

DISCUSSIONS

ANIMALISM *VERSUS* LOCKEANISM: REPLY TO MACKIE

BY HAROLD W. NOONAN

I

In his paper 'Animalism *versus* Lockeanism: No Contest', David Mackie, responding to my earlier paper, rejects Lockeanism and defends animalism as the only sustainable account of personal identity.¹ Animalism is the thesis that any person coincident at any time with an animal *is* that animal (this is a statement of animalism free of indexicals; a more familiar statement of the position is the indexical 'We are animals'). (Neo-)Lockeanism is the thesis that psychological continuity in *some* sense, however attenuated, is necessary for personal identity over time.

In my paper I had first defended the modest compatibilist conclusion that the 'transplant intuition', so called by Shoemaker,² that a human person goes where his brain goes, or rather, to be more precise in the way which recent developments in the literature noted by Mackie (p. 371) make necessary, where his cerebrum goes, could be accepted *both* by neo-Lockeans *and* by animalists, and hence that so long as we consider only cases of cerebrum transplantation, a neo-Lockean could also be an animalist, regarding psychological continuity as what 'continuation of [Lockean] life comes to' for animals of the human kind, as McDowell puts it.³ However, I had eventually concluded that neo-Lockeanism and animalism were after all incompatible, because of the existence of cases, notably those of fetuses and patients in vegetative states, in which the neo-Lockean ought to assert the actual existence of persons who are not animals but coincide with animals through part of their history. Given that this is so, I had then argued, neo-Lockeanism could be defended only by

¹ D. Mackie, 'Animalism *versus* Lockeanism: No Contest', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (1999), pp. 369–76; H.W. Noonan, 'Animalism *versus* Lockeanism: a Current Controversy', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 48 (1998), pp. 302–18.

² S. Shoemaker, 'Eric Olson', *The Human Animal*, *Noûs*, 33 (1999), pp. 496–504.

³ J. McDowell, 'Reductionism and the First Person', in J. Dancy (ed.), *Reading Parfit* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 230–50, at p. 237.

distinguishing the concept of the *T*-user from that of the self, or *reference of T*, and maintaining that in the problematic situation in which a person and an animal temporarily coincide, the animal can indeed think *T*-thoughts, but is not thereby constituted a person, since the reference of its *T*-thoughts is not *itself* but the person with whom it is sharing these thoughts. Mackie rejects both the arguments for the initial modest compatibilist conclusion and my eventual proposal about how the neo-Lockean must elaborate his position to render it invulnerable to animalist objections. His conclusion is that anti-Lockean animalism, which rejects the 'transplant intuition', is the only sustainable view.

In what follows I respond to Mackie's criticisms.

II

I gave three arguments for the modest compatibilist conclusion. Mackie finds all three unconvincing. I consider them in turn.

(a) *The Mekon*

The first argument I gave was intended to establish that to deny that a human animal goes where its cerebrum goes commits one to a highly counter-intuitive disjunction. The Mekon, in the *Dan Dare* comic strip, has a huge brain (with, presumably, a huge cerebrum) and a tiny body. Following unpublished work of Parfit, my argument was that someone who denied that in the case of human beings the animal went where the cerebrum went would either have to say the same, implausibly, in the case of the Mekon, or, even more implausibly, have to claim that the persistence-conditions of two species of animal might be different merely in virtue of a difference in the distribution of mass over their bodily parts. Mackie's response is that I can have no coherent argument here, since to defend the idea that the Mekon goes where his cerebrum goes I must appeal to the bulkiness of the Mekon's brain, whereas it is a premise of my argument that bulk is irrelevant to animal identity.

However, this mistakes the structure of the argument (as the rephrasing in the last paragraph makes clear). The point was just to bring out the extent of the conflict with common sense that rejecting the transplant intuition involves, not to defend the common-sense intuitions – that the Mekon goes where his cerebrum goes and that the persistence-conditions of animals of different species cannot be affected by the relative bulk of their bodily organs – with which the conflict occurs.

