while the upper half does not, etc.—any more than it attempts to prove that you *are* your animal's undetached head, or your animal's upper half, etc. The thinking parts problem is an epistemic problem precisely because it concerns one's *evidence* for claiming to know (P2) in a way that rules out (P2)' and its cognates. The problem stems from the fact that nothing in your experience could supply the evidence needed to ground a claim to *know* that you are the thinking animal, rather than its undetached head, since all of the animal's thinking parts share exactly the same experiences you do. It is this equivalence between the phenomenal evidence for (P2) and the phenomenal evidence for (P2)' that threatens the animalist's claim to know (P2), and by extension, (C).

All of this is worth belaboring because doing so exposes some of the underlying assumptions embodied in skeptical challenges of this sort. Notably, we see how the skeptical challenge relies on a traditional approach in epistemology, according to which knowledge can be factored into a subjective component (e.g. the whole animal's belief that it has two hands) and an objective one (e.g. the truth that the whole animal does indeed have two hands). In recent years, however, this approach has undergone a series of withering attacks. Perhaps the most provocative and forcefully prosecuted of these comes from Tim Williamson, on whose view knowledge is a *sui generis*, factive mental state that cannot be analyzed further into component parts.¹³ Whereas the traditional approach draws a sharp distinction between knowledge and evidence—one's evidence for *p* is part of the analysis of one's knowledge that *p*—for Williamson, “knowledge, and only knowledge, constitutes evidence.”¹⁴

¹³ Williamson 2000: 185.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: ch. 9.

Now, it would take us too far afield to review the array of arguments and considerations that Williamson brings to bear in support of his “ $E = K$ thesis”. But one consequence of his “knowledge first” view should be registered: if his account of knowledge is correct, then what Williamson calls the “phenomenal conception of evidence” is false.¹⁵ According to this mainstay of many familiar skeptical scenarios, a subject’s phenomenal state just is her evidentiary state. In other words, two subjects who are in the same phenomenal state are in the same evidentiary state.

To see how all of this bears on the topic at hand, suppose that you are having the experience of thinking about your left toe and that, on this basis, you form the belief that the whole animal currently located where you are is thinking. Your undetached head is also having the experience of thinking about “its” left toe and, on this basis, it too forms the belief that the whole animal currently located where it is is thinking. The undetached head fails to know that the whole animal currently located where it is is thinking because this belief is based on the experience of thinking about “its” left toe, and that belief is false: your undetached head does not have a left toe. Yet your evidence for the belief that the whole animal currently located where you are is thinking is no different than your undetached head’s evidence. And given the phenomenal conception of evidence, it follows that you fail to know that the whole animal currently located where you are is thinking. But if the phenomenal conception of evidence is false because knowledge is factive, then this inference does not go through. It follows that the animalist’s claim to know (P2) in a way that rules out (P2)’ and its cognates is not threatened by the fact that the phenomenal evidence for these claims is identical. In other words, if Williamson’s account is correct, then the considerations raised at the outset of this section—(a) the properties you ascribe to yourself that are instantiated by the whole animal rather than its parts, and (b) the fact that the sensory, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic experiences that your proper, thinking parts have are detected in parts of the whole animal that are not parts of themselves—*do* in fact represent a direct answer to the thinking parts problem: such evidence *just is* the knowledge that you are the thinking animal rather than any of its thinking parts.

8.4. Short-Circuiting the Thinking Parts Problem

Instead of answering the skeptical question posed by the thinking parts problem, the animalist might attempt to cut it off at the knees by rejecting one or the other of its two key claims.

Reject (P1)’?

Let us begin with the first. Ought animalists try to short-circuit the problem by rejecting (P1)’ and its cognates? I think not. Certainly there are views out there that deny the existence (*sensu stricto*) of proper parts such as heads and hands. But most of these

¹⁵ Ibid.: 173–4.

views—including, for instance, so-called “blobjectivism”¹⁶ or mereological nihilism¹⁷—would rule out the existence of not only heads and right-hand complements, but also human animals themselves. And an approach that enables the animalist to reject (P1)’ only at the cost of having to reject (P1) is no help at all.

