

Animalism and Person as a Basic Sort*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper Animalism is analysed. It will be argued that Animalism is correct in claiming (i) that being of a certain sort of animal *S* is a fundamental individuating substance sortal concept (an animal of the species *Homo Sapiens*), (ii) that this implies that Animalism is correct in claiming that persons such as us are, by necessity, human beings, (iii) that remaining the same animal is a necessary condition for our identity over time. Contrary to Animalism it will be argued that this does not imply that *person* should be understood as a phased sortal concept. It will be argued that Animalism rests upon a prior conception of person, and that this implies that *person* must be understood as a basic substance sortal concept through which we have to individuate ourselves and others. It is further argued that this, together with the insights of Animalism, implies that persons, by necessity, are beings of a biological nature.

1. INTRODUCTION

A common assumption by philosophers interested in “persons” and “personal identity” has been that the concept *person* is a substance sortal concept, that is, a concept that picks out a special sort of individuals in the world. According to this account, being a person is associated with some particular or special properties that strictly distinguish persons from other sorts of object, and particularly, the concept *person* is a different concept than that of a *human body* or *human organism*. From this it follows, according to the traditional account, that the correct classificational or individuating concept in relation to our

* This article is an elaboration of certain ideas presented in the thesis of the present author: MELIN 1998, and it consists partly of the excerpts from this book.

selves is *person*, and that our identity over time consists of personal identity over time.

In more recent years an alternative to this idea has been developed. According to this more recent account which is called Animalism, it is wrong to think that *person* is the fundamental individuating concept by which we individuate ourselves and our own identity over time. Rather, Animalism claims: (i) we, the individuals who presently formulate the question of personal identity, should be understood as animals of the species *Homo Sapiens*, and that (ii) this implies that being of a certain animal sort *S* is the fundamental substance sortal concept applicable to us, and (iii) our identity over time consists in the identity of the animals that we are (Snowdon 1991; 1996; Ayers 1991; Olson 1997).

The aim of this paper is to show that it is possible to construe an account of ourselves which holds that being a person is an irreducible part of our basic conceptual structure, i.e. that *person* should be understood as a substance sortal concept, even though it is also true that we are fundamentally animals. This account has as its objective to capture the basic use of the concept person in our understanding of ourselves and the world.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, the idea of Animalism will be introduced, and it will be argued that Animalism has a strong case in favour of claiming that the persistence condition for individuals such as us are based in biological conditions. After that it will be argued that Animalism rests upon a prior conception of person, and that this implies that person must be understood as a fundamental substance sortal concept. Lastly, some implications, especially that persons are necessarily, beings of a biological nature, of this account of person and personal identity will be discussed.

2. ANIMALISM

To understand the Animalist position we can begin by considering David Wiggins' "animal attribute view" of personhood. According to Wiggins, persons should be understood in the following way:

x is a person if and only if *x* is an animal falling under the extension of a kind whose typical members perceive, feel, remember, imagine, desire, make projects, move themselves at will, speak, carry out projects, acquire a character as they age, are happy or miserable, are susceptible to concern for members of their own or like species [...] [note carefully these and subsequent dots], conceive of themselves as perceiving, feeling, remembering, imagining, desiring, making projects, speaking [...], have, and conceive of

themselves as having, a past accessible in experience-memory and a future accessible in intention [...] etc. (Wiggins 1980: 171).¹

Now, from the Animalist position, the important part of Wiggins' account of personhood is that what a person is must be determined through relating it to a natural kind where it is stated what persons fundamentally are (Wiggins 1980: 171). We can rephrase this demand into the language of sortal terms and sortal concepts. The idea, then, is that it is only by letting an object fall under a sortal concept that a particular object can become a part of our experience as being a "this such". That is, to individuate an object is done by classifying it as a "this such", that is letting the object fall under the extension of a sortal concept *S* and doing this is to give an answer to the *what is it*-question. We thereby determine what sort or kind of object it is that we have an experience of.