The fact is that both in the human case and even more so in the Mekon case the transplant intuition is very appealing. Anti-Lockean animalists like Mackie must explain it away. To do so they must explain away the plausibility of the view that psychological continuity has some special relevance to personal identity. It is hard to see how this can be done except by invoking some version of the Parfitian thesis that identity is not what matters in survival to explain how we mistakenly take our intuitions about the presence of what matters in survival (i.e., psychological continuity) to be intuitions about what suffices for identity.⁴ If this is right, animalists

⁴ See E.T. Olson, *The Human Animal* (Oxford UP, 1997), for an attempt at this.

who reject the transplant intuition need an argument for Parfit's thesis. Conversely those who, like myself, think that no such argument will be forthcoming must think that the transplant intuition poses an irresolvable difficulty for animalism.

(b) *The envatted brain*

The argument I gave, again following Parfit, was that the animalist who rejected the transplant intuition would be committed to a highly implausible story about a case of cerebrum envatment followed by re-embodiment. Mackie does not deny that he has to say counter-intuitive things about this case, but claims that the neo-Lockean can be similarly embarrassed. I think that this is incorrect.

Suppose Brown's cerebrum is removed from his cranium, envatted and subsequently rehoused in Robinson's vacant cranium. Then the anti-Lockean animalist I was envisaging must describe the case as follows:

(1) When the cerebrum is envatted, *either* no conscious being is present (a view Mackie describes as having 'little plausibility') *or* there is a conscious being present which is not an animal but which either came into being at the time of envatment or existed previously, located in (a proper part of) the region then simultaneously occupied by the living conscious animal Brown. While the cerebrum is envatted no *animal* is located in the vat.

(2) When the cerebrum is transplanted into a new cranium the conscious being, if any, present during the period of envatment either ceases to exist or comes to coincide (partially) in location with an animal – Robinson – who has acquired a new cerebrum, but not a new identity. Unless no conscious being was present during the period of envatment, then either the process of envatment and transplantation created and then destroyed a new conscious being distinct from the animals Brown and Robinson, or at some point an animal was (partially) coincident in location with an entity distinct from him which either then or at a later or earlier time was a conscious being.

This description, I claim, is highly counter-intuitive, whichever of the various disjuncts the anti-Lockean animalist chooses to adopt. By contrast the neo-Lockean animalist can say:

(1) When the cerebrum is envatted, it is the person (and human being) Brown who is located in the vat, severely mutilated, but still conscious. No other conscious being need be supposed present and no conscious being need be supposed to have ceased to exist.

(2) On subsequent rehousing into the cranium of Robinson, Brown goes where the cerebrum goes. Thus the person (and human being) Brown acquires a new set of limbs, kidneys, etc. Robinson's fate will have been determined by the fate of his cerebrum. If it was preserved, he survived. Otherwise he is dead.

Mackie's objection (p. 371) to this is that the neo-Lockean animalist must say that the 'living, breathing but mindless being that receives the transplanted cerebrum either ceases to exist ... or co-exists with an animal with which it is non-identical, after the transplant'. But the neo-Lockean animalist will say that the animal that exists after the transplant is Brown; the 'living, breathing but mindless being' receiving the transplant is not Robinson (who is either dead or elsewhere); and that there

is no more paradox in Brown's 'co-existing with' this 'living, breathing but mindless being' than there is in his 'co-existing with' Robinson's kidneys, heart, etc., which is, indeed, all that is actually the case.

