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The Lives of Human Animals

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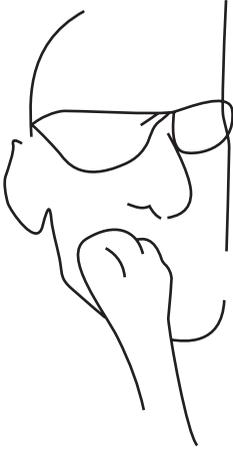
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MURRAY SPINDEL



Murray Spindel, who died of cancer on July 7, 1999, was a great friend to the University of Memphis and to the faculty members and students in the Philosophy Department who came to know him during the preceding two decades. Murray and his good friend Bert Bornblum, both Memphis businessmen, participated in their first philosophy courses in the department during the 1981-82 academic year. Murray and Bert took Hoke Robinson's course in nineteenth century philosophy that fall and Terry Horgan's course in contemporary philosophy of mind the following spring. Thereafter, they continued to take classes on a regular basis and became actively involved in the intellectual and social life of the department.

While taking Hoke's course, Murray endowed a gift to the University of Memphis (then Memphis State University) to be used by the Philosophy Department to fund an annual conference on varying philosophical topics, with the proceedings to be published as a supplement to *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (then edited by Nancy Simco). Since the first conference was held in the fall of 1982, the Spindel Philosophy Conference has become an internationally renowned event, and the Spindel Supplements are timely and important contributions to philosophy.

Splendid though they were, Murray's financial generosity to the department and tireless service in support of the College of Arts and Sciences and the University represented only one dimension of his friendship. Over the years, Murray and his wife, Chris, hosted many events in their home, including meetings of our undergraduate Philosophy Club, philosophical talks, informal Sunday afternoon conversations beside their swimming pool, and every year a dinner reception for attendees of the Spindel Conference. Especially those faculty who now qualify as department old-timers came to be good friends not only with Murray and Chris but also with their daughter Carol, her husband Tom, their son Alan, and his wife Karen.

The marvelous sketch above was drawn by Carol and reminds us that Murray is sorely missed but not forgotten. His legacy to philosophy lives on in the annual conferences and supplements that bear his name.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

STEPHAN BLATTI

The problem of personal identity is one of the most bewitching puzzles in all of philosophy. Consider how much each of us changes during our lifetimes. In so many ways—biologically, psychologically, socially, physically—you are today very different from the person you were last year or twenty years ago or on the day of your birth. And yet just one person has persisted through these changes. The first facet of the problem of personal identity focuses our attention on this question: *what exactly are the conditions under which beings like you and me persist through time and change?* Some changes are survived easily, while others are not. You can change your mind, for example, but not your brain (probably). What, then, must remain the case in order for us to survive from one moment to the next? And what sorts of changes could we undergo that would be sufficient to bring about our nonexistence? Closely related to these questions about our persistence is the second facet of the problem of personal identity: *what is our fundamental nature?* Are we material or immaterial? Organic or inorganic? Simple or composite? Substance, property, process, or event?

Until quite recently, most philosophers subscribed to the answers to these questions advocated by the seventeenth-century British philosopher, John Locke. Locke held that our fundamental nature is given by our status as self-conscious, rational agents (“persons”) and that the conditions under which we persist through time and change are thus to be accounted for in terms of psychological continuity.¹ Central to this view is a sharp distinction between the person and her animal body. Whereas a living organism, according to Locke, is a structurally complex material object whose functional organization is conducive to continued life, a person is a “thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the

¹ Such, anyway, is the view standardly attributed to Locke. In fact, I think the interpretations recently presented by Strawson (2011), Thiel (2011), and Ayers (1991) come closer to capturing the more nuanced view that Locke meant to advance. Cf. Gordon-Roth forthcoming.

same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking” (Locke 1975, II.xviii.9). Something is a person, in other words, not because of the material or immaterial substance in which it is grounded, but in virtue of the psychological capacities it exercises, namely self-consciousness and rationality. Further, whereas a human animal persists just in case “the same continued Life [is] communicated to different Particles of Matter, as they happen successively to be united to that organiz’d living Body” (II.xxvii.8), Locke holds that, when one “consider[s] what *Person* stands for,” one sees that its persistence consists in “the sameness of a rational Being.” He explains: “as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought”—“whether in the same or different Substances”—“so far reaches the Identity of that *Person*” (II.xxvii.9, 13). Thus the way was clear for Locke to assert that a person may continue to exist (e.g., following the resurrection or a “body swap”) even in the absence of the animal body she previously inhabited (II.xxvii.15).