Possibly the strongest basis for rejecting (P1)’ would be to follow Peter van Inwagen (1990) in arguing that the only composite objects are living organisms. On this view, whereas the activities of the full set of simples together constitute a life and thus the simples compose an object (i.e. the human animal currently located where you are), the subset of simples located where your head is does *not* constitute a life. In contrast with the living organism sitting in your chair, your head—like Dion’s foot or Skywalker’s hand—is merely an “arbitrary undetached part” and thus does not exist.

But while this strategy *would* allow the animalist to draw a principled distinction between (P1)’ and (P1)—thereby establishing the requisite disanalogy between the thinking animal argument and the thinking parts problem—I believe animalists would do better not to respond in this way. If the thinking animal argument is to convince non-animalists, it should do so independently of an animalism-conducive ontology like van Inwagen’s. The existence of a human head located where you are looks to be as much of a Moorean fact as the existence of your hands and feet, not to mention the existence of your whole animal.

(P2)’ Proves Too Much

So, rather than (P1)’, let us instead explore some reasons why (P2)’ and its cognates ought to be rejected. First of all, (P2)’ may prove too much. Recall that the original rationale for (P2) appeals to what we know (or take ourselves to know, anyway) not about human animals, but about nonhuman animals, viz. that some of them are thinkers. Earlier I put the point like this: “since it would be odd to deny that human animals think while accepting that many nonhuman animals do, and since we can assume that the human animal sitting in your chair is not atypical of its kind, whatever reasons one has for accepting that various nonhuman animals think apply equally to the human animal sitting in your chair.” But if the skeptical question raised by the thinking parts problem is taken seriously, the epistemic status of this rationale for (P2) gets turned on its head (so to say). For if (P2)’ is true, then the skeptical question posed by the thinking parts problem applies equally to all nonhuman animals ordinarily credited with thinking. Once again, this point would *not* establish that Koko, for example, is not a gorilla, or that Lassie is not a dog, any more than it shows that you are not a human animal. But it *would* show that a parallel thinking animal argument—one concerning Koko the gorilla rather than you the human—could not substantiate a claim to know that Koko is one and the same thing as the gorilla located where she is. In other words, if we fail to know that you are a human animal because of the possible truth of (P2)’, then an equal degree of uncertainty plagues any claim to know that Koko is a gorilla

¹⁶ Horgan and Potrč 2000, 2008.

¹⁷ Unger 1979.

and Lassie is a dog. “Why suppose that Koko is a thinking animal,” we must imagine the critic of animalism also asking, “rather than its head, or its brain, or some other thinking part?” It follows that the critic of animalism cannot consistently doubt that each of us is a thinking animal while affirming that the likes of Koko and Lassie are thinking animals. And for some, this downstream implication of (P2)’ and its cognates may be reason enough not to endorse them in the first place.

(P2)’s Attribution Error

A more direct objection to (P2)’ is that it commits a kind of mistake—what we might call an “attribution error,” and what others have recently labeled the “mereological fallacy.”¹⁸ Precisely how to understand the nature of (P2)’s failure will occupy us shortly. But broadly speaking, the mistake consists in attributing to a part the exercise of capacities appropriately attributed only to the whole. This attribution error was identified as far back as Aristotle, who cautioned that:

to say that the soul is angry is as if one were to say that the soul weaves or builds. For it is surely better not to say that the soul pities, learns, or thinks, but that the human being does these things by virtue of his soul.¹⁹

In a similar vein, Wittgenstein writes that:

only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees, is blind; hears, is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.²⁰

Just as it is the centipede that walks and not its legs, and just as it is the owl that hears and not its ears, so too it is the human animal that thinks and not any of its parts.

Now, before proceeding any further, note that, even if it *is* a mistake to attribute cognitive and affective capacities to a proper part of a whole animal, nothing said thus far explains *why* it is a mistake to do so. This is important because, while I am sympathetic to the basic charge levied by Aristotle and Wittgenstein—(P2)’ is guilty of an attribution error, I believe—there are multiple possible explanations of what makes this attribution a *misattribution*. I do not endorse all of these explanations, and in fact it is not obvious that all of the explanations could be affirmed consistently. Certainly it is not the case that all of these explanations are available to the animalist at this stage of the dialectic. For instance, the context in *De Anima* in which the remark quoted above appears makes it clear that Aristotle would appeal to his hylomorphism to explain the nature of (P2)’s attribution error. All things considered, maybe a hylomorphic

¹⁸ Bennett and Hacker 2003: ch. 3. For further discussion, see Bennett et al. 2007, Hacker 2007, 2013, Harré 2012, Smit and Hacker 2014.

