Introduction

Profoundly important ethical issues turn on the question whether biological life is an essential and intrinsic aspect of a human person or is only an extrinsic instrument. Consider, for example, the controversy concerning abortion. A key issue, of course, is the status of the developing human embryo or fetus that is deliberately destroyed by induced abortion. If the human person is not a particular type of *organism*, then one could hold that a human organism begins to exist at one time while the human person begins to exist at a later time. If, however, a human person *is* (whatever else he or she may be) a particular type of organism, then whenever the human organism begins to exist that is the time that the human person begins to exist. Now, consider the issue at the other "edge of life," namely, euthanasia. Here the issue is the status of the severely debilitated and, perhaps, permanently unconscious or minimally conscious individual. A supporter of euthanasia might look at such an individual and say, "that's the same living organism that used to be grandfather, but that is not grandfather anymore." The assumption the euthanasia supporter is making is that the "person" is something distinct from the living human organism, albeit associated with it, namely, the consciousness or perhaps a spiritual entity. If we reject that assumption and regard the human person as a particular type of bodily being, a particular type of organism, then the living human individual remains grandfather – the person – and is entitled, from an ethical vantage point, to be treated as such, despite his debilitated condition.

The relationship between the personal and the biological is also important for central issues in the domain of sexual ethics. Does sexual intercourse only *symbolize* a personal union? In that case the personal union

itself would seem to be a purely spiritual reality (in essence only a union of wills or affections of the individuals), and demands on what structure the sexual act must take in order actually to symbolize union would have to be argued out extensively. If the biological is an intrinsic aspect of the human person, however, it might be that sexual intercourse does more, or can do more, than symbolize a union existing wholly in a different dimension of being; it may actualize or be an internal part of the union of bodily persons.

In this book we argue that human beings are physical, animal organisms, albeit essentially rational and free. We then examine the implications of this understanding of human beings for some of the most controversial issues in contemporary ethics and politics.

In Chapter 1 we provide positive evidence that human beings are animal organisms; that their personal identity across time consists in the persistence of the animal organisms they are; that they do endure through time (thus rejecting the perdurance theory of the human person, roughly, that a human person is a series of conscious experiences rather than a substance that endures through time); and that, as a consequence, the human person comes to be when the human animal organism comes to be, and the human person does not cease to be until the human animal organism dies.

In Chapter 2 we show that while human beings are animals, they are a specific kind of animal, and that there is a radical difference in kind between human beings and other animals. In this chapter we also show that the position that human beings are animals is fully compatible with holding that an aspect of the human being, that is, the rational-spiritual soul, transcends matter. We also show that our position on the nature of the human person is compatible with the one that the human soul is the sort of reality that could survive death and with the belief, held by faith by Christians and Jews, that there is a resurrection of the body at some point after death. (We do not enter the theological debate about whether, in fact, human persons will be resurrected. Our concern is merely to show the compatibility of our claim that human beings are rational-animal organisms with the Jewish and Christian belief that they will be.) In this chapter we also argue that this difference in kind (between us and other animals) grounds a moral obligation on our part to treat human beings in a way that is radically different from the way we may legitimately treat other beings that do not possess a rational nature, indeed, that we are morally obligated to give full moral respect to all human beings (irrespective of age, size, stage of development, or mental or physical condition) and

treat them, as Kant rightly said, always as ends and never as mere means only.

Chapter 3 shows that body–self dualism is exemplified in the ethical theory of hedonism and, in particular, in (both the ethical defense and actual practice of) hedonistic drug-taking. To show this, we examine the different types of hedonism and different types of pleasure. We explore many of the arguments against hedonism, propose our own specific argument against it, and explain the ways in which pleasure is good and the ways in which it is not.

Chapter 4 shows that the main defenses of abortion are based on an implicit body–self dualism. This chapter sets out some of the embryological evidence which shows that human embryos and fetuses are human beings, provides philosophical evidence that from conception onward they are persons with full moral worth, and argues that since the parents have a special responsibility to care for their children, intentional abortion, even if in rare cases it is not intentional killing, is morally wrong (though there are rare cases in which it is not wrong intentionally to perform an act that one knows or believes will cause fetal death as a side effect).

Chapter 5 shows how the euthanasia debate, in many ways, mirrors the abortion debate, explains why euthanasia or assisted suicide is morally wrong, clarifies the distinction between intentional killing, on the one hand, and causing death as a side effect, on the other hand, defends the proposition that human life itself is a basic good of human persons, and clarifies the criterion of death.