Now, given this, Animalism requires of us, i.e. individuals such as you and I, that we consider some basic and obvious facts concerning ourselves. First of all, it is an acknowledged fact, a point which does not even seem to be in need of being mentioned, that individuals like you and I are persons. According to John Locke, 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 [...]" (Locke 1975: 335; ch. XXVII). And that both you and I satisfy this Lockean definition is not unproblematic. While reading these sentences you have rational thoughts, you are making certain plans for tomorrow and remember certain events in your own past.² In this sense, both you and I are rational and thinking beings who perceive ourselves to have a history, and we thus are *persons*.

But secondly, another obvious fact is that we, besides being persons, are also members of the natural kind, *Homo Sapiens*. While you are reading this sentence your heart is pumping blood around your body, your brain is sending out and receiving information from different parts of your body, the digestive system of your body is constantly in action, as well as your respiratory system. And, ordinarily conceived, all of these functions of the biological organism, or the animal, are functions that you have, though you are unaware of some of them.

¹ It is important to notice that some Animalists might not accept the later part of this specification of personhood on the ground that whether an animal has certain psychological capacities or not is irrelevant to the question of what he is fundamentally.

² In this and the following argument I do intend "you" to be a generalized possible reader, including you, me and any human being with ability to read and understand written language

That is, not only are we persons, we are also animals (of the sort *Homo Sapiens*) where animal stands for objects of biological natural kinds K with internal evolutionary based “life-supporting processes”, in the sense that individual objects of the kind K are teleologically self-directed and self-organised objects sustaining their own dynamic stability both in relation to their surroundings and their internal structure (Olson 1997: 127), and that the biological natural kind concept K is a relational concept in that the internal structure of an individual object of kind K is relationally dependent upon the internal structure of the other objects of kind K, for instance evolutionary dependency.³ This internal structure of the biological natural kind consists in certain empirical law-like principles constraining the specific development and history of individual members of the kind. For instance, an individual horse develops from being a foal to a fully grown up horse due to the existence of certain inherent biological processes in the object, and the same biological processes prevent the object from passing through certain changes. These law-like principles constraining the development and history of an animal contain both conceptual and empirical elements. For instance, while it is a priori true that horses are biological organisms and hence that an individual horse must persist as a biological organism, it is an empirical matter what biological processes are required for a biological organism to be, and preserve, a horse. Thus, the biological processes associated with *Horse* need not be conceptually transparent in an analysis of the term ‘horse’. To specify what it is to be a horse requires certain empirical investigations which, once carried out, constrain which objects in the world can belong to the sort *Horse*.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that a certain degree of individual variation of the morphological as well as the deep level structure is possible since human being and animal are relational concepts. A three-legged horse is no less a horse than a four-legged horse. Animals continue to belong to the natural kind in virtue of a causal and evolutionary chain leading back to a typical individual member of the kind. In this sense, something is a horse, not in virtue of having certain necessary individual features, or morphological features, but in virtue of

³ This idea rests upon a distinction between individual concepts and relational concepts. If a concept is an individual concept, then an object falls under it wholly in virtue of the object itself having the properties associated with the concept. If a concept is a relational concept, then an object falls under it in virtue of the object standing in a certain relation to an other individual object which falls under the concept and which has the properties normally associated with the concept.

standing in a causal and evolutionary relation to an individual who belongs to the kind horse.

But this implies that it is true that I am an animal, and it is true that I am a person, and hence, that I am at least as much an animal as I am a person (Snowdon 1990), and that we can formulate the following first claim of Animalism:

A1. "Animal" is a fundamental sortal term applicable to individuals such as you and I, and hence

A1'. We, individuals such as you and I, are fundamentally animals.

However, Animalism further claims that we are fundamentally animals, not persons. This is showed, according to Animalism, in virtue of the facts that (i) *person* and *human animal* have distinct persistence conditions associated with them, and (ii) I persist in virtue of the persistence conditions I have *qua* the animal that I am. Consider, for instance, a "vegetative state"⁴: Suppose, that my cerebral cortex is damaged as a result of a terrible accident and that I thereby lose all my higher mental capacities. They are, let us say, irretrievably lost. Now, while the cerebral cortex is destroyed, it is still possible that certain sub-cortical parts of the brain, for instance, the thalamus, basal ganglia, brainstem and the cerebellum, continue to fulfil their functions. These lower parts of the brain sustain respiration, metabolism, circulation and digestion, and these functions can be fulfilled many years after the irretrievable loss of higher mental functions.

