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978-0-521-42245-1 - Human Beings
Edited by David Cockburn
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Introduction

DAVID COCKBURN

The papers in this volume, or earlier versions of them, were delivered at the Royal Institute of Philosophy conference on 'Human Beings' which was held at St David's University College, Lampeter in July 1990. It was hoped that this theme would provide a focus for discussion of a range of philosophical issues—in particular in the philosophy of mind and ethics—which, while deeply connected, are often treated in relative isolation from each other. Linked with this hope was the idea that the notion of a 'human being' is not one that has, in recent philosophy, been given the attention that it deserves. The relation of each of these papers to that theme creates a number of strong threads running through the volume. This is combined, however, with some radical divergences of views. In this introduction I will try to bring out both the continuities of theme and the differences in approach.

A number of the contributors to this volume are united in thinking that the notion of a human being *is* of crucial importance in our thought. This marks their views off from ways of thinking which have a strong hold in much contemporary philosophy. It is, for example, sometimes argued that to give the notion of a human being a fundamental position in our moral thought is to be guilty of a bias which is closely akin to racial prejudice. Again, it is suggested that there is no difficulty in supposing that an artificially created being—a being not born of human parents—should be a 'person', having the capacity for the full mental life of a normal human being. Finally, it is assumed that my thinking is only clear in so far as it is unconditioned by the fact that I live the life of a human being. In challenging these three, closely linked, ideas the papers by Cora Diamond, Christopher Cherry and Raimond Gaita insist that the notion of a human being is of fundamental importance. The responses, by David McNaughton and Oswald Hanfling, to the first two of these papers call for some qualification of that claim. The papers by Geoffrey Madell and Stephen Clark, on the other hand, call for an outright rejection of it.

The character of the relationships between the notion of a 'person', the notion of a 'human being', and the notion of an 'animal of the species homo sapiens' is of central importance to these issues. A series of particularly striking contrasts in approach to this can be seen in a number of the papers. In taking it to be clear that I am something other

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than the extended, tangible being in the publicly observable world, the views of Madell and Clark stand in sharp contrast to those of Diamond, Lowe and Snowdon. Yet the contrasts between the views of the latter three contributors are in some ways just as striking. While he believes that there are objections which still need to be answered, Snowdon is inclined to say that a person is an animal of a certain kind. Diamond and Lowe both reject that view. A crucial difference in the *way* in which they do so emerges, however, in their radically different understandings of the importance of the fact that something is a human being.

It is quite widely thought that Christianity is clearly incompatible with the suggestion that the notion of a human being is of fundamental importance in that it is incompatible with any picture of ourselves as essentially embodied beings. The papers by Fergus Kerr and John Haldane examine this suggestion. Both argue, though in rather different ways, that, far from requiring the Cartesian picture of a person as an entity quite distinct from the human being, Christianity provides the resources for a fundamental critique of such views.

The topic of 'personal identity' has had an important place in the philosophy of mind of the last twenty or thirty years. The papers by Snowdon, Madell, Hertzberg, Clark, Wilkes and Dilman are linked in one way or another with this issue. (Though it is important to recognize that significantly different issues may be being raised under that head.) Two general themes which run through this group of papers deserve to be highlighted. First, Madell, Clark and Dilman all stand in opposition to the strongly third person approach which characterizes much recent philosophy of mind; there are, however, fundamental differences in the *kind* of priority which they give to the first person point of view. Second, Snowdon, Madell and Hertzberg all give a central place to a theme raised in a recent book by Kathleen Wilkes: that of the role which thought experiments can play in a philosophical investigation of the kind of beings that we are.

* * *

We normally draw a fairly fundamental distinction between human beings and all other beings, animate or inanimate. No doubt it is pretty well universally agreed that certain kinds of sensation, belief and emotion can be ascribed to all but the very lowest forms of animal life, and, with this, that certain of the obligations which we owe to other human beings we owe, at least in some form, to non-human species. Nevertheless, we draw some fundamental distinctions. We do not hold funerals for sheep; indeed, many of us eat them. Looking in a rather different direction, while some may speak without any sense of incongruity of computers as 'thinking', few, I suppose, are tempted to ascribe, say,

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depression to their personal computer in quite the way in which they do to other human beings. Now it is often suggested that the existence of such distinctions in our thought stands in need of rational defence; or, alternatively, that certain developments could undermine them. Two of the symposia explore such challenges to the distinctive place which the notion of a human being now has in our thought.

