

## The Nature of People

Eric T. Olson

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### 1. Two Questions

What is a person? The question can mean two different things. One is what it is to be a person, as opposed to a nonperson--a someone and not merely a something. You and I are people (or persons); stones are not. Whether a chimpanzee is a person is disputed. What is this property--personhood--that we've got and stones haven't got, and which there is dispute about whether chimpanzees have? An answer would be a completion of the formula

Necessarily, x is a person if and only if...x....

Or maybe the formula should be 'Necessarily, x is a person at time t if and only if...x...t...', so as not to prejudge the issue of whether something could be a person at one time and a nonperson at another.<sup>1</sup> Call this the personhood question.

The most common answer is that to be a person (at a time) is to have certain special mental properties (at that time). Locke, for instance, said that a person is "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places" (1975: 335). To be a person is roughly to be intelligent and self-conscious. Others say that a thing needn't actually have any special mental properties at a given time to count as a person then, as long as it can acquire them. A newborn infant is probably not self-conscious--not able to consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places--but it might still count as a person because it has the capacity to develop to the point where it is.

These answers specify a sort of role or job. We call something a person because it fills or has the potential to fill that role. The personhood question asks what the person-role is and how a thing has to relate to it in order to be a person.

But to ask what a person is can also be to ask what sort of thing fills that role. Suppose Locke was right in saying that to be a person is to be intelligent and self-conscious. What sort of beings are intelligent and self-conscious? What are we--readers and authors of this book? What are our other fundamental properties, beyond those that make us people? And how do those other properties relate to our special mental properties? To put the question in the formal mode, what do we refer to when we say 'I'? We might call this the question of personal ontology.

An analogy will help distinguish these two questions. Suppose we ask what a

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<sup>1</sup>Another alternative is that 'person' is a family-resemblance term for which there are no necessary and sufficient conditions. Wiggins' view (1980: 171) is something like this.

star is. One sort of answer is easy enough: a star is a luminous object visible in the night sky. (Ignore the planets--“wandering stars”--and the moon.) The ancient Greeks knew this much. But they didn’t know what those luminous objects were. They thought they did: they believed, naturally enough, that the stars were fires, and emitted light by combustion. But they were wrong. We know that stars are enormous balls of superheated gas that emit light by nuclear fusion. So in a way the ancients knew what stars were, and in a way they didn’t. They knew the star-role, but not what sort of objects filled the role. In other words, they understood what it was to be a star, but not the nature of the stars.

I will say no more about the personhood question. (I don’t find it especially interesting or important.) This chapter is about personal ontology: about what sort of things stand to intelligence and self-consciousness (or whatever special mental properties make something a person) as balls of superheated gas stand to the property of shining in the night sky. What is the fundamental nature of a human person?

## 2. Animalism and its Discontents

You might think that modern science has answered this question, just as it has discovered the nature of the stars. The ancients (some of them) believed that intelligent, self-conscious beings were invisible, immaterial things, or at any rate things with an immaterial part--a part without which nothing could think at all. Neuroscience has proved them wrong on this point. We know that intelligent, self-conscious beings are biological organisms. We also know that organisms are made up entirely of atoms--tiny bits of matter--and that their being alive consists in a complex array of physical activities which impose a stable form on those atoms as they are constantly renewed by the processes of ingestion, excretion, and respiration. Some of those physical activities are mental phenomena: thought and conscious awareness. Or maybe the physical goings-on produce thought and consciousness but are not themselves mental. (How these physical goings-on relate to mental phenomena is the central topic of the philosophy of mind: the so-called “mind-body problem”.) But whatever those details may be, the answer to the question of personal ontology is that we are organisms. There is an organism--a member of the primate species Homo sapiens--that you see in the mirror. That animal is not merely “your body” (whatever exactly that means), or the material thing that somehow contains you. The person and the animal are one and the same being.