Given this, Animalism claims that after the accident we have, at least, a human animal that elapsed into a vegetative state. Something is still alive, since all the lower neurological functions are intact. What this something lacks is the higher cognitive functions, such as thinking and consciousness. That is, in the vegetative state we seem to be stuck with me being a human animal without mental functions. Now, Animalism concludes that I am the animal in the vegetative state. The only alternative to this claim is to maintain that I, at some point in the process of mental deprivation, cease to exist and I am replaced by a numerically distinct animal. But this idea just seems absurd. On the one hand, the sub-cortical functions are continuous between me before the accident and the human animal in the vegetative state, but also because the human animal in the vegetative state will have all of my physical characteristics.

⁴ A second example indicating that "person" and "human being" are different from each other is the fact that we do not seem to count a human foetus as a person, though we do count it as a human being. This is the "foetus case".

Furthermore, the human animal in the vegetative state will receive attention and care by my loved ones. All of this strongly indicates that I am that human animal, and that I have lost all of my higher mental capacities. But, claiming that I, as I am in the vegetative state, am a person is not equally straightforward according to Animalism (Olson 1997: 17). The reason for this is that I no longer satisfy the capacity specification clause of the animal attribute view. The individual existing in the vegetative state simply has no features of its own which could distinguish it as being a person from being a non-person. This implies that *person* and *human animal* do not have the same persistence conditions.

But, furthermore, Animalism can also give an account of why *person* and *human animal* have different persistence conditions. The simple reason is that individuals such as us, i.e. you and I, persist in virtue of being the animal we are and that we are only contingently persons. This is showed by the following argument: I, as a person, have psychological and social capacities — I think, talk, refer, reflect upon my own existence, laugh, have empathy towards others, etc. But, Paul Snowdon (1990: 91) has claimed that the same psychological and social capacities can be attributed to the human being that I am. To assume otherwise would imply that the statement “I am an animal” could not be settled by empirical facts, and would not express an empirical truth. But, as a matter of fact, “I am an animal” seems to express an empirical truth, and, therefore, one would have to assume that animals can be the subjects of psychological and social attributes. Furthermore, the most reasonable account of how animals can be the subject of psychological and social attributes is through basing the capacities in the evolutionary caused internal biological law-like principles of the animals, where a primary significance should be attributed to the central nervous system and the brain of the animals. In this sense, my mental sphere is a causally emergent feature of my neuro-physiological structure, and the general structure of my central nervous system is due to the fact that I am a member of the kind *Homo Sapiens*. That is, I have a certain neuro-physiological structure in virtue of being a human being with certain developmental law-like principles that is causally and evolutionarily related to other individual members of the same species. The reason for this is that (i) all other features of the animal are strictly biologically based, and (ii) there is no other real option, except some “miraculous unexplainable fact” for the fact that I have higher cognitive and social capacities.

Furthermore, given that I, *qua* human being, have my higher cognitive and social capacities due to my biological features, it seems unrea-

sonable to think that I, *qua* person, have the same higher cognitive and social capacities due to some other non-biological features. Why think the thoughts “I am a person” and “I am an animal” to have different origins, since we already know that I am both a person and an animal. One account being naturalistic and explainable, and one account being non-naturalistic and (at least hitherto) incomprehensible. What is more reasonable, is to hold that individuals such as you and I have the ability for having higher cognitive states founded in the evolutionary based biological internal structure of the animals that we are, and that we are persons as long as the biological structure supports higher cognitive and social capacities. Once we lose these capacities we no longer are persons, but we still persist as animals. Hence, the different persistence conditions for being a person and being an animal of the species *Homo Sapiens*.