Christopher Cherry and Oswald Hanfling consider the question of whether we could ascribe sentience to, and describe as a 'person', an artificially produced being that was not made of flesh and blood. Both suggest, in opposition to certain strong currents in much philosophy of mind, that the possibility of doing so would depend on the fact that the being we are dealing with has the human bodily form and behaves as human beings do. Cherry, however, argues that this is clearly not enough, that we would be strongly pulled in opposite directions in our reaction to such artificially produced beings, and that if we did speak of them as 'persons' this would represent a massive, and grotesque, shift in our thought. Hanfling argues in opposition to this that facts about the origin and internal materials of these beings would be no reason for thinking of them differently, and that we would, in fact, find it impossible *not* to treat them as people. In defending his position Hanfling suggests that there is a crucial contrast to be drawn between the notion of a human being in the biological sense and that of a being 'who looks and behaves like a human being, engages our sympathy, respect and resentment, is held responsible for what he says and does, and so forth'.

It has been argued, for example by Michael Tooley, that the notion of a 'human being' is responsible for serious confusion in our moral thought in that it has two faces.[1] On the one hand, it serves to identify something as a member of a particular biological species; on the other, it carries the suggestion that a being demands a certain kind of respect from us. Since there is no reason to hold that these go together we should, if we wish to avoid confusion, use the term 'human being' exclusively in the biological sense and employ the term 'person' when we want to indicate that a being has a certain moral status. Some of those who argue in this way would place 'having the human form' in the 'merely biological' category. In stressing the importance which the human form has in our relations with others Hanfling distances himself from suggestions of that kind. He does, however, speak of the particular origin that we have as a 'biological', hence not morally significant, feature of us.

In insisting that the notion of a human being is of fundamental importance in ethics, Cora Diamond is making a more radical break

[1] See, for example, Michael Tooley, 'Abortion and Infanticide', in Peter Singer (ed.) *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 60–62.

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with the tradition represented by Tooley. One of her principal targets is the idea that we must draw a contrast between the biological properties of human beings, which it is claimed cannot possibly be of moral relevance, and non-biological properties, such as our capacity for reasoning or self-consciousness, which, while they may be morally relevant, are not found in all human beings and could be found in members of non-human species. Diamond points out that such an approach may conflict violently with our understanding of how, for example, the mentally retarded are to be thought of and treated. She challenges the thinking behind the contrast appealed to here by suggesting that the notion of the human which is relevant in this context must be understood, as she puts it, 'not in a biological sense, but imaginatively'.

While not disputing Diamond's suggestion that the notion of a human being is important in ethics, McNaughton defends a very different view of the *kind* of importance that it has. Diamond insists that we do not need a ground for, say, treating the severely retarded human being quite differently from the chimpanzee. By contrast, McNaughton argues that we *do* need such a ground, and, further, that the ground can be provided. The *justification* for giving the special treatment that we do to the severely retarded human being is found in the fact that he or she has suffered a terrible loss: the loss of distinctively human capacities. This justification, McNaughton points out, appeals ultimately to the *biological* fact that the individual belongs to a certain species. He insists, however, that this need have none of the unacceptable moral implications which have worried some.

In his contribution E. J. Lowe defends the view that a person is a 'psychological substance': a concrete individual thing which is distinct from the biological substance that is his or her body, and yet which does have corporeal characteristics. In defending this view Lowe criticizes two currently popular rival accounts of what a person is. The first is the view that persons are a kind of animal; the second the view that a person is in some sense 'constituted by mental states'. The suggestion that persons are a kind of animal, Lowe argues, runs into very serious difficulties unless we hold that human beings are the only persons that there could be; and *that* claim, he suggests, is 'not only morally repugnant and dangerously arrogant, but also symptomatic of a philosophically inadequate imagination'. Lowe argues further that what is crucial to being a person is the possession of certian psychological characteristics and that there is no reason why these characteristics should not be associated with an inorganic or wholly artefactual body.