In Chapter 6 we defend the position that within marriage, the marital sexual act (when performed with morally upright intentions) is not a mere symbol of love or affection, nor a mere means to procreation (positions that reflect at least an implicit body–self dualism), but embodies or makes present the intrinsic human good of marital union, a union that is itself bodily as well as emotional and spiritual. We also argue that nonmarital sexual acts, such as masturbation, fornication, and sodomy, cannot actualize any basic human good and therefore involve instrumentalizing one's (and perhaps others') body (or bodies) for the sake of a mere experience (without the reality) of unity or for the sake of self-affirmation. Thus, in this chapter we examine what marriage is, how sexual acts contribute to the good of marriage, and show the immorality of nonmarital sexual acts, such as those mentioned earlier.

1

Human Beings Are Animals

Is biological life an essential and intrinsic aspect of a human person or are our bodies merely extrinsic instruments? Stated abstractly, the question may seem rather distant from matters of ethics and public affairs. In truth, however, as we indicated in the introduction, it is logically connected to several morally charged political issues.

In this chapter we defend the position that human beings are living, bodily entities, that is, organisms, and indeed animals. The first argument we present is a development of Aquinas's argument against Plato's position on the relation of the soul to the body.[1] The overall, main argument is as follows:

1. Sensing is a living, bodily act, that is, an essentially bodily action performed by a living being.
2. Therefore the agent that performs the act of sensing is a bodily entity, an animal.
3. But in human beings, it is the same agent that performs the act of sensing and that performs the act of understanding, including conceptual self-awareness.
4. Therefore, in human beings, the agent that performs the act of understanding (including conceptual self-awareness, what everyone refers to as "I") is a bodily entity, not a spiritual entity making use of the body as an extrinsic instrument.

Each of these steps in the argument will be explained more fully. The main development, however, will occur in providing support for the first

[1] See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Pt. I, q. 75, a. 1 and q. 76, a. 1.

premise, since substance dualists as well as proponents of the no-subject view (the position that the person is not an enduring substance at all but is a set of experiences united by memory and other psychological connections)[2] deny that premise.

I. Main Challenges to Establishing the First Premise

We shall present two arguments to defend the first premise (that sensation is a bodily act). In our first argument we shall begin by concentrating on sensation in *non*human animals (and then compare sensation in human beings to sensation in nonhuman animals.) Before doing that, however, we shall consider the main challenges to that first premise. There are, we believe, four theories about what a human being is which in various ways block acceptance of the proposition that sensation (whether in nonhuman animals or in human beings) is a bodily or organic act. Two theories of material entities go against this proposition: mechanism[3] and the position that the ultimate entities are events rather than substances (as in process philosophy, which may be called "eventism," or as in perdurantism).[4] And two theories of mind go against it: the no-subject view (the denial that there are enduring substances) and substance dualism (the identification of mind with an independent spiritual substance).

Observing nonhuman animals, most of us do not hesitate to say that these animals, that is, these complex, moving bodily entities, sense and adapt to their sensations. When we see a dog chase a rabbit or sniff out the place of a hidden bone, and observe that dogs have bodily structures similar to our eyes, ears, and noses, we understand that dogs see, hear, and smell. But there are various ways of denying this position, that is, various

[2] Also called "the bundle theory of the self." See, for example, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Person* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Chapters 10–13.

[3] That is, the view that there are no *composite* substances. What appear to be composite substances are, according to those holding this view, mere aggregates of simple substances (similar to a machine, and hence the term "mechanism").

[4] "Perdurantism" refers to the position that there are no substances that *endure* throughout time. What appear to be enduring substances are, according to this view, entities that have extension in time as part of their being (analogous to songs or baseball games, which are said to *perdure* rather than endure). For a general treatment: Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 201–232; a recent full-scale defense: Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). This theory is often adopted in the context of considering the question of the identity of *persons*, and so we treat the specific arguments for and against it in the context of considering personal identity across time. See Section VII.

ways of denying that sensation is an action attributable to a bodily animal as its subject, the different ways corresponding to the theories mentioned earlier.

First, someone might say that sensation is not a unitary action at all, but an aggregate of electrical and chemical reactions: a mechanist would take this sort of position. Second, someone might say that sensation is really a mental episode *associated with* the body (rather than an act performed by a bodily being): a proponent of the no-subject view (or "bundle theory of the self") might take this position. Third, someone might say that sensation occurs, not in a bodily entity, but in a mind that is substantially distinct from the body. One might then hold either that there really is no sensation in nonhuman animals (it only appears that way; they really are automata, as Descartes held) or that in nonhuman animals also there are substantially distinct minds associated with them. So, to defend the first premise in the main argument stated earlier, we must defend the position that animals are enduring entities (against mechanism, eventism, and the no-subject view), and that sensation occurs in *them*, as opposed to occurring in substantially distinct minds associated with them. Our treatment of these positions will necessarily be brief, so we shall consider some, but not all, of the possible objections that our arguments might suggest.