But, the reason for them not to have the same persistence conditions is not that the person is distinct from the animal, but because not all sortal terms can be understood as equally good candidates for determining to what kind an object belongs (Wiggins 1990: 24–28). Certain sortal terms individuate an object through the longest prolongation of the object and are, because of this, semantically simple in the sense that the true attribution of them to an individual object is not dependent on whether other sortal terms are attributable to it (Lowe 1989: 30–31). These sortal terms we can call “substance sortal terms” (ibid.). Contrast-ed with substance sortal terms are so called “phase sortal terms” which are at best applicable to an object only during a part of the object’s whole existence (Wiggins 1990: 24–28). Phased sortal terms are semantically complex in that they are adjectival in relation to substance sortal terms (Lowe 1989: 30–31). The only way of grasping the meaning of a phased sortal term is by simultaneously grasping a substance sortal term which determines part of the meaning of the phased sortal term. This means that substance sortal terms are most suitable to determine what kind of object a certain object fundamentally is (Wiggins 1990: 24). And, according to Animalism, the concept *p e r s o n* does not determine any distinctive persistence conditions, since *p e r s o n* is not a substance sortal concept. *P e r s o n* is, according to this view, a phase sortal which picks out a certain phase of an object, and not what the object is fundamentally or essentially. Being a person is something one can be at one time, but not at another time, and an individual needs not cease to exist if it ceases to be a person (Snowdon 1996: 46; Olson 1997: 27). In this sense, the concept *p e r s o n* is of the same category as *i n f a n t* and *b a k e r*.

This means that Animalism upholds the view that individuating us as being persons is not the fundamental determination of what kind of ob-

jects we are. While it is true that we are persons, it is e s s e n t i a l l y true of us that we are animals, and that it is this latter sort which gives us the fundamental answer to what kind of objects individuals like you and I are. This means that we can formulate the following further claim of Animalism:

A2. The fundamental substance sortal term applicable to us is animal, not person, and hence:

A2'. We are fundamentally, or essentially objects of the sort animal, not person.

Animalists are also committed to accept the further claim that being the same animal is necessary and sufficient for the survival of individuals like you and I (Snowdon 1991: 111). That is, according to Animalism, is it not only a necessary feature of me that I am an animal, it is also impossible that I persist over time without continuing to be that animal, because the persistence conditions by which I survive, I do have in virtue of being an animal (Olson 1997: 18). Since Animalism claims that "person" is a phased sortal, asking ourselves what it takes for a person to persist through time, is on a par with asking what it takes for an infant or a baker to persist over time. It is, so to speak, not the determining of the existence of a substance, but only a feature of a substance. Since "person" is a phase sortal, we should not be surprised that a different kind of things could satisfy the conditions, whatever they are, for being persons. This implies that human persons are only one of several possible types of persons, and our, i.e. yours and mine, persistence conditions are persistence conditions that we have *qua* human beings, and it is possible that other kind of persons might have other persistence conditions (Olson 1997: 27).

The third and fourth claim of Animalism then consists in:

A3. The persistence conditions for individuals like you and I are the persistence conditions of the sort of Animal that we are.

A4. Different types of persons can have different persistence conditions.

This means, then, that the striking feature of Animalism is its denial that being a person is an essential property of a person, and that individuals like you and I are essentially human beings. Though it is true that you and I are persons, this is something which we are contingently. We might lose our personhood and still survive, but we cannot survive without being human animals.

3. CRITICISM OF THE IDEA THAT "PERSON" IS A PHASE SORTAL CONCEPT

Although Animalism has a strong case in favour of interpreting our identity conditions in relation to the Animals that we are, and hence, that we are animals of some kind, I do not think we should accept that "person" is a phase sortal term. What I want to claim is (i) that "person" is a basic individuating term of our conceptual scheme, and (ii) that semantic properties of proper names and indexicals entails that *person* is a substance sortal concept.