¹⁹ *De Anima* I 4 408^b 11–15.

²⁰ Wittgenstein 1953, §281. Hacker and colleagues (e.g. Bennett and Hacker 2003: 71; Hacker 2007: 131–2; Hacker and Smit 2014: 1077–8) frequently reference both of these passages along with an article by Anthony Kenny (1971). Indeed, they regard their mereological fallacy as an adaptation of what they label “Aristotle’s Principle” and of what Kenny previously labeled the “homunculus fallacy.”

approach is the best way for an animalist to understand the nature of human animals.²¹ But even if it were, the animalist's rejoinder to the principal objection to the principal argument for (C) cannot rely on a substantive theory of the relationship between the human animal's mind and its body.

In the current context, there are at least two tenable explanations of the impropriety of attributing cognitive and affective capacities to proper parts of human animals. For Wittgenstein and his recent defenders, the nature of the mistake is conceptual confusion. According to Hacker et al., in ascribing mental properties to a proper part, one effectively subsumes under the concept *human animal* something that does not fall under that concept. An undetached human head, for instance, is not a human animal, but merely an animal part. And its concept, *human head*, is not one of whose instances it makes any sense to apply such psychological predicates as "is thinking" or, for that matter, "is not thinking." Human heads do not know, believe, decide, interpret, hypothesize, calculate, suspect, etc.; human animals do these things. The reason that we have no coherent conception of what it would be for a part of an animal to engage in such activities is that the criteria for their ascription lie in the behavior of a whole animal—behavior that is thoughtful or thoughtless, attentive or inattentive, intentional or unintentional, reflective or unreflective, considerate or inconsiderate, etc.—and animal parts do not behave. An undetached head does not act in ways that license (or fail to license) the ascription of predicates like "is attentive" or "is thoughtless"; only the whole animal of which the head is a part engages in behavior of this sort. In this way, the very expression "thinking parts" reveals its own confusion.

Hacker et al. trace the source of this mistake to "an unthinking adherence to a mutant form of Cartesianism. It was a characteristic feature of Cartesian dualism to ascribe psychological predicates to the mind, and only derivatively to the human being."²² Even though contemporary neuroscientists and philosophers of psychology have since rejected the dualist outlook adopted by their predecessors, according to Hacker et al., these scientists and theorists nevertheless persist in unreflectively ascribing to the brain the predicates which dualists previously ascribed to the immaterial mind. In so doing, they purport to "explain human perceptual and cognitive capacities and their exercise by reference to the brain's exercise of *its* cognitive and perceptual capacities."²³

Contra Bennett and Hacker, animalism's critic might respond that (P2)'s talk of an undetached head thinking is just a figure of speech—an innocuous shorthand for describing psychological operations more precisely credited to the organism whose head it is. And indeed, whether *façons de parler* of this type are harmless or whether they reflect one's credulous acceptance of "mutant Cartesianism" is one of the main questions on which subsequent debate over Bennett and Hacker's book has focused.²⁴ But however that debate goes, it will not help the critic of animalism to qualify the

²¹ See Hershenov 2008 and especially Toner 2011.

²² Bennett and Hacker 2003: 72.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See especially Bennett et al. 2007; also Sytsma 2010.

ascription of thinking to an undetached head as merely metaphorical or metonymical. First of all, if (P2)' is to represent a genuine analogue to (P2), it must purport to be true in just the way that (P2) purports to be, viz. literally. Second, recall that the skeptical question raised by the thinking parts problem is motivated (and just to that extent, worrisome for the animalist) only if there is sufficient reason to countenance (P2)'. Two rationales for this claim were suggested, and one of these—the brain function rationale, according to which thinking is the brain's function (just as circulating blood is the heart's function, etc.)—cannot consistently be maintained if, strictly speaking, thinking is *not* the brain's function. In other words, a nonliteral understanding of attributing thinking to proper parts of the human animal undercuts half the case for taking the thinking parts problem seriously in the first place. If this is the preferred interpretation of (P2)', so much the better for the thinking animal argument.