These strands in Lowe's discussion link his paper strongly with the two preceding symposia. In particular, his worry about anthropocentrism can be contrasted with Diamond's insistence that the notion of

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a human being is of crucial significance within moral thought, and with Cherry's suggestion that if we come to speak of human-like artefacts as 'persons' then our use of that term will have 'massively—and in my view grotesquely and deplorably—shifted'. Yet, while it is clear that there are serious tensions between these contributions, the relationships between the three approaches are complex. For, on the one hand, Lowe's version of the thesis that a person is a 'psychological substance' is, as he insists, quite consistent with the claim that the person is the being in the world that can be seen and touched by others; and, on the other, Diamond insists that there is a crucial distinction between the notion of a human being and that of a biological organism of a certain structure.

Lowe's argument against the claim that persons are a kind of animal turns in part on the following suggestion: the circumstances in which we could say that a particular *person* has survived some change are not the same as those in which we could say that this particular *animal*—this member of the species *homo sapiens*—has done so. P. F. Snowdon is sympathetic to 'animalism' but acknowledges that there may be difficulties at this point. His paper is an examination of what he takes to be the most serious of these difficulties. It is widely assumed that it is in principle possible for a person's brain to be transplanted into another body and that if this was done 'the subject (or self) would go with the brain'. Since we clearly cannot say that the animal goes with the brain, we must distinguish between the person and the animal. Snowdon considers a number of possible replies to this argument, focusing in particular on recent attempts by Mark Johnston and Kathleen Wilkes to show that this *method* of argument—that which appeals to thought experiments—is misguided. While concluding that none of these arguments succeeds, he closes with a sketch of another possible line of defence for the animalist.

The acceptability of arguments which appeal to thought experiments is also central to the symposium between Geoffrey Madell and Lars Hertzberg. Madell's paper is a defence of the claim that no view which identifies the person with some 'item in the objective world' can possibly be correct. We will fail to see this, Madell argues, if we focus exclusively on the third person point of view. For it is the first person perspective which creates the following two difficulties for such views. First, there are things that I can imagine for myself—for example, I can imagine having been born earlier or later—which would be unintelligible if I were a certain kind of object in the public world. Second, there is no possible answer to the question: what is it for something which is *merely* an item in the objective world to be me? Madell concludes that the idea that the notion of a human being should be central to our thought about persons is radically flawed, or, as he also expresses it,

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'there is no way of entertaining the possibility, that "I" and its objective setting are anything but contingently connected'.

Madell suggests (in ways which partially converge with Snowdon's treatment of this point) that Johnston's and Wilkes' objections to arguments which appeal to thought experiments are misconceived. In his response to Madell's paper Lars Hertzberg offers other grounds for doubt about this method of argument. While not denying that I can imagine, for example, having been born in a different time and place, with quite different characteristics, and so on, Hertzberg suggests that this fact cannot be used in a philosophical argument to establish conclusions about what a person is. For a particular exercise of the imagination is something that takes place against a particular background of concern. (In this case, for example, it might be connected with a feeling of gratitude.) There is no answer, in the abstract, to the question 'Can this be imagined?' and so no room, in abstraction from a particular background of concern, for claims of the form 'I could have been born at a different time and place'. Hertzberg goes on to suggest that we should distinguish arguments which appeal to the imagination in this way from the appeal to 'thought experiments': the idea that considering how we would speak of the identity of people if our lives were very different in certain respects can show us something about 'our concept of personal identity'. This idea also, however, involves a confusion since it is an illusion to think that there is a 'definite answer to the question what, in a different set of circumstances, would constitute going on using our expressions with their present meaning'.

In his discussion of thought experiments Snowdon writes: 'The normal view about language is that we have conferred upon its terms an interpretation in such a way that determines them as true of or false of certain merely possible (but non-actual) situations.' This is what Hertzberg is rejecting when he suggests that 'The structure we take ourselves to be exploring by the aid of thought experiments is one I have been arguing does not exist.' If Hertzberg's arguments are accepted they would appear to have important implications not only for Madell's paper but also for those by Snowdon, Lowe, Cherry and Hanfling; and, further, for most of the recent literature on personal identity (and, perhaps, considerably more besides.)