Firstly, according to Animalism, indexical terms such as "I", "you" and "we" fundamentally refer to the human animal, not to the person, and it is possible to determine what the identity over time of objects of our sort consists in without presupposing that we are persons (Snowdon 1996: 46). According to Animalism, individuals who are in all essential features 'like you and I' are essentially of the kind *Homo Sapiens*. But this means that whatever else "I" refers to it definitely refers to a person, since the term "I" cannot be understood in any other way than as referring to the individual determining the essential conditions of our identity. In establishing that we are human beings an individual also must have a certain kind of awareness, or consciousness of himself as being a conscious and thinking individual to whom it is appropriate to refer with the first-person pronoun "I". In this sense, the very act of individuating us as human beings is possible only if *person* is understood as a basic sortal concept. The argument is as follows: (i) Individuation of oneself as being a subject with mental characteristics is a necessary condition for being able to refer to oneself with the use of "I" in a referring expression. Examples of mental characteristics are experiences and states of consciousness like pain, emotion and thought. (ii) Furthermore, since the user of the first-person pronoun has individuated himself as being a subject who experiences things and who possesses states of consciousness, it should be meaningful for him to ascribe certain P-predicates to himself, and for others to ascribe P-predicates to him (Strawson 1959: 104). For instance, it should make sense for him to say such things as "I am in pain" and "I am depressed". This means that an individual who is able to individuate and refer to himself meaningfully can ascribe P-predicates to himself. (iii) But, further, by pain we simply do not intend a different meaning in a first person expression "I am in pain" and in a second- or third-person expression "Giordano Bruno is in pain" which implies that a necessary condition for the possibility of attributing P-predicates to oneself is that one also should be able to attribute the same predicates with the same

meaning to other individuals. P-predicates do not change their meaning when we attribute them to ourselves or to other individuals. (iv) But, the only way in which we can attribute P-predicates to others is by accepting that the concept *person* is a primitive individuating concept by which other individuals' behaviour is interpreted as the behaviour of consciously acting individuals, since nothing in the "pure" observation of an individual's body movement could force us to conclude that it is appropriate to ascribe P-predicates to that individual. (v) "I" cannot be a basic individuating term, since I then would not be able to distinguish between experiences being mine and experiences being somebody else's, and hence there would be no basis for ascribing P-predicates to other persons. This means that we can attribute P-predicates to the behaviour of an individual only because we presuppose that the behaviour is done by an experiencing and reflecting individual, i.e. a person. Consequently, the use of P-predicates in the first-person case relies upon the use of P-predicates in the second- and third-person cases. (vi) But since it is reasonable to assume that if there is a sort of object β , such that we cannot individuate objects of sort β without reference to objects of another sort, α , but we can individuate objects of sort α without reference to objects of sort β , then α -objects are more ontologically primitive than β -objects (Strawson 1959, 15). Since these latter cases of P-predicate ascriptions rely upon the concept *person*, this implies that the individuating use of "I" is logically dependent upon *person* and hence that the sortal term "person" is the most basic individuating term applicable to us. Since being an animal of the species *Homo Sapiens* cannot be individuated unless we have a prior individuation of being a person, then this implies that *person* should be understood as a basic sortal concept, i.e. a concept which is ontologically primitive in our conceptual scheme. It is even the case that we can claim that *person* is a synthetic a priori concept in our conceptual scheme of the world.

But, furthermore, given the semantic meaning of proper names and indexicals it is reasonable to understand "person" also as a substance sortal term. It is now, reasonable to assume that there exists a semantically significant meaning associated with proper names such that it is a necessary condition for a successful act of thinking of an object *a* with a proper name "*a*" that the user of "*a*" associates, with "*a*", the normally assumed sort *S* that *a* is individuated under. This means that a proper name has a meaning, or sense, associated with it which determines "what sort of individual its referent is" (Lowe 1989: 29). Imagine now the following scenario: You have a grandmother called Samantha. When Samantha has used the name "Samantha" and the indexical "I" to refer to,

and think of herself, she has primarily used them as referring to what she has individuated as being the person that she is. During your younger years you individuated Samantha as a person and you learned that “Samantha”, or “Grandmother” were names of a person. Furthermore, you learned that you were able to use “Samantha” or “Grandmother” to refer to the same object as Samantha herself did when using “Samantha” or “Grandmother”. Imagine now that Samantha, by a terrible accident, enters into a vegetable state where all her former higher cognitive capacities are gone forever. Though she cannot think, she still has her biological functions intact. She breaths by herself and digests as before the accident. What I want to claim now is that the individual lying at the hospital is still your grandmother, Samantha, and that that individual is a person. It is a person who has lost all her higher cognitive capacities, but nevertheless, she is a person, since the individual lying at the hospital is still referred to by the name “Grandmother” and “Samantha”. You say such things as “I am going to visit Grandmother tomorrow”, “I wonder whether Grandmother is getting any better?” and “My Grandmother’s name is Samantha, and she is lying at such and such a hospital”. Other persons, for instance, the personnel at the hospital, speak about your grandmother as “Samantha in room twenty-four had low blood-pressure this morning!” and “Why do not the grandchildren of Samantha visit her more often?”