The view that we are organisms is nowadays called animalism. But despite its obvious appeal, few philosophers accept it.<sup>2</sup> Their main objection is that it has

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<sup>2</sup>According to a recent survey (Bourget and Chalmers 2009), just 17% of professional philosophers lean towards a “biological view” of personal identity, a thesis more or less equivalent to animalism. Defenders of animalism include van Inwagen (1990) and Olson (1997, 2007).

unattractive consequences about what it takes for us to persist from one time to another--what Locke called personal identity. Suppose your brain were put into my head. (These consequences do not arise only in science fiction, but that's where they are most forceful.) The being who ended up with your brain would remember your life, and not mine. He would have your beliefs, preferences, plans, and other mental properties, for the most part at least. Who would he be? Me with a new brain, or you with a new body? Or maybe neither, but someone else instead?

Animalism implies that he would be me with a new brain. He couldn't be you, because the operation does not move an organism from one head to another. It simply moves an organ from one animal to another, just as a liver transplant does.<sup>3</sup> One animal loses its brain and stays behind as an empty-headed vegetable or corpse; another has its brain removed and replaced with yours. According to animalism, you are the donor organism and I am the recipient. You get an empty head; I get your brain. So the operation would fill my head with false beliefs: I would become convinced that I lived in your house, worked at your job, and was the child of your mother. I would think I was you. I would be systematically mistaken about who I am and how I fit into the world.

Many people reject this description. They say that the one who got your brain would be you, not me. A brain transplant is not like a liver transplant. It doesn't move an organ from one person to another. Rather, it moves a person from one organism to another. To transplant your brain is to transplant you. The surgeons remove you from your own head and put you into my head. More precisely, they cut away all your parts except your brain, move you across the room, then give you a new set of parts (previously mine) to replace the ones you lost. As for me: when my brain is removed to make way for yours, I go with that organ and leave the rest of my parts behind. So no one is mistaken about who he or she is.

Whatever the merits of this alternative description may be, however, it is incompatible with animalism. The animal you would be if you were any animal at all would stay behind with an empty head in the transplant operation. So the alternative description implies that you and that animal would go your separate ways: you would go with your brain and the animal would stay behind. But a thing and itself can never go their separate ways. Even though you are not actually going to have a brain transplant, you have a property that no animal has, that of possibly going with your transplanted brain and leaving your animal body behind. And if you have a property that no animal has, then you are not an animal. Not only are you not essentially an animal. You are not a biological organism at all, even contingently. Call the claim that animalism has false consequences about who would be who in a brain-transplant operation the transplant objection.

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<sup>3</sup>If an entire detached brain would be an organism (van Inwagen 1990: 169-181, Olson 1997: 44-46), let only the cerebrum be transplanted. This applies to the remnant-person problem of §5 as well.

### 3. Mind-Life Dualism

But if we're not biological organisms, what are we? On this point the transplant objection leaves us completely in the dark. It tells us as much about the nature of people as the ancient Greeks would know about the nature of the stars if the Oracle had told them that stars were not fires and then fallen silent.

In fact our position (if we accept the transplant objection) is even worse than that. Not only do we not know what we are, but we have to deny that a human organism could ever be intelligent and self-conscious. If a human organism could be intelligent and self-conscious, the animal now writing these words would be. And in that case it would surely be me. Otherwise--if I were something other than the intelligent animal sitting here--I would be one of two intelligent beings writing these words and thinking these thoughts. In fact I would be one of two people here, since the animal would satisfy any plausible account of personhood (Locke's, for instance). What's more, some human people--perhaps half of them--would be organisms after all, and would stay behind with an empty head if their brains were transplanted. But the transplant objection was supposed to show that any person would go with her transplanted brain. If there really were two people now writing this, a nonanimal person who would go with his transplanted brain and an animal person who would stay behind, the animal person would have the same grounds for supposing that he would go with his transplanted brain as the nonanimal person has. They would both find the transplant objection equally convincing, since they would think in exactly the same way. But the animal person would be mistaken about what he was and what it takes for him to persist through time. So for all I could ever know, I might be the one making the mistake.