II. Animals are Enduring Agents

A mechanist holds that the dog is just an aggregate of smaller entities, perhaps molecules, and perhaps these molecules are aggregates of atoms, and so on. On this view, dogs and other animals are only aggregates of smaller entities, and their actions are determined not by any intrinsic unitary direction but merely by the interaction of the smaller units. A proponent of this view might add that it is *convenient* to think of animals and other entities as unitary substances, but this convenience hardly translates into a truth descriptive of the world. This mechanistic view might then harmonize either with a functionalist view of the human mind or with the identification of the human self with a distinct substance as Platonists or Cartesians hold.

However, there is strong evidence that it is more than convenience that moves us to see dogs and other animals as real substantial units rather than as mere aggregates, *entia per accidens*.[5] Our viewing the dog as a unit is

[5] On the distinction between a composite substance and a mere aggregate, see Richard Connell, *Substance and Modern Science* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies,

similar, as Aristotle pointed out, to our viewing houses or other composite artificial objects as units. Why do we think of the boards and bricks of a house as one? Because we grasp a certain type of unity, a functional unity, in those materials. We understand that the material components of the house are organized for the purpose of providing shelter and warmth. In this case the unity is extrinsic; it has been imposed from outside by human agency.[6]

Analogously, when we see a dog chase a rabbit or come up to us drooping his head and wagging his tail, we apprehend a unity in the materials that go into the makeup of the dog. In the dog's chase of the rabbit, we understand the canine feet and back and head as organized and directed to a single end, the catching of the rabbit. Even while the dog is sleeping, we understand the various parts of the dog, the cells, the tissues, the organs, as functional parts of a whole. Unlike the house, however, whose unity has been extrinsically imposed, the unity of the dog is intrinsic.

The things around us, and most obviously animals and other living things that exhibit behavior, are really various types of agents. And agents endure. An agent is a source of regular actions and reactions. We observe recurrent and predictable actions and reactions; the source or center of such patterns of action is a thing or agent. It is not reasonable to think of reality simply as events or as particles in random motion, because agents or natures are required to explain the recurrence of definite actions and reactions. We must think and act in relation to dogs as units, for example, because only in that way can we understand and predict the actions of the materials which together we refer to as a dog. The materials that together constitute a dog are in some ways similar to a multiplicity of chalk marks on a blackboard: why those bits of chalk dust are there can be explained mechanically, by reference to the properties of the chalk dust and the wood and other chemicals in the blackboard. But beyond that, there is an intelligibility in the chalk marks (though, unlike the dog, imposed from outside in the use made of them) which can be understood only by grasping their unity, which allows them to express a meaning.[7] Similarly, we cannot fully explain why the dog turned to the left and then to the right exactly

1988), 3–39; Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, "On the Unity of Compound Things," in *Form and Matter: Themes in Contemporary Metaphysics*, ed. David Oderberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 76–102.

[6] Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, Bk. I, 1 639b15–640a10; ibid., *Metaphysics*, Bk. VII, Chapter 17.

[7] See James Ross, "Christians Get the Best of Evolution," in *Evolution and Creation*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 223–251.

when he did without seeing the dog as a unitary agent, as an animal in pursuit of a prey. True, the motions of the parts of the dog can be explained on lower levels, that is, by reference to the smaller particles that go into the makeup of the dog. We can explain the dog's turning to the left by reference to muscle contractions, and these contractions can be explained as electrochemical reactions. But there is a unity in the turning this way and that way of a dog which can be understood only by understanding the materials in the makeup of the dog as parts of a single agent. But again unlike the house or chalk dust, here the unity is from within. It is a unity not imposed by us but recognized by us – that is, it is a unity that is antecedent to the meanings we impose on things by our use of them.[8] It is the same with trees, animals, and other composite substances.[9] Thus, the more reasonable position is that the unity of the materials consists in their intrinsic organization. Dogs, cats, trees, and perhaps, on the lower level, molecules and even detached atoms are composite units, understood as one in that they are distinct types of agents.

The position that animals and other entities are things or substances which endure through time is not an a priori necessary truth. It is not logically inconceivable that we could have a world with entities that do not endure at all, or endure for a very short time.[10] The evidence that there are persisting substances, and that animals are enduring substances, consists (in part) in all of the phenomena which show beyond reasonable doubt that animals and other entities are *agents* and they remain the same sort of agents, numerically the same ones, throughout stretches of time. The actions initiated and sustained by animals – such actions as chasing prey, eating meals, mating – are actions that take time. The life of a numerically single organism is maintained by continuous processes such as respiration, blood circulation, cell repair, and homeostatic operations. To suppose that there are only events or experiences strung together in various ways is, we believe, not easily made compatible with the fact that in countless cases an action and its structure is explained by the persistence of a numerically

[8] Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, Bk. II.