This use of language is common, and since a successful reference of the term “Samantha” or “Grandmother” in those circumstances to a particular object rely upon that object being a person, this means that “person” should be understood as a substance sortal term. That is, it is essential for the term “person” that being a person is an essential property of an object. Ceasing to be a person is, for a person, the same as ceasing to exist, and a person continuous to exist as long as he or she is a p e r s o n. What all of this shows us is that we, even though we are essentially animals of the species *Homo Sapiens*, also are essentially persons. We have to individuate ourselves as persons, and we have to be persons as long as we stay in existence. Hence, “person” is a basic substance sortal term.

4. PERSON AS A BASIC SUBSTANCE SORTAL TERM

So far we have shown that persons such as you and I are animals, and that we persist in virtue of being the animals we are. We have also shown that, though we are animals, we are also persons and that “person” is a basic substance sortal term. How, then, should we understand this account?

What I would like to propose is an account in which “person” is understood as a basic substance sortal term, which functions as a cross-classificatory term picking out a *substantial sort* of object in the world.⁵ According to this account, persons are, by necessity, animals, but different persons might belong to different kinds of animals. Let us start by establishing two obvious facts. Firstly, the only plausible account of the concept *person* is to understand it as a concept derived from actual persons in the world. The reason for this is that the application of the concept *person* to ourselves is basic in the sense that an individual object who knows he is falling under the concept must presuppose the concept *person*, and that this presupposing of the concept *person* implies that the only possible way of acquiring the concept *person* is through a direct relation to one or several particular instances falling under the concept. In this sense, the concept *person* is like a natural kind concept in that we have the concept in question in virtue of standing in a particular causal relation to one or several actual objects falling under it.

The second obvious fact is that we, the individuals for whom “person” is centred around, are animals. If something is a person, then, by necessity, it must, in the relevant way, be similar to us in all relevant ways, since we are the paradigmatic instances of what a person is. This means that whatever “person” refers to, it must refer to individuals who are similar to you and I. But as already pointed out in relation to Animalism it is reasonable to assume that we have the higher cognitive and social capacities normally associated with personhood due to some form of biological features of our humanness. But this means that we can reasonably claim that you and I are persons because we are human beings, and that we are human beings in virtue of being subjects of certain empirical law-like principles ordering and structuring the development of our lives. And, furthermore, since individuals like you and I are paradigmatic persons and we are persons in virtue of possessing a certain basic internal biological constitution causing us to have features normally associated with personhood, it is also reasonable to assume that the same basic biological constitution should be found in all persons.

But since it is unreasonable to think that individuals such as you and I have exactly the same character traits typically associated with

⁵ The idea that person is a basic sortal which picks out a basic sort of object goes back to P. F. Strawson’s idea of certain particulars being basic in our conceptual scheme, and E. J. Lowe’s understanding of “person” as being one of those sortals which is presupposed for the understanding of other concepts in our conceptual scheme. See STRAWSON (1959: 15–134) and LOWE (1989: 129–131).