To avoid this problem of "too many thinkers", advocates of the transplant objection will want to say that the animal sitting here is not intelligent and self-conscious. I, the non-animal, am the only intelligent being here.<sup>4</sup> Yet that animal would be intelligent and self-conscious if any organism was. It has a normal adult human brain; it has just the right surroundings and the right education; it behaves exactly as an intelligent and self-conscious being does in both actual and counterfactual situations. If this doesn't suffice for it to be intelligent and self-conscious, that can only be because it is metaphysically impossible for any human organism to be intelligent and self-conscious. And in that case it is hard to see how any organism, human or otherwise, could have any mental property whatever.

So if we would go with our transplanted brains, then we are not organisms. And unless we share our thoughts with beings who would go with their transplanted brains, it follows that human animals have no thoughts at all and are not intelligent. That leads more or less inevitably to the conclusion that it is metaphysically impossible for any biological organism to have any mental property. This is a sort of mind-body dualism--in fact a form of substance dualism. It says that nothing could be both alive, in the biological sense, and thinking or conscious. What

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<sup>4</sup>For a different response to the problem, see Noonan 1998, Olson 2002.

appears to be a single conscious, living being is in reality two beings, one conscious but nonliving and one living but nonconscious. A thing's physical properties would never suffice for it to have any mental properties.

This is not quite the Cartesian view that no material thing could think or be conscious. It is a dualism not of mind and matter, but of mind and life. If anything, it is even more baffling than Cartesian dualism. If we ask why it should be metaphysically impossible for an organism to think, the most natural answer is that this is because organisms are material things. The idea that no entirely material thing could think or be conscious--that mentality could not arise out of brute mechanics--has an undeniable attraction, and it is no surprise that great philosophers (Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant, for example) have found it compelling. But mind-life dualism allows that you and I are material things. In fact this is what most critics of animalism believe. It follows from their view that some material things can and do think, but no biological organism could be any more sentient than a stone. How could that be? If any material thing could think, would it not be some sort of animal?

#### 4. The Brain View

Although the transplant objection rules out our being animals, it says nothing about what we might be instead. And it implies that no biological organism could ever think or be conscious, without saying anything about why. Can this double mystery be solved? Is there an account of what we are that would both make it possible for us to go with our transplanted brains and explain why it is impossible for organisms to think?

Few proposed accounts of what we are say or even suggest anything about animal thought.<sup>5</sup> Rather than go through these views and explain why they don't, I will devote the rest of this chapter to one that does: the odd-sounding view that we are brains.<sup>6</sup> Each of us is literally a three-pound chunk of soft, yellowish-pink tissue lodged within the cranium. Few of us have ever really seen ourselves, or any other person. (Most of us wouldn't want to.) We see only the organisms that we are hidden parts of.

Despite its faintly comical implications, the "brain view" has real virtues. The most obvious is that if you are your brain, then you go where your brain goes, answering the transplant objection. And it explains why organisms cannot think by implying (or at least suggesting) that a thinking organism is like a powerful car. Just as a car is powerful by having a powerful engine as a part, an organism thinks by

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<sup>5</sup>For one that does, see Shoemaker 1999. Olson 2007 discusses all the main accounts of what we are.

<sup>6</sup>Or maybe we would be certain parts of brains, since the brain has parts--blood vessels, for instance--that perform the same functions as parts of the organism outside the brain. Puccetti (1973), Tye (2003), Hudson (2007), Campbell & McMahan (2010), and Parfit (2012) all endorse this view or something like it.

having a thinking brain as part. Animals think only in the derivative sense of having a smaller part that thinks strictly speaking. So there are two thinking beings there, the organism and the person, only in the harmless sense in which there are two powerful things, the car and its engine, on the drive. There is only one true, nonderivative thinker. Those nonderivative thinkers--the brains--are ourselves.

The brain view may look even better supported by modern science than animalism, since it is informed by the knowledge that thought and consciousness are not distributed throughout the organism, but take place in the brain: the brain is the organ of thought, and not, as Aristotle believed, a device for cooling the blood. Here are two further advantages the brain view has over animalism.