(c) *The canine case*

The argument I gave, which was intended to cast doubt on the contention that, as Snowdon puts it, 'with regard to [non-human animals] we have no inclination to think of the animal as going with the transplanted [cerebrum]',⁵ was that if we consider a version of the standard Brown/Brownson case in which the conscious subjects present are not human beings but dogs, the strength of the transplant intuition is in no way diminished. But in this case our conviction of identity cannot be based on any intuition about *personal* identity. However, given the widely accepted thesis that there is no such thing as being the same without being the same *such and such* (i.e., that identity is always identity under a sortal concept), there must be *some* answer to the question 'Same what?' which is available. But in this case the only available answer is *same dog*. Mackie's response (p. 372) is to say that this is *not* the only other response which is available – another is *same curson* (where *cursons* are thinking subjects related to dogs, as persons on a neo-Lockean anti-animalist view are related to human beings). But I simply see no reason to suppose that the man in the street, whose intuitive judgement of identity is what is at issue here, has any such sortal concept in his repertoire. It is not that I think the absence of the word 'curson' is decisive, but rather that there is no evidence at all that we ever employ such a concept (and Mackie, as anti-Lockean animalist debating with neo-Lockean animalist, is hardly in a position to deny this). Of course, if the considerations in support of neo-Lockean anti-animalism in the human case accepted in the second half of my earlier paper are brought into the equation, matters stand differently. For, since dogs also begin life as fetuses and may end it in a permanent vegetative state, these considerations provide equally strong support, *mutatis mutandis*, for distinguishing psychologically individuated canine individuals ('cursons') from canine animals. But the question at present is whether *in the absence of these supporting considerations* neo-Lockean anti-animalism (or anti-Lockean animalism) is to be preferred to neo-Lockean animalism. My suggestion is that the 'canine argument' is an argument that *prima facie* the opposite is the case.

III

Although I wish to maintain that, at least in the case of animals with the intelligence of human beings or dogs, our intuitions about the familiar puzzle cases involving cerebrum transplantation are consistent with the view that animal identity follows cerebrum identity, and so also consistent both with animalism and neo-Lockeanism, I accept, with Mackie, that there are cases, actual cases, in which a

⁵ P. Snowdon, 'Personal Identity and Brain Transplants', in D. Cockburn (ed.), *Human Beings* (Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 109–26, at p. 113.

neo-Lockean is committed to saying that a person coincides with a human animal with which it is not identical. These cases pose difficulties for the neo-Lockean which have been well brought out by Paul Snowdon.⁶ For it is plausible to say that human beings are our paradigm of thinking things. But a person is by definition a thinking thing. So in such cases are there two thinking things present, thinking the same thoughts? And what of the 'I-thoughts which are expressed? If the thought is expressed 'I am an animal', is this thought true because the animal is thinking it, or false because the person is thinking it, or ambiguous because both are thinking it? And whatever may be said in response to this, if such cases are accepted does it not follow that Locke's definition of 'a person' is inadequate, since on that definition 'person' will apply in such a case *both* to the person to whom it is supposed to apply *and* to the thinking human animal to whom it is not supposed to apply?

My response to the difficulties confronting the neo-Lockean was first to point out that logically speaking exactly analogous difficulties exist for Locke himself, given that he accepts the existence of thinking substances which are, supposedly, not persons, since the condition of their identity is different, but coincide with persons in such a way that whenever a person thinks a thought there is a thinking substance 'thinking in' (as he puts it) the person who is thinking that very thought.

With this parallel noted, I suggested, it is clear that both Locke and the neo-Lockeans have only one recourse. They have to reject Locke's original definition of a person (which the neo-Lockean must accept applies to human animals, and Locke must accept applies to thinking substances), substitute for it the notion of the object of self-reference, and insist on a distinction between the 'I'-user and the reference of 'I'. Then Locke can say that in the problematic situation in which a person and a thinking substance coincide, the thinking substance can indeed think 'I'-thoughts, but is not thereby constituted a person, for the reference of its 'I'-thoughts is not *itself* but the person with whom it is sharing these thoughts, and the neo-Lockean can say the same, *mutatis mutandis*, about the relation between a person and a temporarily coincident human animal.