persons, it also seems to be unreasonable to maintain that we must have exactly the same internal constitution. For instance, while it is reasonable that our notion of “the typical person” involves the idea of an object with perception, memory, intentions, emotions, reflections and the capacity for social interaction with other objects with similar capacities, it does not seem to be required that all individual persons must have all of these properties. An individual person is a person in virtue of being a member of a biological kind whose internal constitution is such that it explains the possession of typical properties of persons. This means that the concept *person* is a relational concept like natural kind concepts, and that certain variations of the important internal structure are allowed as long as the object is related to a typical instance of the concept *person*, i.e. an individual with certain higher cognitive and social capacities. This means that we do not have to think that it is only human beings who are persons. The required similarity to human beings of *person* specified in the above clauses can be interpreted in a liberal way which implies that it is an open question whether there are any kinds of animals, except human beings, that are persons. But if these animals are persons, it is in virtue of having an internal constitution similar to human beings in that it sustains higher cognitive and social capacities similar to those of human beings. For instance, it might turn out to be the case that dolphins or certain higher primates are persons. If these species of animals are such that a fully developed individual of the kind can perceive, feel, remember, have concern for members of their own or like species, can reflect upon their perceptions, feelings, memories, and experience their own existence through time as containing a past and a future, etc., then these animals most likely are persons. As long as the object is an animal, a biological organism, of a kind whose typical members possess the same kind of higher cognitive social capacities as human beings possess, then there are good reasons to suppose that that object is a person.⁶ But it is important to remember that this principle only provides us with *prima facie* good reasons for assuming that animals of the kind *K* are persons. It can always be defeated by further evidence pointing against animals of kind *K* being persons. The reason for this is that *person* is an open-ended concept, since we simply cannot specify what necessary and sufficient higher cognitive and social char-

⁶ A more far fetched example would be a group of animals, absolutely distinct from human beings, from another planet, satisfying the required characteristics for being a person.

acteristics individuals like you and I necessarily possess *qua* persons.⁷ Hence, the following five principles can be formulated:

- (i) *A c t u a l i t y*: Individuals like you and I are persons;
- (ii) *N e c e s s i t y*: If x is a person, then x is an animal;
- (iii) *E x t e n s i o n*: If x is a person and x is an animal of the kind K , then all individuals of the kind K are persons;
- (iv) *E s s e n t i a l i t y*: If K is a kind of animal whose members are persons, then the internal constitution of K would, if completely specified, give an account of the possession of a fully developed individual of the kind to have cognitive and social capacities similar to u s, human being;
- (v) *E x p a n s i o n*: If K is a kind of animal with an internal constitution which would, if completely specified, give an account of the possession of a fully developed individual of the kind to have cognitive and social capacities similar to u s, i.e., human beings, then we have good reasons to suppose that animals of the kind K are persons.

So far we have reasons to think that you and I are persons, and that we are persons because we are human beings with certain internal law-like principles structuring our lives. We further have shown that we have reasons to think, given that you and I are persons, that all other human beings are also persons, and that other animals might be persons if they belong to a kind which internal constitution explains the fact that they have higher cognitive and social capacities similar to those exhibited by human beings.

Given this, it is reasonable to assume that individual persons have a self-sustaining unity due to the fact that persons are subject to certain law-like principles which inhere in the persons themselves, just like biological natural kinds do. There are certain changes which are compatible with the preservation of an individual person, and some that are not. But, though “person” resembles a biological natural kind term in that there are law-like principles determining possible alterations in individuals falling under the term, this does not imply that “person” is a natural kind term. The reason for this is that “person” is not the name of a species in the way that “horse” or “cow” is a name of a species. Species names refer to substantial kinds, i.e. are the names of kinds

⁷ What we can do is to create a list of important features, similar to the “capacity clause” of the animal attribute view, normally associated with human beings, but where no individual capacity of the list is absolutely necessary, nor sufficient, for personhood. See WIGGINS (1980: 171) and two of the present articles.

whose objects belong to the kind wholly in virtue of laws that are distinctive for the kind in question. For instance, a horse belongs to the species *Horse* in virtue of having certain distinctive law-like principles which differ from the law-like principles of what makes an individual a cow. *Person*, on the other hand, is what we can call a *substantial sort*, where *substantial sort* satisfy the following criteria:

A sort *S* is a substantial sort if:

- (i) *S* is a substance sort (i.e., something being of the sort *S* cannot cease to be of sort *S* without ceasing to exist);
- (ii) individual objects of the sort *S* exist and persist in virtue of belonging to a substantial kind *K* with distinctive law-like principles governing the lives of objects of *K*;
- (iii) *S* is a sort of enduring object;
- (iv) there exists a set of properties based upon the internal constitution of a certain kind *K*, *E* such that, necessarily, something is of sort *S* if and only if it has *E*.