### **5. The Remnant-Person Problem**

Suppose your brain is removed from your head as before, only this time it isn't transplanted, but kept alive in a vat. It may be possible for your brain in this condition to think more or less normally. (Countless philosophical thought experiments assume this.) That would make it a person. This "remnant person" would not be an organism. It would be "alive" only in the way that a kidney awaiting transplant is alive--in that its individual cells are kept alive. Nor was it previously an organism: there was only one organism there before your brain was removed, and the operation merely gave it an empty head.

That some people are not organisms is perfectly compatible with animalism. Animalism does not say that all people are organisms. It is consistent with the existence of a theistic god--an immaterial person. But it does say that all human people are organisms; and a remnant person would presumably be a human person. More seriously, it is difficult for animalists to explain where the remnant person could have come from. Did she exist before the operation? If so (and if she was a person then), animalism implies that there were then two people within your skin: the animal, who stayed behind with an empty head, and the remnant person, who went into the vat. It would be a mystery why they came out of the operation in such different states. And it's hard to see how you could have known which person you are: whether you were going to lose your brain or end up in the vat. If the remnant person did not exist before the operation, on the other hand, then the surgeons must have brought that person into being by removing your brain from your head. But how can you create a person just by cutting away sustaining tissues (Johnston 2007, Olson 2014)?

It's hard to find a plausible account of the nature of remnant people and of what happens to them in the brain-removal operation that is compatible with animalism. But on the brain view there's no problem: the remnant person is just you. You were a brain all along. The operation merely changes your surroundings.

### **6. Double-Brained Organisms**

Another objection made against animalism is that it rules out the possibility of

there being more than one person associated with a single organism at once (Campbell and McMahan 2010). There are real cases in which two heads grow from a single human torso, each supporting an independent mental life. There is every appearance of there being two intelligent, self-conscious beings here--beings as psychologically different as you are from me. In recorded cases of this sort there is always some duplication of vital organs--two hearts, for example--suggesting that there are two organisms present, which simply overlap by sharing parts lower down. In that case each twin would be an organism. But this needn't always be so. It seems possible, at least, for a single organism to contain two independent brains or organs of thought. And here too there would appear to be two different people. If that appearance is correct, then at least one of them would not be an organism.

It is hard to say what sort of beings these "twin people" could be in a way that is compatible with animalism. If an organism with two independent organs of thought would "contain" at least one human person who was not an organism, wouldn't an ordinary human animal also contain a nonanimal person--someone of the same metaphysical nature as the twin people? But in that case animalism itself would have the absurd consequence that there are two different people writing this chapter, one an animal and one a nonanimal. (The remnant-person case raises the same problem: since remnant people would not be animals, we should expect each human animal in normal circumstances to be associated with a person of the same nature as a remnant person.)

Perhaps animalists can say what sort of things the twin people would be and why there are no people of that sort in ordinary cases. Or maybe they can explain why there could never be a single organism with two independent organs of thought. Otherwise they will have to say that there would be just one intelligent, self-conscious being in such cases, namely the organism. Such a person would have two independent mental lives (van Inwagen 1990: 188-212). But friends of the brain view can accept that there would be two people in these cases, just as there appear to be. The two people would be the two brains.

## 7. Thinking-Subject Minimalism

Let us now examine the brain view more critically. What makes it important as an alternative to animalism is its account of why an organism cannot think, namely because it has a smaller part that really thinks. This raises an obvious and pressing question: what determines which part of an animal is the thinking part? Why suppose that it's the brain? Why not the head, or the entire nervous system, or all of the animal except its feet? Why should having feet as parts prevent a thing from thinking (in the strict, nonderivative sense)? For that matter, why should any smaller part of the animal think nonderivatively? It may be true that an animal uses its brain to think, and not its liver or its heart. But why infer from this that the brain literally does the thinking? (I use my hands to tie my shoes. It doesn't follow that

my hands tie my shoes.) If the brain view is true, this question must have an answer.