While Locke’s view has undergone various refinements and reformulations in response to the challenges it faced over the centuries, his core commitments continue to enjoy widespread support amongst theorists of personal identity today. Whatever their differences, all contemporary Lockeanism agree that our fundamental nature is given by such psychological capacities as self-consciousness and rationality and that a psychological relation involving memory, beliefs, desires, dispositions, etc. is necessary and/or sufficient for persons to persist through time and change.²

But today’s Lockeanism face a powerful new challenge to the distinction underlying their core commitments. According to the view known as animalism, there is no distinction to be drawn between human persons and their animal bodies. You do not “have” a body in the sense that you are one thing and the animal located where you are is something else. Rather, on this view, human persons *just are* their animal bodies: the primate located where you are *is* you. Furthermore, animalists claim, we human animals persist through time and change under the same conditions as other biological organisms. Since psychological capacities are not essential to animals, and since the conditions of animal persistence (however exactly these may be understood) are not psychological in character, animalism stands in direct opposition to Lockeanism.³

² See, for instance, Baker 2000, 2002, 2007, forthcoming; Hudson 2001; Johnston 1987, 2007, forthcoming; Lewis 1976; McMahan 2002; Parfit 1984, 2012; and S. Shoemaker 1984, 1999, 2004, 2008, 2011, forthcoming.

³ See Blatti 2014 for a more detailed overview.

Though Aristotelian in spirit, animalism is a relative latecomer to the debate over personal identity, having been articulated and defended only within the past twenty-five years or so. During these first two and a half decades of work, advocates of the view sought mainly to specify and defend its central claims and to understand its relation to the Lockean opposition.⁴ While highly important work along these lines continues to be done,⁵ a second, overlapping wave of work on animalism seems now to be emerging. This new wave is beginning to broaden animalism's import beyond metaphysics and philosophy of mind into a diverse array of fields and topics, including ethics,⁶ philosophy of language,⁷ conjoined twinning,⁸ epistemology,⁹ evolutionary theory,¹⁰ philosophy of religion,¹¹ death,¹² and so on.

The guiding aim of the thirty-second annual Spindel Conference on "The Lives of Human Animals" (University of Memphis, September 26–28, 2013) was to spotlight and facilitate this second wave of work by providing a forum in which metaphysicians and philosophers of mind working on animalism were brought together with philosophers who are presently engaged in pertinent debates in other areas of philosophy. The fruits of this effort are contained in the pages that follow.

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⁴ Ayers 1991; Carter 1989, 1999; Mackie 1999a, 1999b; Olson 1997; Snowdon 1990, 1991, 1995; van Inwagen 1990; Wiggins 2001.

⁵ See, e.g., Bailey 2014; Hershenov forthcoming; Johansson 2007; Olson 2007; Toner 2011; Yang forthcoming.

⁶ E.g., DeGrazia 2005; Johansson forthcoming; D. Shoemaker 2009 forthcoming.

⁷ E.g., Noonan 1998, 2001, 2012; Olson 2002.

⁸ E.g., McMahan 2002; Liao 2006; Blatti 2007; Campbell and McMahan forthcoming.

⁹ E.g., Yang 2013.

¹⁰ E.g., Blatti 2012; Gillett 2013; Daly and Liggins 2014.

¹¹ E.g., Loose 2013; Tollefsen 2004.

¹² E.g., Belshaw 2011; Hershenov 2005; Olson 2004.

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