Even so, Hacker et al.'s diagnosis of (P2)'s attribution error leans heavily on the thought (familiar from the *Philosophical Investigations*) that philosophers are led into conceptual confusion by their tendency to misconstrue various uses of language. Many of today's philosophers will be dubious of this methodology, particularly Wittgenstein's notion of a "criterion." So let us briefly consider a non-Wittgensteinian (though certainly complementary) diagnosis of the error of which (P2)' is guilty. I cannot fully defend this suggestion here, but perhaps a sketch will suffice.

The impetus behind this alternative diagnosis lies in the observation that attributions of thinking are not made in a vacuum or in isolation, but are instead embedded in practices of agential understanding and moral concern. Typically it is in our attempts to describe, explain, praise, and blame another being's actions that we credit it with various cognitive and affective capacities and their exercise. Doing so helps us to see why (P2)' and its cognates are mistaken, i.e. because the only behavior eligible for agential understanding and moral concern is the behavior of the whole animal. It is mistaken to ascribe boredom, for instance, to a left-hand complement because it is not this part, but the whole human animal who twiddles her thumbs. It is incorrect to credit an undetached head with feeling thirsty when it is the whole human animal, not his head, who reaches out for a glass of water. It is wrong to attribute to a dog's brain the belief that the squirrel ran up the tree, as it is the whole canine animal who stands barking at the base of that tree. So too, it is erroneous to assign blame to a human animal's upper half on account of impetuous behavior, since it is the whole child who kicked the cat without cause. Such cases illustrate perfectly standard contexts in which attributions of thinking are made. And in these and similar contexts, it is not the proper parts, but the wholes of which they are constituents who act in ways suitable for description, interpretation, explanation, justification, rationalization; for praise and blame; for judgments concerning responsibility and culpability; for attitudes of approval and reproach; and so on. It is in these engagements with the whole being that we credit *it*—not its thinking parts—with various cognitive and affective capacities and their exercise. Likewise when it comes to one's own self-ascriptions and self-knowledge: just as understanding and judging the behavior of another involves ascribing cognitive and

affective capacities to the entire system responsible for that behavior, so it is for oneself.²⁵

This, then, is how the second diagnosis of (P2)'s attribution error helps to short-circuit the thinking parts problem: you know that you are the thinking animal, rather than any of its (allegedly thinking) proper parts, because such knowledge is conditioned by widespread practices of understanding human agency and assigning moral responsibility. These practices are also subject to skeptical doubt, I suppose. But in that case, far more than just the thinking animal argument would need to be reassessed in order to accommodate (P2)' and its cognates. And only one who is already in the grip of an anti-animalist theory would be tempted by that trade-off.

Rationale Autopsy

If (P2)' is false, then its supporting rationales must be flawed in some way. The brain function rationale errs, I believe, by misunderstanding the import of an admittedly correct observation. Clearly it is the case that most of our internal organs have certain roles to play in contributing to the vital functioning of our bodies. But from this it should not be inferred that each of these organs is the discrete site of the exercise of its particular function, as if in isolation from the rest of the body. Each internal organ plays the role it does only insofar as it operates in concert with the operations of the rest of the body's organs, not to mention its fluids, bones, soft tissue, etc. For this reason, it is not the heart *per se* that circulates blood, but the animal as a whole who does so by virtue of the proper functioning of its heart. Likewise, it is the whole animal who removes waste material from its blood and regulates its fluid levels thanks to the proper functioning of its kidneys; the whole animal who respire due to the proper functioning of its lungs, which import oxygen into the animal's bloodstream and which export carbon dioxide from the animal's bloodstream; and, crucially, the whole animal who thinks by virtue of the proper functioning of its brain.²⁶ At the very least, this way of understanding the integrated functionality of our internal organs is no less plausible than the one suggested in the brain function rationale. And yet it is an understanding that speaks not in favor, but against (P2)' and its cognate claims. So the force of the brain function rationale can be neutralized in this way.

The second rationale for (P2)' appealed to two fantastical cases in which it seemed appropriate to ascribe thinking to a head that was previously attached to a

²⁵ Admittedly, this alternative diagnosis does not depart radically from the Wittgensteinian one outlined above. The two analyses do differ in where they locate the mistake committed by (P2)' and its cognates. Whereas Hacker et al. characterize the mistake as conceptual confusion inspired by linguistic misuse, the alternative explanation is less doctrinaire: (P2)' simply misidentifies the being whose behavior is eligible for agential understanding and moral concern. Still, it is not inappropriate, I think, to construe these two accounts of (P2)'s attribution error as complementary; the alternative diagnosis simply has been scrubbed of its Wittgensteinian carbuncles.