As far as I can see, the answer must be something like this: a being thinks in the strict, nonderivative sense only if all its parts are somehow directly involved in its thinking (Hudson 2007: 218f.). A human organism cannot think because it has superfluous parts--feet, eyebrows, kidneys--that have no direct involvement in its mental activities (or rather, those mental activities going on within it). My feet may play a role in my sense-perception (one mode of thinking) by enabling me to feel the ground, but that involvement is indirect. Since I am a nonderivative thinker, it follows that my feet are not parts of me. Neither is my liver, my heart, or any other part outside my brain. A true thinker must be made up of all and only the objects directly involved in its thinking. Otherwise it would be entirely arbitrary to say that each of us is a brain rather than some other part of an animal, or indeed a whole animal.

Call this claim thinking-subject minimalism (Olson 2007: 87-90). Minimalism faces two serious objections. First, it implies that every part of a human organism is either directly involved in thinking or not directly involved (or neither definitely directly involved nor definitely not directly involved--a borderline case). But which parts are which? I couldn't think unless my brain had a supply of oxygenated blood; so my heart and lungs are involved in my thinking, but not, presumably, directly involved. Why not? It's not generally true that for every activity an organism engages in, there is a fact about which parts of the organism are directly involved in it and which are only indirectly involved or not involved at all. No one would say that every part of an organism is either directly involved or not directly involved in its walking. If anything is directly involved in my walking, my feet are. Yet my feet have parts--toenails, for instance--that make no contribution to my walking. It seems to follow that only certain parts of my feet are directly involved. But which ones? Suppose I have excess water in my feet owing to poor circulation, which hinders my walking. The "excess" water molecules could hardly be directly involved in my walking. But which ones are the excess molecules and which ones, so to speak, belong there? Yet some water molecules must be directly involved in my walking if anything is.

I doubt whether there is any principled way of saying which molecules are directly involved in my walking and which are not. The reason is not that some are on the borderline between being directly involved and not being directly involved, but that there is simply no such distinction. The whole idea of "being directly involved in someone's walking" is a muddle. The same goes for such activities as eating and sleeping. And it looks no different for thinking or being conscious. Some atoms might be more directly involved in my thinking than others, but there is no saying which ones are "directly involved" without qualification. If so, minimalism implies that there is no saying which things are parts of me, and thus no saying which thing I am. That is not a coherent conclusion. Certainly it is incompatible

with the brain view.

The second problem arises even if there really is an absolute division between the things directly involved in thinking and those not directly involved. If some things are directly involved in my thinking generally, some will be directly involved in specific mental activities. Some of my molecules will be directly involved when I imagine clouds; others--different ones--will be directly involved when I hope for rain. And any reason to suppose that a true thinker must be composed entirely of objects directly involved in its thinking looks like an even better reason to suppose that a true imaginer or hoper must be composed entirely of objects directly involved in its imagining or hoping, respectively. If that reasoning is correct, then each human being contains within it a nonderivative imaginer and a nonderivative hoper. Because each mental activity involves different parts of the brain, each will be performed nonderivatively by a different part of the organism.

It follows that a human being hasn't got one nonderivative "general" thinker within it--the brain--but only a lot of specialist thinkers: one that imagines, another that hopes, one that thinks about metaphysics, and so on. It is unlikely that any part of the organism could have more than one sort of thought. The thing that imagines clouds, for instance, would be either too big to hope for rain--by having superfluous parts not directly involved in that hoping--or too small, by not including such parts (or both). What we take to be a person able to perform all sorts of mental operations would really be many beings, each able to perform only one. If a person is by definition both intelligent and self-conscious, there would be no people (or at least no human people). The reasoning behind the brain view leads almost ineluctably to this absurd conclusion.

## **8. The Brain View and Personal Identity**

A more obvious objection to the brain view has to do with its consequences for our identity over time. It implies that a human person could not survive without her original brain. Suppose the parts of your brain were all replaced with new parts just like them--gradually, so that your thought processes were not interrupted and there was someone psychologically continuous with you throughout the process. If these parts were large enough, the result would seem to be not your original brain with new parts, but a new and numerically different brain. Your original brain would have ceased to exist. But few would take this to imply that you had ceased to exist--that the resulting person would have to be someone else, mistakenly convinced that she was you (Unger 1990: 157f.). Likewise, it is tempting to suppose that you could become wholly inorganic, if your parts were gradually replaced with appropriate prostheses (e.g. Unger 1990: 122, Baker 2000: 123). Here too your original brain would cease to exist. The brain view rules out your surviving in these cases: if you are your brain and your brain ceases to exist, then you must cease to exist.