I went on to point out that a similar distinction between an 'I'-user and the reference of 'I' is implicit in the four-dimensionalist commitment to person-stages (at least if this notion is understood as David Lewis recommends),⁷ which stand to four-dimensional persons somewhat as thinking substances do to Lockean persons.

Mackie thinks that this attempt to defend the neo-Lockean position is, in effect, a *reductio ad absurdum* of it. He has several objections. The first (p. 374) is that the position of the neo-Lockean is more implausible than that of the four-dimensionalist. For 'the four-dimensionalist's claim ... challenges no ordinary beliefs.... by contrast [Noonan] urges the rejection of the ... view that human beings ... can refer to themselves using the first-person pronoun'. This is a mistake. The four-dimensionalist view does challenge ordinary belief. It entails that as I sit here writing this, there are many numerically distinct conscious beings here, thinking the very thoughts I am thinking but incapable of referring to themselves in the first person. It thus urges the

⁶ Snowdon, 'Persons, Animals and Ourselves', in C. Gill (ed.), *The Person and the Human Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 83–107.

⁷ See D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol 1 (Oxford UP, 1983).

rejection of the highly plausible ordinary view that just one conscious being is thinking these thoughts. This hardly supports Mackie's claim that 'there is a clear difference between the intuitive plausibility of the four-dimensionalist's claim ... and Noonan's'.

Mackie's second objection (p. 374) is that 'Noonan's proposal makes it an *a priori* matter whether human beings can refer to themselves using the first-person pronoun'. It does not: it is not an *a priori* truth that humans have late vegetative states or foetal states to which, in their mature stage, they are related by no relations of psychological continuity or connectedness whatsoever, so it is not an *a priori* truth that human beings are not persons. It is an *a priori* truth that humans *can* have late vegetative stages or foetal stages to which, when mature, they stand in no relations of psychological continuity whatsoever, but I argued in my previous paper that merely modal differences cannot uncontroversially be said to ensure non-identity.

Mackie's third objection is that I ignore the general objections to the whole theory of coincident objects. But I am not convinced that there are any such objections which are cogent. Mackie asks how the person and the animal manage to have different persistence-conditions, given that they are physically identical and share the same matter. The same question can be asked about the piece of clay Lump1 and the statue Goliath, the tail-less cat Tibbles and its tail-complement Tib, and the many other examples in the literature of temporarily coincident entities. But since it is trivially true that things can share *some* properties without sharing *all* their properties, we need to be told why there is a problem about the particular case in which the properties they share constitute them as physically identical at a time, while the properties with respect to which they differ constitute them as having different persistence-conditions. Why is this situation not just an illustration of a general unproblematic truth?

Mackie's fourth objection (p. 375) is that 'it is crazy to suppose that there are two psychological lives going on where I am now'. Perhaps, but as I indicated, this is also a commitment of the four-dimensionalist position (assuming that *x*'s psychological life is distinct from *y*'s psychological life if *x* is numerically distinct from *y*), for which, as Mackie acknowledges, there are powerful arguments, so Mackie needs to answer these arguments before he can regard this objection as conclusive.

Mackie also thinks (p. 375) that my proposal involves a serious epistemological embarrassment:

When Noonan says, 'I am a person', how does he know that he is the person, successfully referring to himself? How does he know that he is not the human animal, having the thought that the person coincident with him is a person? ... if his proposal is correct, he cannot know this. Hence his proposal would leave us, absurdly, in doubt as to whether we are persons.... in thinking 'I am a person' Noonan *can* know that what he is thinking is *true*.... [but] his knowledge that his thought 'I am a person' is true does not amount to the knowledge that he is a person. For if Noonan were in fact an animal, ... he *could* know that his thought 'I am a person' was true.... But ... in this situation he *could not* know that Noonan was a person. And Noonan cannot know that this situation is not the one in which he in fact finds himself.

