

Philosophy Workshop Essay Topic 9

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In this essay, a version of the animalism criterion of personal identity will be contrasted with three other criteria of personal identity. Those three criteria are versions of 1) the neo-Lockean criterion, 2) the brain criterion and 3) a simpler animalist criterion. An objection to each of these three criteria will be presented, and it will be argued that the version of the animalist criterion presented here is immune to each of those objections. The version of the animalist criterion to be defended will be called the *Complex Animalist Criterion*, and it is stated below:

CAC (complex animalist criterion): Person B now is identical to person A at an earlier time if and only if person B is the same human animal as person A, and in both cases, that human animal's brain is sufficiently well-developed, and functioning well enough, to permit that human animal to have a first-person perspective on the world.

The first alternative to CAC to be discussed is the *neo-Lockean criterion*, exemplified by Derek Parfit [Parfit, p. 207]:

NLC (neo-Lockean criterion): X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if X is psychologically continuous with Y, this continuity has the right kind of cause, and it has not taken a 'branching form'.

The NLC allows half-cerebral transplants. If half of Y's cerebrum is transplanted into X's empty head, and the other half of Y's cerebrum is destroyed, then the NLC says that person X is now identical to person Y. On the other hand, if the other half of Y's cerebrum is transplanted into Z's empty head, then this is a case of 'branching', so Y is NOT identical to X after all.

Consider this objection: if someone spirits away the other half of Y's cerebrum, then we will never know whether or not Y is identical to X. It will always be possible that the stolen cerebrum will be inserted into someone's empty head, resulting in branching. But whether or not Y is identical to X should depend

only on facts about Y and X, not on facts about some (possibly unknown) person Z. This objection to the NLC will be called the *irrelevance of third person facts*.

All versions of animalism make personal identity depend on numerical sameness of the human animal, and therefore rule out the possibility that the person receiving a brain transplant is identical to the donor. In the case described above, person Y cannot be identical to either X or Z since X and Z are numerically distinct human animals from Y. We don't have to trace the history of either cerebrum. We know that Y has ceased to exist as a person since the remaining human animal no longer has a brain which permits a first-person perspective.

Persons Y (and Z, if that transplant happens) will be monstrosities, created from the remains of two persons who ceased to exist when their cerebrums were destroyed, and portions of X's brain. Whether they are persons at all is open to debate. On any animalist criterion, they are certainly not identical to any of the original persons X, Y, or Z.

Since all versions of the animalist criterion escape the objection of the *irrelevance of third person facts*, so does the CAC.

The *brain criterion* may be formulated this way:

BC (*brain criterion*): Person B today is identical to person A at an earlier time if and only if B has enough of A's brain to be self-aware and capable of rational thought, and there is no one else now who is similarly related to A.

This criterion also permits half-brain transplants, ruling out branching, and therefore making identity of A and B dependent on facts about others (i.e., none of them are now in the same relation to A as B). So this criterion is also subject to the objection of the *irrelevance of third person facts*. There is, however, a further objection against all cases in which a brain transplant is supposed to transfer one person's identity to a different body.

The human brain and body mature together over nearly two decades, during which time the brain adapts to the nerve structure of the body, and vice-versa. As a result, the neural connections between brain and body, and within the brain itself, are not the same in any two people. A brain transplant is not like connecting a new thermostat into an old heating system, with one-to-one correspondence between wires that had been connected to the old thermostat, and wires available from the new one. If adaptation is even possible, there is no reason to believe that the new brain will be able to adapt to its new body in anything less than several years. The new creature will have to learn how to interpret visual and auditory input, how to keep its balance, how to walk, how to use its fingers and arms. In the meantime, all the “memories” brought along by the new cerebrum will at best be a jumbled dream, totally disconnected from all sensory input, and at worst, an endless nightmare. This objection will be called *naïve recovery scenario*. Again, the CAC avoids this objection by ruling out all forms of brain transplant as cases of personal identity transfer. While transplants of neural masses might be of great benefit to a recipient whose brain, though damaged, retains its first-person perspective, such a case does not result in transfer of personal identity.

A simple version of animalism, formulated by Eric Olson, says that:

each of us is numerically identical with (a human) animal. [Olson, 1]

Turning this into a criterion for personal identity,

SAC (*simple animalist criterion*): Person B now is numerically identical to person A at an earlier time if and only if B and A are the same human animal.

On this criterion, person B now is identical to the newly-fertilized human egg cell, since it is the same human animal as B. Also, if B later becomes brain dead, he will still be the same human animal, so still the same person. This criterion of personal identity requires one to view a newly fertilized egg, and a brain-dead human body, both as full-fledged human persons. But both these entities lack the distinctively human capacity for

self-awareness and a first-person perspective on the world. While both entities may be deserving of special consideration and protection because of their intimate relations to human persons, it seems more accurate to say that the fertilized egg may *become* a person, and that the brain-dead body *has been* a person, but that neither of one *is* a person. Call this the *insufficient self-awareness* objection. The CAC avoids this objection by requiring candidates for identity to have functioning brains sufficiently well-developed to permit a first-person perspective on the world.

The *complex animalist criterion* avoids the objection of *irrelevance of third person facts*, making it preferable to both the *neo-Lockean criterion* and the *brain criterion*. The *complex animalist criterion* also avoids the *naïve recovery* objection, to which the *brain criterion* is subject. And finally, the CAC also avoids the *insufficient self-awareness* objection, which may be made against the *simple animalist criterion*.