Hertzberg's approach to these questions is, as he notes, closely linked with what Raimond Gaita, in his paper, calls 'the possession of sense'. The notion of a human being does, however, enter Gaita's argument at a point different from that stressed in most of the previous papers. (Though Gaita's concerns are directly linked with a question addressed by McNaughton: 'Is the moral point of view essentially a human point of view?') The emphasis in Gaita's discussion is not, as with Hertzberg, on the way in which a certain form of argument can *lead* to particular

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conclusions about what I am, but, rather, on the way in which a certain form of argument, in particular, that which Descartes employs in the *Meditations*, can *reflect* a view of what I am. We see the picture that is at work here in the way in which Descartes asks us to take seriously suggestions—such as the suggestion that I may be dreaming—which would *not* be seriously entertained by anyone of sense. The possession of 'sense'—which is linked with the fact that we are beings of a certain bodily form and have a certain way of life—is, then, being represented by Descartes as external to our nature as thinking beings. Thus, Descartes is asking us to suppose that it is accidental to our nature as thinking beings that we are 'beings who live a particular kind of life, in our case, the life of human beings'.

Why is it that the Cartesian picture of the thinking subject as 'a purely rational, disengaged and timeless entity', only contingently linked with the world of extended and tangible things, has the hold that it does on our imagination? Fergus Kerr's paper opens with an examination of Heidegger's answer to this question. Heidegger argues that it is the influence of Christian conceptions of God, and of our relationship with Him, which are responsible. Kerr suggests, however, that the 'conceptions' (if any) at work here might have been *mis*conceptions and that the philosophical anthropology with which Heidegger replaces the Cartesian myth contains strongly Christian themes. Kerr emphasizes in particular the Christian notion of being *in* this world but not *of* it: a notion which he links with the New Testament sense 'of how the things of this world *matter* to human beings'.

John Haldane is also concerned to show that Christian doctrines need not lead to the confusions of Cartesian dualism. Having spelled out the difficulties which he sees in current approaches within the philosophy of mind, Haldane argues that reflection on the doctrine that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God became a man may open up new ways of understanding the kind of beings that *we* are. If we are to make any sense of this doctrine we must think in terms of a *single* subject of Divine and Human attributes. Applying this 'one person/two natures' formula within the philosophy of mind will lead to a view which avoids both Cartesianism and the idea that the existence of a particular person depends upon his being human. Taking as a model the way in which *Christ's* existence was not dependent on *his* being a man we can 'explain how a created person could be at one time a rational animal incarnate in an empirical medium, and at some later stage possibly be transfigured into a different mode of being'.

The final three papers in the volume discuss the notion of 'the self' within the context of cases in which there is a doubt whether the face which an individual presents to the world, and to himself, 'really is him'. In the first part of his paper Stephen Clark expresses scepticism

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about many of the claimed cases of individuals with multiple personalities. Quite apart from *that* scepticism, however, he has serious doubts about the suggestion that we should link the notion of 'the self' closely with that of 'the personality' and so conclude that in such cases, if they do exist, we should think in terms of several selves successively occupying a single human being. (His discussion here has close links with Lowe's treatment of the view that a person is a 'psychological mode'.) Now this claim would be consistent with a view which maintained that the person should be identified with the human being. Clark, however, goes on to argue that it is quite clear that this will not do and to offer an alternative, Plotinian, account. Central to Clark's worry here is his suggestion that no view which gives the fundamental position to the notion of a human being can leave room for the idea of the value of the individual person which is so important in our thinking. The reason it cannot is that, as Clark expresses it, 'there are no such things' as human beings: the class of 'human beings' is dependent on the values that *we have given* to particular portions of the world. (This step in Clark's thought should be placed alongside Kerr's observation that 'initially and normally—"proximally"—others are disclosed, as Heidegger says, "in concernful solicitude"'; and with the Appendix of Diamond's paper: for example, with her suggestion that 'what it is that we are talking about is shown in how we talk about it, and in how that talk enters our lives, the shape—the "face"—that life containing such talk has.')