²⁶ Further support for this line of thought comes from embodied approaches to the mind, according to which cognition is not simply equivalent to brain activity, but integrally relies on features and activities of the agent's entire physical body. There is a vast literature on embodied cognition, but see, e.g., Gallagher 2005.

head-complement and then subsequently separated and artificially sustained. According to this line of thought, since neither of the separation procedures envisioned could be responsible for causing the head to think, it must have been thinking all along, even while it was attached to the head-complement. Even taking these thought experiments at face value, I am inclined to think (for reasons that will now be obvious) that the “behavior” exhibited by an artificially sustained head is likely to depart too significantly from the norm to ground any strong conviction about whether we would ascribe cognitive and affective capacities to it.²⁷ Would we take ourselves to understand the behavior of an intelligent agent, a subject of moral concern? Possibly. But even if we did, there would be a decidedly stipulative dimension to any such attitude. We would have to establish, more or less by fiat, that, all things considered, it would be best to interpret the behavior of this otherwise alien being in ways approximating the ways we interpret one another’s behavior.

Yet even granting (for the sake of argument) that we would ascribe thinking to an artificially sustained head—even this is not enough to establish the truth of (P2)’. For while it may be true that the separation procedures do not *endow* the artificially sustained head with the cognitive capacities we ascribe to it, nevertheless those procedures *do* make it the case that the detached head *is* and the head-complement is *not* implicated in behaviors whose interpretation would involve such ascriptions. The most that the artificially-sustained-head rationale shows, in other words, is that something smaller than a complete animal may be properly credited with thinking. What it does not show is that this smaller thing is properly credited with thinking *while it is a proper part of the animal*. And given what we know about the conditions under which attributions of cognitive and affective capacities are made, this should come as no surprise.

Indeed, even apart from these flaws in the two rationales for (P2)’, in retrospect, there was something telling in the very fact that independent support for this claim was needed in the first place. The skeptical challenge that the thinking parts problem poses to the thinking animal argument trades on the analogy between (P2) and (P2)’. Perhaps we should have recognized that the disanalogy between these two claims lurks in the very fact that (P2) is credible on its face while (P2)’ is contrary to commonsense and requires argumentative support. By this I do not mean to suggest that (P2)’ is false for the reason that it must be shown to be true; obviously, not all truths are *prima facie* truths. I mean only that the plausibility of (P2) derives from our familiarity with associated practices that—we see now—are altogether *unassociated* with (P2)’, i.e. practices

²⁷ In point of fact, I believe that would-be thought experiments like this are far too underdescribed to ground any assessment whatsoever of the relevant counterfactual judgments and *ipso facto* any assessment of what support they may or may not lend to a claim like (P2)’. I do not pursue this line of criticism here because more philosophers employ thought experiments in this way than do not—including philosophers on both sides of the debate over animalism—and because the methodological discussion required to substantiate this stance would take us too far afield. Here, I simply commend the interested reader to the first chapter of Kathy Wilkes’s (1988) underappreciated book on the subject, as well as Williamson 2004 and 2007.

of understanding and judging (whole) human behavior by appeal to our cognitive and affective capacities (according to the non-Wittgensteinian diagnosis) and/or linguistic practices manifesting our concept of the human animal (according to the Wittgensteinian diagnosis).

Remnant Persons Problem

Notably, the considerations brought to bear in this section may harbor the resources needed to reply to another important objection facing animalists. Mark Johnston's "remnant persons problem" invites us to imagine removing the cerebrum of a fully developed human animal—call her Sally—and sustaining it artificially in a vat.²⁸ Sally's cerebrum, it seems, is not only capable of thinking but also psychologically identical with Sally herself. Animalists deny that the cerebrum—which Johnston calls a "remnant person"—is Sally, since a cerebrum is not a human animal. On the contrary, animalists say, Sally is the human vegetable left behind following the operation. But this response—which has struck many non-animalists as counter-intuitive and unappealing—is not Johnston's target. His aim, rather, is to force animalists to answer a related question: When in the course of the procedure described does the remnant person come into existence? The question is challenging because neither of the two answers appears to be open to the animalist. Claiming that the remnant person existed *prior* to the cerebrum's removal would require the animalist to say that two human persons existed all along: Sally, who became a cerebrum-less organism, and the remnant person, who became an envatted cerebrum. But claiming that the remnant person came into existence only *after* the procedure is equally problematic, not least because it carries the absurd implication that a person can be created simply by cutting away sustaining human tissue.

