

Snowdon, Paul F., *Persons, Animals, Ourselves*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 260, £30 (hardback).

Animalism is the thesis that we are identical to human animals. You might think that animalism is obviously true. Aren't we mammals, and therefore animals? Most contemporary anglophone philosophers think not. But a growing body of articles and books develop and defend animalism. This volume is a welcome addition to that tradition. Snowdon coined the term 'animalism' over twenty years ago, and it is fitting that his contributions (heretofore scattered across a handful of articles) are finally brought together.

In this review, I will summarize Snowdon's main claims and offer some critical remarks. My view, in short, is that this is a good book that could have been much better had it engaged with more of the recent literature.

Chapters 1–2 describe animalism and connect it to philosophical questions about personal identity, the unity of consciousness, content ascription, and minds and bodies. Snowdon's aim is to understand which answers to those questions are compatible with animalism, and to state those questions without presupposing the denial of animalism. Snowdon argues that problems about personal identity cannot be resolved by conceptual analysis alone. He further argues that conclusions in personal ontology (what we *are*) do not follow from premises only about personal identity over time (what it takes for us to last).

Animalism is a thesis about human persons. Appropriately enough, Snowdon dedicates chapter 3 to conceptual questions about personhood. He suggests that questions about personhood as such can be sidestepped: even if there are no clear answers to questions about what personhood is or about what it takes for persons to last, this is no reason for despair, says Snowdon. For we can instead turn to questions about what *we* are or what it takes for *us* to last.

Chapter 4 outlines a case for animalism as a default position. An appeal to Ockham's Razor is tempting (roughly: there are human persons, and there are

human animals; identify the former with the latter, thereby cutting in half the numbers and kinds of entity). Snowdon resists that temptation, claiming instead that the denial of animalism does not entail the existence of entities with extra causal roles [81]. Better, says Snowdon, to argue for animalism from its pre-theoretical appeal. Before considering arguments for or against it, we ‘already accept that there is at least massive similarity between myself and [the human animal with which I am associated]’ [83]. Both human persons and animals, for example, are thought to enjoy similar causal origins and futures, and to stand in the same social structures. Given this ‘massive overlap in properties, it would seem reasonable to add, or insist, that some positive reason would need to be given for thinking that they are not the same thing’ [ibid.].

Some have argued for animalism from the absurdity of a person and an animal spatially coinciding. Snowdon does not find these arguments convincing: they likely end in a stalemate over the possibility of coincidence. Related arguments for animalism, from the absurdity of a person and an animal being *psychologically* similar but numerically distinct, are more promising; and Snowdon offers three formulations of such. Each is designed to draw out implausible consequence of the denial of animalism: (i) there are two psychological lives within a human animal, (ii) there are in fact two persons within a human animal, and (iii) when a human person says ‘I am an animal’, she speaks falsely, despite the fact that her words came out of the mouth of an animal [93–4].

Chapter 5 raises questions about the persistence of animals. Snowdon claims, ‘For an animal to remain in existence, it is *not* necessary that the animal have the kinds of psychological links to the past (such as memory) that philosophers have been tempted to invoke in the analysis of personal identity’ [113]. He argues, further, that animals can outlast their own deaths—not in some afterlife, but as dead corpses [114–20].

Most arguments against animalism stem from reflection on various actual and possible cases in which human persons apparently part ways with human animals. Snowdon calls these ‘disassociation’ arguments, and they are the main topic of chapters 6–11.

Chapter 6 replies to ‘A&~P’ cases (in which there is a human animal but no corresponding human person). Chapter 9 focuses on their mirror image: ‘P&~A’ cases (in which there is a human person but no corresponding human animal). Chapter 7 is dedicated to multiple personality disorder cases (we might call these ‘A&P&P*’ cases). Snowdon’s verdict is that multiple personality cases do not genuinely involve a plurality of *persons*, although they may involve a plurality of *person-roles*. Chapter 8 takes on the unity of conscious experience and arguments purporting to show that this is a problem for animalism. Chapters 10–11, finally, discuss at some length various brain transplant cases and their implications for animalism. Throughout all of this, Snowdon is careful to divide the conceptual terrain before proceeding, distinguishing between cases that are sometimes run together. In addition, he often finds clever ways to use judgments about actual or possible cases against his opponents. A key move in chapter 6, for example, is that A&~P cases tell against the neo-Lockean anti-animalist, for they show that we can last across an interval even without the memorial or psychological links that neo-Lockeans think are necessary for personal identity over time [141].

Chapter 12 (‘Conclusions and Consequences’) is intriguing but short. In it, Snowdon identifies and replies to a handful of arguments against animalism that go beyond mere disassociation (especially those pressed by Lynne Rudder Baker). Snowdon then considers what broader consequences animalism might have for the possibility of life after death and for value theory. Animalism, he claims, is

compatible with life after death—and so belief in life after death need not commit one to dualism [250]. The remarks here are of limited interest, though, since Snowdon does not interact with the philosophical literature on the question of whether dualism is required for life after death. He concludes with the thought that animalism may have substantive implications for value theory: ‘Now, in thinking of ourselves as animals ... we can see how various human activities make sense because they bring the good things of this [animal] level into our lives—such things are sport and walking’ [254].

I have described the book’s main arguments and a few of its qualities. It has problems, too. Most importantly, the book does not engage with wide swathes of recent scholarship on animalism and the metaphysics of human persons. There is an extensive and growing literature on animalism; but one might not learn that from Snowdon’s book (for a sampling of that literature, see the bibliography compiled for ‘Animalism and Personal Ontology’ at <http://philpapers.org/browse/111435>).

First, an emerging consensus suggests that questions about the metaphysics of human persons and the viability of animalism are best pursued in tandem with systematic issues in ontology. What we are is in part a matter of what there is; so, animalism finds a home within some metaphysical systems but not others. This is reflected in recent literature. Hud Hudson [2001] and Trenton Merricks [2001], for example, have both defended systematic theories in ontology and have conjoined those theories with animalism (Merricks) and its denial (Hudson). Snowdon doesn’t cite or discuss either of those contributions.

Second, in recent decades, *hylomorphism* (according to which objects—human animals among them—are comprised of matter and form) has seen a resurgence among anglophone philosophers. Accordingly, the question of whether hylomorphism is true is a fault-line among animalists, with hylomorphic animalists offering new and interesting replies to the usual objections against animalism. A discussion of this controversy from an early animalist pioneer like Snowdon would have been intriguing; but the issue goes unmentioned.

Finally: there are other perplexing oversights. Snowdon discusses Derek Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons* [1984], but not Parfit’s more recent thinking about personal identity, even though the more recent papers engage directly with animalism. Sydney Shoemaker’s initial forays into personal identity [1963, 1984] get plenty of attention, but later articles in which Shoemaker takes on animalism go unmentioned. An entire chapter is dedicated to what animalism is, yet without citing recent research on that question. Another oversight is Judith Jarvis Thomson’s [2008] influential work on personal identity and the so-called ‘bodily criterion’.

These omissions are unfortunate and puzzling. Snowdon led the animalist charge long ago; this reader, at least, would have relished his perspective on recent developments in the literature he helped spawn. This book does not offer that perspective.

Complaints aside, it is good that Snowdon’s arguments and ideas (themselves sometimes unfairly overlooked) have finally been presented together in a prominent venue. The book offers a valuable treatment of some standard anti-animalist arguments, and it has much to teach anyone thinking about animalism or personal identity.

References

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Andrew M. Bailey

Yale-NUS College

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