In her response to Clark's paper Kathleen Wilkes argues that Clark's question—'How many selves make me?'—is misguided; for the notion of a 'self' has no useful role to play in philosophical discussions of these issues. We can describe (supposed) cases of multiple personalities entirely in terms of the notion of a 'person'. (But, it should be noted, Wilkes' discussion of this point involves an implicit appeal to a contrast between the notion of a 'person' and that of a 'human being'.) Wilkes allows that if suppositions of the kind discussed by Madell and Hertzberg—'I might have lived in the eighteenth century'—made sense, we would have to think in terms of a 'self-spark'; but we do not have compelling grounds for thinking that they do.

In his contribution İlham Dilman discusses Sartre's treatment of the notion of 'being oneself'. Dilman's approach is marked off from that of Wilkes in that he argues that the notion of 'the self' *does* have a crucial role to play in discussions of these issues. His understanding of what that role is is, however, quite different from that presented in Clark's paper. There is a question 'Who am I?' which may be asked, not by an amnesiac, but by a person who is 'trying to find himself'. Dilman rejects attempts to capture the sense of this question in terms of the notion of a 'self' conceived as an entity waiting to be found—as my lost watch is

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waiting to be found. The significance of this contrast is seen in the way in which the question 'Who am I?' is necessarily asked in the first person. To try to find oneself is to try to *make* of one's life something more genuine; not to try to locate something which is *given* to me independently of what I make of it. Thus Dilman argues that there is a crucial insight in Sartre's contrast between the idea of what makes a *person* the person he is and that of what makes an *object* the individual thing that it is. He also argues, however, that this insight becomes seriously distorted in Sartre's conclusion that a person can *never* be himself.

The language in which Dilman discusses these issues is, in many ways, close to that in which Madell speaks of 'personal identity'. Either, for example, might write: We cannot think of the self in purely objective, third person terms. But while those words, as written by Madell, would serve to indicate a fundamental disagreement with those contributors who give a central place to the notion of a human being, that cannot, I think, be said of the point that Dilman would be making. As with many of the papers in this volume, surface similarities or differences in verbal formulation may disguise the real relationships which hold between the views expressed.

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Machines as Persons?

CHRISTOPHER CHERRY

I

I begin, as I shall end, with fictions.

In a well-known tale, *The Sandman*,[1] Hoffmann has a student, Nathaniel, fall in love with a beautiful doll, Olympia, whom he has spied upon as she sits at a window across the street from his lodgings. We are meant to suppose that Nathaniel mistakes an automaton for a human being (and so a person). The mistake is the result of an elaborate but obscure deception on the part of the doll's designer, Professor Spalanzani. Nathaniel is disabused quite by accident when he overhears a quarrel between Spalanzani, who made Olympia's clockwork, and the sinister Coppelius, who contributed the eyes (real eyes, it seems).

His fellow students are not sure what to make of Olympia. They find her behaviour oddly disturbing, it is true; but it is far from clear that they are not likewise duped. Siegmund remarks that

> [S]he has appeared to us in a strange way rigid and soulless . . . She might be called beautiful if her eyes were not so completely lifeless. I could even say sightless. She walks with a curiously measured gait; every movement seems as if controlled by clockwork. When she plays and sings it is with the unpleasant soulless regularity of a machine, and she dances in the same way. We have come to find this Olympia quite uncanny; we would like to have nothing to do with her; it seems to us that she is only acting like a living creature, and yet there is some reason for that which we cannot fathom.[2]

[1] E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales of Hoffmann* (London: Penguin 1988).

[2] Hoffmann, ibid. 116. Grotesquely inappropriate transactions between human beings and artifacts are a significant theme in Fantastic and Surrealist literature and painting, and (like the present case) seem to be special applications of the idea of the inanimate *becoming* animate which is found everywhere in myth and fairytale. The audience attunes to the business with an unerring sense of epistemic pitch that baffled and enraged Rousseau. Discussing, in *Emile,* La Fontaine and Aesop, Rousseau wonders how we can possibly expect children to so much as grasp the idea of talking things: it's bad enough with animals. Worse still, the dish and the spoon speak the same language, and the same language as the cow.

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