Or suppose that when I die my brain is fixed in a solution of formaldehyde and

kept in a jar. It looks as if my brain would still exist in the jar: putting a brain in formaldehyde need not destroy it.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise we'd be left wondering what it does take for a human brain to persist (and whether your brain could continue to exist when removed from your head and transplanted or kept in a vat). But if my brain would exist in the jar, then according to the brain view I would exist in the jar. I could become a specimen in formaldehyde.

These consequences are not only implausible, but go against the thinking that led to the brain view in the first place. Its attraction lay in its compatibility with the thought that you would go with your brain if that organ were transplanted, rather than staying behind with an empty head as animalism implies. The reason why you would be the one who got your transplanted brain was supposed to be that she would be psychologically continuous with you. Everyone takes the moral of the transplant objection to be that our persistence through time consists in some sort of psychological continuity. But the brain view implies that psychological continuity is neither necessary for us to persist (as the formaldehyde case shows) nor sufficient (as the gradual-replacement cases show): as with animalism, our identity over time would consist in some sort of brute physical continuity.

## 9. The Functioning-Brain View

The brain view appears to have consequences about personal identity at least as surprising as those of animalism. This has led some of those attracted to the brain view to reject these consequences (Tye 2003: 143, Parfit 2012). They say that I couldn't literally become an anatomical specimen: if my brain permanently ceased to function, as it would if it were put in formaldehyde, I would no longer exist (though I would still exist if my brain were kept functioning in a vat). The thing in the jar would be my brain--or the thing that was once my brain--but it would not be me. They might also say that if the parts of my brain were gradually replaced with new ones in a way that preserved psychological continuity, I would still exist even though my original brain would not.

Either claim would imply that we are not brains. If I would not exist when my brain is fixed in formaldehyde, then my brain could outlive me. If I could exist after my brain has been destroyed and replaced with something new, then I could outlive my brain. But nothing can outlive itself. If my brain could exist in a jar of formaldehyde and I could not, or if I could become wholly inorganic and my brain could not, then my brain and I are two different things.

But if we're not brains, what are we? Merely saying that our identity over time consists in some sort of psychological continuity does not tell us what we are--not even if the sort is specified precisely. The claim that we are intelligent, self-conscious beings that persist by virtue of a certain kind of psychological continuity

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<sup>7</sup>Campbell and McMahan (2010: 289f.) disagree, as do Aristotelianhylomorphists. This is a thought worth exploring further. It may also solve the remnant-person problem by explaining how the operation creates a new intelligent being.

leaves entirely open what sort of intelligent beings we are. (Suppose the ancient Greeks had known not only that the stars were luminous objects visible in the night sky, but also the conditions under which stars persisted through time. They would still not have known what the stars were.)

Someone might say that we're just like brains, only with psychological persistence conditions: some sort of psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for us to persist. So we survive as long as we continue to function psychologically, whereas a brain can exist in a nonfunctioning state. We are not brains, we might say, but "functioning brains".<sup>8</sup>

Of course, if there are things just like brains except that they persist by virtue of psychological continuity, then there are presumably things just like organisms except that they persist by virtue of psychological continuity. If we could be "functioning brains", we could just as easily be "functioning organisms".<sup>9</sup> And if our being functioning brains would answer the brain-part-replacement and brain-in-formaldehyde objections, our being functioning organisms ought to suggest analogous answers to the transplant and remnant-person objections--in which case those objections provide no reason to think that we're any smaller than whole organisms. But maybe the possibility of double-brained organisms is a reason to think that we're brain-sized.

## 10. Substance Dualism Again

I find the "functioning-brain view" hard to understand: I don't really know what a functioning brain is supposed to be. But I will try to say something useful about it nonetheless.

One obvious question is whether there are such things as functioning brains. Maybe there are such things as brains. But why suppose that there are also things just like brains only with different modal properties? (What it takes for a thing to persist in a modal property is that it specifies what it is possible for that thing to survive.) Can you take the nonmodal properties of an ordinary object and combine them with an arbitrary set of new modal properties to get a description of a real object?