The first point I wish to make about this argument is that if it refutes my position it also refutes four-dimensionalism; Olson deploys it for this purpose.⁸ If the argument is a good one, it remains so if 'human animal' is replaced throughout by '(non-maximal) person-stage', and 'person coincident with a human animal' is replaced by 'person having as a proper part a person-stage'. But the argument is not a good one. As Mackie states, according to my proposal both the animal and the person can know that the utterance 'I am a person' is true. And each understands this sentence, so each knows the proposition it expresses (by contrast, a monolingual Frenchman may know that an utterance of, say, 'London is pretty' is true, but not know the proposition it expresses, that London is pretty). In virtue of knowing this, the animal knows of the person that he is a person, and the person (who of course knows no less) knows of the person that he is a person. So the person knows of himself that he is a person (if x knows of x that he is F , x knows of himself that he is F). So there is after all no epistemological embarrassment. I know that what I express by 'I am a person' is true. Since I understand this sentence I also know the proposition expressed, and in virtue of knowing this I know of myself that I am a person. But no more than this can be required for knowledge *de se*, of oneself, that one is a person. Hence there is no ignorance of the kind Mackie supposes here, because there is no expressible thought whose truth-value is unknowable in the way he thinks.

Mackie's final objection (p. 375) is that

it is not clear that Noonan's proposal even solves the original problem ... that he does address.... If [animals] can use the locution 'the thinker of this thought' ... the original problem simply arises all over again.... But is the utterance 'the thinker of this thought is an animal' true because the animal is thinking the thought expressed, or false because the person is thinking it, or ambiguous because both are thinking it?

The answer is that it is *unambiguously false* (given a Russellian reading of the definite description, or unambiguously *truth-valueless* given a Strawsonian reading), whoever is thinking it, because there are *two* thinkers of the thought (so animals *cannot* think of themselves under this description). So the proposal does not 'face the old problem again' as Mackie claims (and again if this were a good objection to my proposal it would also be a good objection to the four-dimensionalist's position – with which Mackie does not wish to take issue in his reply).

He leads into this objection via a more general worry about how human animals can refer to, or think about, themselves at all, given my proposal that they cannot do so in the first person. But there is no problem. A human animal who knows that a description of the form 'the human animal who is F ' is satisfied can refer to that individual under that description; so if that individual is in fact himself, he thereby refers to himself.

In sum, then, I acknowledge the implausibility of the proposal I have put forward in defence of the neo-Lockean. But I do not think that its implausibility is significantly greater than that of the four-dimensionalist position, or that it is subject to any additional epistemological difficulties.

⁸ See Olson, 'Is Psychology Relevant to Personal Identity?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 72 (1994), pp. 173–86, at pp. 183–4.

I should add, however, that I would not like to be construed as an enthusiastic defender of this proposal. I am, in fact, increasingly attracted by the view, mentioned in my previous paper, that ‘person’, whether defined in Locke’s way or according to the revision suggested here, is not a sortal term at all, and that debates on personal identity are void for lack of a subject matter. However, what stands in the way of accepting this view is the combination of our intuitions about the life histories, including pre-natal and possible vegetative stages, of human beings with our intuitions about such cases as the Brown/Brownson case (and other cases of ‘information transfer’ without any movement of matter), which are hard to explain except by appeal to some form of neo-Lockeanism, and I think cannot be explained away by resort to Parfitian ideas about identity and survival, since those ideas themselves cannot be backed by any cogent arguments. Possibly all these intuitions can be reconciled by a complex disjunctive account of the identity of human beings, which gives psychological continuity a role, as the neo-Lockean would wish, but allows that in its absence bodily continuity can suffice. But whether or not this is so, I think, the distinction between the ‘I’-user and the reference of ‘I’ is obligatory, since the four-dimensionalist position, which requires this distinction, is correct. Consequently even an anti-Lockean animalist like Mackie must accept this distinction, on general metaphysical grounds which are prior to any particular considerations pertaining to the particular issue (or non-issue) of personal identity.⁹

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⁹ I am grateful to David Mackie and Penelope Mackie for comments on an earlier draft of this reply.