In Chapter 7 in this volume, Olson argues at length that there is no convincing way for an animalist to defend either of these two answers to Johnston's question. But one possibility that Olson does not adequately explore is that there is no answer because there is no remnant person.²⁹ For if Sally's envatted cerebrum is not properly credited with thinking in the first place, then it is not a person. And if there is no remnant person, then there is no problem.

8.5. Conclusion

I have outlined (without fully exploring) several ways that an animalist might go about resisting the thinking parts problem without renouncing the thinking animal

²⁸ Johnston 2007: 45. See Chapters 2, 5, 7, and 9 in this volume, by Parfit, Johnston, Olson, and Madden respectively.

²⁹ I say "fully" because Olson does briefly consider a proposal—inspired by van Inwagen's (1990) answer to the special composition question—he calls "brain eliminativism." But whereas this view denies the existence of remnant people on the grounds that brains do not exist, my view denies the existence of remnant people on the grounds that brains do not think.

argument. We can think of the foregoing as a tactical exercise, the result of which is a menu of avenues open to the animalist to pursue further. I conclude by registering a brief point about strategy.

The fact that the thinking animal argument even appears susceptible to the thinking parts problem reflects, I believe, one reason why animalism's fortunes should not be tied exclusively to that argument in the first place. By this, I mean to suggest neither that the thinking parts problem succeeds in undermining the thinking animal argument, nor that the latter should no longer be considered the primary argument for animalism. I mean only that resting the case for animalism on an appeal to the exercise of our psychological faculties is—besides ironic—injudicious, seeing as it is not the animalist, but the *anti*-animalist who typically insists that these faculties are essential ingredients of our fundamental nature. Indeed, it is precisely our capacity for thought that animalists *deny* is essential to us. On the contrary, animalists say, each of us was once a *non*-thinking fetus, and each of us may yet become a *non*-thinking persistent-vegetative-state patient. Animalists may reply (roughly) that our sameness with these beings existing at other times is a consequence of our present status as human animals, and it is this status that the thinking animal argument establishes. The logic of that point cannot be denied. And yet, it remains peculiar that the line of argument that establishes the truth of our animal nature now could not be invoked to establish the same truth concerning these beings existing at other times.

This peculiarity is one reason why I have offered elsewhere a companion argument that substantiates animalism on altogether different grounds, viz. by showing how the case for (C) can be seen to piggyback on the credibility of evolutionary theory.³⁰ While this argument is no more immune from criticism than the thinking animal argument,³¹ if nothing else, perhaps it adds to the mounting evidence in support of animalism—to a victory through attrition, rather than in a single stroke. Nor are these arguments the only considerations that speak in favor of animalism as against alternative accounts of our fundamental nature.³² Nevertheless, they suggest that, whatever the fate of the thinking animal argument, maybe Olson overstates the dialectical state of affairs when he remarks that “there will be no reason to accept animalism” if the thinking parts problem cannot be answered. Either way, fortunately, there appears reason to believe that it can be.³³

³⁰ Blatti 2012.

³¹ See, for instance, Gillett 2013; Daly and Liggins 2013.

³² See, for instance, Snowdon 2014.

³³ A premature version of this chapter was presented at the Persons and Their Brains Conference, held at St. Anne's College, University of Oxford. A less premature (but still immature) version was presented more recently at the Immortality Project Capstone Conference, sponsored by the Templeton Foundation and held at the University of California, Riverside. Full maturity remains out of reach, but its pursuit was furthered by discussions with Andrew Bailey, Stephen Burwood, Peter Hacker, Eric Olson, Tim Roche, Paul Snowdon, Deb Tollefsen, Somogy Varga, and Eric Yang. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the support of a Templeton Foundation grant, which enabled some of my work on this project.

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