[9] At the level of nonliving things, it is hard to say what are substances as opposed to aggregates. Is a water molecule a composite substance or an aggregate composed of two hydrogen elements and an oxygen element? We are inclined to think the former, but nothing in the argument we are advancing here depends on the answer to that question.

[10] This is not to suggest that a world without substances is logically possible. It is only to say that a world with substances whose duration was so brief as to be undetectable is perfectly conceivable.

singular agent that produced and sustained it.[11] A dog will chase a rabbit; a horse will not. This is partly because a dog is a carnivore while a horse is a herbivore. But this is most reasonably interpreted as meaning that a dog is a certain type of agent, that is, an enduring source of predictable actions and reactions – given certain circumstances, this type of agent will act or react in certain ways.[12]

This understanding of enduring agents is also challenged by process philosophy, more specifically, the view we referred to as eventism. A. N. Whitehead recognized that both difference and continuity must be included in our account of the realities we experience.[13] But rather than locating the continuity in an enduring substrate, such as a substantial agent, he located it in the commonality of universal features. For example, according to Whitehead, an animal is not an enduring substance, but a society of events, and the continuity is the commonality of features shared by the series of events (which he labeled "actual occasions").[14]

But the continuity which he recognized is continuity in a series, and so it *requires explanation*. If the commonality is not intrinsically determined, then the regularity with which such continuous sequences occur remains unexplained. Rather, that in reality which corresponds to sound explanations is a numerically singular subject or center of actions and reactions; this subject is the real counterpart of explanations and predictions of actions (and reactions) in various circumstances (within a suitable environmental range) and throughout stretches of time. Hence it seems that the real counterpart of such explanations must endure through time.

So, it is reasonable to hold that the dog is a persisting (enduring) organism. The dog chases the rabbit on Monday because the dog is a carnivore. The dog chases the rabbit on Tuesday because he is still a carnivore, and he remembers where he chased him on Monday. (This is evidenced by the fact that as he approaches the tree where he first saw the rabbit on Monday, he begins to salivate and turn his head quickly in various directions.)

[11] Cf. Michael Ayers, "Substance: Prolegomena to a Realist Theory of Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (1991), 69–90.

[12] Cf. Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1985), 253–296; R. Harré and E. H. Madden, *Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 44–118; T. D. J. Chappell, *Understanding Human Goods: A Theory of Ethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 104–125.

[13] A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 34–35, 59–66, and 240–248.

[14] Ibid.

III. Sensation is a Bodily Act

St. Augustine, Descartes, and others held that in human beings sensation is not, strictly speaking, a bodily act (or state) at all, but an act performed by the soul on the occasion of the change produced in the body by stimuli acting on it.[15] According to this view, having a sensation is an act that occurs in one's consciousness, and so it is in one's soul, even though it is in some way informative of how things are modifying my body. In other words, the bodily processes in the sense organs and the brain would be merely preparatory to the sensation itself, which would be an act of *conscious experience* and would occur only in the mind.[16]

However, there are several problems with this view. The first difficulty concerns nonhuman animals. It is hard to believe that nonhuman animals have spiritual substances associated with their bodies in which sensations occur that guide their (nonbodily) desires and bodily movements. It was for this reason that Descartes, holding that sensation is a spiritual state, denied that nonhuman animals sense at all, claiming instead that nonhuman animals are mere automata.[17] But Descartes's denial is implausible. The movements of animals are clearly specified by information obtained through sensation. They turn their heads in order to obtain sensations; they cry out apparently with pain when struck and groan or cry when apparently suffering from constant pain. Also, much of their behavior can be explained only by admitting that they remember and have images. Dogs that seem to be sleeping often bark or moan, clearly reacting to what they are dreaming. So, there is sensation in, or at least associated with (if it occurs in their substantially distinct minds), nonhuman animals.

It may be objected, nevertheless, that sensation in nonhuman animals could guide the bodily parts of the dog from outside that body, and thus exist in the substantially distinct animal minds.[18] Indeed, one could use

[15] St. Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, Bk. XXIII, 41; Bk. XXV, 48. Cf. Vernon Bourke, *Augustine's Quest for Wisdom* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1945), 111–112; Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation II*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1931), 149–157.

[16] Cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[17] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part 5, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, op. cit., 106–118; *Replies to Objections*, Part 4, #1, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, op. cit., 79–96.

[18] Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–196.