That is, objects of a substantial sort have their existence and persistence-conditions in virtue of belonging to a substantial kind, where the laws determining the possible lives of objects of the substantial kind entail a set of properties which explains that objects of the substantial kind belong to a substantial sort. In this sense, a person exists and persists in virtue of belonging to a substantial kind with distinctive laws structuring objects of the substantial kind. But a person has also a mind-independent unity which explains the fact that he belongs to the substantial sort *Person*. In this sense, our concept *person* is construed in such a way that individuals from several different kinds could fall under *person*. In that way *person* is a cross-classificatory concept akin to a biological natural kind concept in that it picks out a mind-independent sort of object without picking out a determinate biological species (Wiggins 1980: 172).⁸ Individual persons are, according to this account, objects of certain *biological kinds*, and *person* should be understood as picking out a *biological substantial sort*.

⁸ In this way *person* is both similar and dissimilar to the concept *vegetable*. The similarity between *person* and *vegetable* is that both concepts, a cross-classificatory concepts, cluster together objects from different natural kinds. The dissimilarity of *person* and *vegetable* is, on the other hand, that *vegetable* is a concept that is clearly functionally defined in relation to human beings, whereas *person* should be understood as picking out a primitive substantial sort of objects.

E. J. Lowe has argued that “person” cannot refer to a biological substantial sort. Assume there exists an unknown kind of amphibian, *bolgs* (Lowe 1989: 16) and that *bolgs* satisfy the normally associated features of personhood. They are as strong a case of persons as human beings are. But Lowe’s point is now that *bolgs*, if they are persons, cannot be subjected to the same biological law-like principles as human beings (Lowe 1989: 16–20). For instance, since they are amphibians we can assume that *bolgs* survive having gills and a tail as opposed to having lungs and legs. But that is not an admissible alteration for a human being. The problem is that *person*, as a biological sort with its distinctive laws of development, either

[...] permit the change from having gills and a tail to having lungs and legs or they do not permit it. If they do, then it follows, absurdly, that an individual human being can survive the change *qua* person but cannot survive it *qua* member of *Homo Sapiens*. If they do not, then it follows, equally absurdly, that an individual *bolg* cannot survive the change *qua* person but can survive it *qua* *bolg* (Lowe 1989: 20).

What Lowe is overlooking though, is that there might very well, since *person* is a biological concept in the sense that something is a person in virtue of belonging to a biological substantial kind, be a uniform explanation of why individuals belonging to some biological substantial kinds are persons while individuals belonging to other kinds are not. This uniform explanation, which might be knowable or not would (i) link mental phenomena to the neuro-physiological structures which cause them, and (ii) determine what kind of biological complexity and organisation an animal must possess in order to be sufficiently complex to cause mental capacities normally associated with persons. This, though, does not imply that we have reasons to suppose only human beings to be persons. Other kinds of animals may also be persons, but if they are persons, then they are so in virtue of having a biological set-up resembling that of human beings in relevant respects, a biological set-up which explains why these kinds of animals typically have the capacities characteristic of persons.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper started with the objective to formulate an account of personhood from how we basically use the term “person” in our understanding of the world. And it has been argued that thinking of ourselves as persons has important consequences for understanding the concept *per-*

s o n. It is claimed that if we seriously consider our ordinary understanding of persons, i.e. its role in our self-understanding and understanding of the world, we will find that it works as a synthetic a priori of our conceptual scheme of the world. In this sense, (i) *p e r s o n* is a basic substance sortal concept by which we have to individuate ourselves and others. We simply cannot but understand ourselves as persons. It is further argued that our ordinary understanding of ourselves implies (ii) that persons such as us are, by necessity, human beings. And combining (i) and (ii) with (iii) that “person” is a natural kind similar term in that its reference and meaning is based upon u s as paradigmatic instances of it, implies that persons, by necessity, are beings of a biological nature, which in its turn has as a consequence (iv) that *p e r s o n* must be understood as a *s u b s t a n t i a l s o r t*. We might say, then, that being a person is nothing over and about being an animal of some particular kind, and that experiencing oneself as a person is nothing over and about the inner experience of the life of the animal one is.

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