Consider the claim that there is such a thing as my waking brain: a thing just like my brain except that it can exist only as long as it is awake. When I fall asleep at night, my waking brain immediately vanishes (replaced, perhaps, by a "sleeping brain"--a thing just like my brain only essentially asleep); when I wake up in the morning it returns to being. I can see no reason to believe in the existence of functioning brains that is not equally a reason to believe in the existence of waking

<sup>8</sup>"Functioning brains" is not the best description of what we would be on this view. If a brain could be psychologically continuous with an inorganic machine, the view implies that we could become inorganic non-brains. But I have no better description.

<sup>9</sup>Shoemaker (1999) and Baker (2000) endorse views like this.

brains. And if there are waking brains, there are probably also things just like brains except that they are essentially reading, essentially thinking about philosophy, or essentially sober; and likewise for each possible combination of such properties (sober and reading; sober, reading, and thinking about philosophy; and so on). That would be an extravagant piece of metaphysics to say the least. It would also raise a problem of “too many thinkers” infinitely worse than the one the brain view was supposed to avoid. If my skull contained not just a functioning brain but also a waking brain, a sober brain, and many more cerebral entities with arbitrary modal properties, all of them psychologically indistinguishable from me (by hypothesis they would differ from me only modally), how could I ever know which one was me?

Maybe there are functioning brains but no essentially waking brains and the like. That would leave us wondering why this would be so--how the cases differ. Nor would it solve the problem. If there are such things as functioning brains, there are surely such things as brains--anatomical organs that can exist even when they are unable to sustain intelligence or self-consciousness. And in that case there are two objects within my cranium--a brain and a functioning brain--physically identical and with the same surroundings. They differ only in their modal properties (and in their histories: my brain is older, since my functioning brain came into being only when my brain, in the normal course of its development, began to function in the relevant sense; and my brain is likely to outlive my functioning brain at the end of my life). That would make the two objects psychologically identical while they coincide. Being equally intelligent and self-conscious, both will count as people by any ordinary definition of the word. How, again, could I ever know which one I am--the brain that could exist in formaldehyde or the functioning brain that could not?

Friends of the functioning-brain view will want to say that ordinary brains cannot think or be conscious: brains and functioning brains differ not only modally but psychologically as well. The functioning brain is the only thinker of my thoughts. But why? It cannot be for the same reason that organisms were supposed to be unable to think, namely that they have parts not directly involved in the production of thought.

So the functioning-brain view implies that no physical properties are sufficient to give a thing any mental properties: my brain is physically identical to me (with the same surroundings and virtually the same history), yet has the psychology of granite. A thing's mental properties would not supervene in even the weakest possible sense on its physical properties. Having the right physical structure (and history and surroundings) may be necessary for a thing to be conscious or intelligent, but it could not be sufficient. What appears to be a conscious brain would really be two things: an unconscious brain and a conscious nonbrain. That is again a form of substance dualism. Until the friends of the functioning-brain view can explain why some things of the right physical sort are conscious and intelligent and others are not, their proposal will remain steeped in mystery.

## 11. Conclusion

The attractions of the brain view are superficial. It may seem to avoid the main objection to animalism--its surprising implications for personal identity over time--while avoiding the problem of too many thinkers. But it rests on the perilous metaphysical principle that nothing can think if it has parts not directly involved in its thinking. And its implications for personal identity are at least as counterintuitive as those of animalism. Attempts to amend the view so as to avoid those implications merely raise a new version of the too-many-thinkers problem, and end in a form of substance dualism.

If we have to be substance dualists, we might as well be Cartesians and say that we are immaterial beings whose nature is entirely psychological. That would at least tell us why human animals and other biological organisms are unable to think: because they are material things. It may not be easy to say why thinking is incompatible with being material. But it can't be any worse than explaining why thinking is compatible with being material but incompatible with being biologically alive. And if it is possible for an organism to think, it will be hard to avoid concluding that we are animals.<sup>10</sup>

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