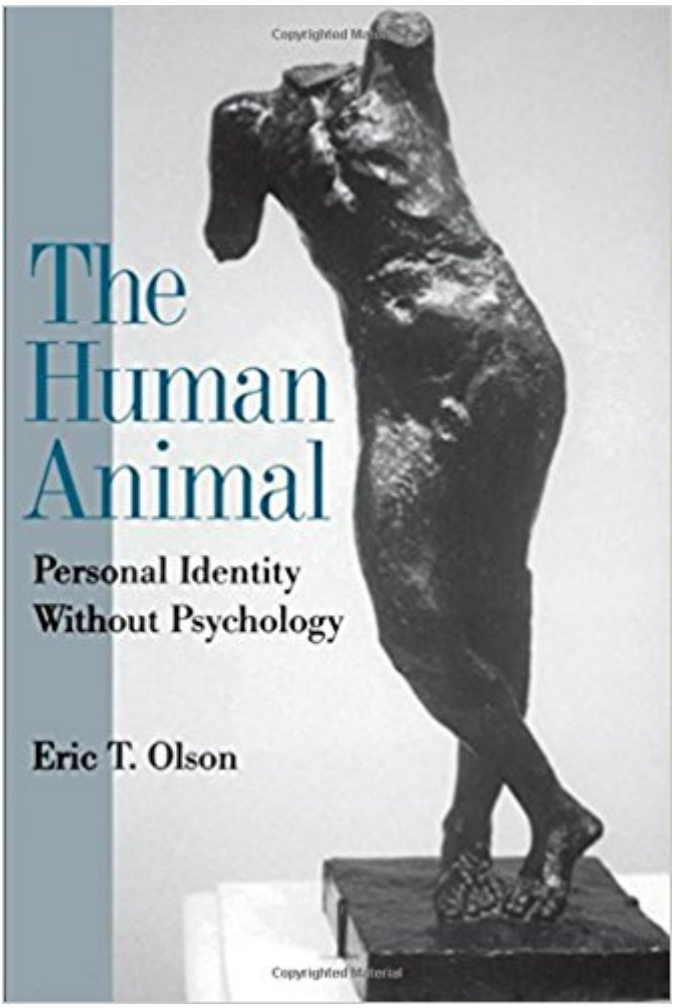
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The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology (Philosophy Of Mind)



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Synopsis

Most philosophers writing about personal identity in recent years claim that what it takes for us to persist through time is a matter of psychology. In this groundbreaking new book, Eric Olson argues that such approaches face daunting problems, and he defends in their place a radically non-psychological account of personal identity. He defines human beings as biological organisms, and claims that no psychological relation is either sufficient or necessary for an organism to persist. Rejecting several famous thought experiments dealing with personal identity, he instead argues that one could survive the destruction of all of one's psychological contents and capabilities as long as the human organism remains alive.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A very clear and powerfully argued defence of a most important and surprisingly neglected view."--Derek Parfit, author of Reasons and Persons (All Souls College, Oxford)"For hundreds of years, almost all philosophers writing on the topic have supposed that personal identity is either entirely a matter of psychology or at least has an important and essential psychological component. This important book presents a powerful challenge to that assumption. If Dr. Olson is right, we are living animals and what goes on in our minds is wholly irrelevant to questions about our persistence through time. If this book receives the attention it deserves, it will transform philosophical thinking about personal identity."--Peter van Inwagen, author of An Essay on Free Will, Material Beings, and

Metaphysics (University of Notre Dame)"Olson's excellent and enjoyable book should be read by everyone with an interest in metaphysics. For those seriously interested in the philosophy of personal identity, or in our existence and identity, the matter is more serious; without much delay, you've got to get your hands on The Human Animal--Peter Unger, New York University"A significant contribution to the field. It issues several important challenges to proponents of a psychological approach to personal identity."--Carol Rovane, Yale University

Eric Olson is a Lecturer in philosophy at Cambridge University.

I disagree with almost all of Olson's major conclusions, and I think a lot of the argument rests on a naive notion of the continuity of an animal, an overly metaphysical reading of "person," and a failure to account for both the history of the term and its pragmatic usage. Nonetheless, this is probably the definitive text on physicalist accounts of human identity. Olson's animalism is easily the strongest form of a purely physicalist view of the person, and is well-argued and well-written. A must read for anyone doing personhood or personal identity studies.

This brief, but densely packed book is a must-read in the metaphysics of personal identity. Olson is a fun writer to read, and displays immense skill in the framing and structuring of his argument. Parts I liked: the criticisms of the psychological approach, the constitution view, the bodily criterion, and the chapter 'Was I ever a fetus?' Part I didn't like as much: the casual dismissal of substance dualism, and the section in which he argues that personhood is a phase sortal like adulthood. Still, every part was profitable to read; recommended.

I'm fortunate enough to be lectured by the author, and his remarkable character shines through in this fascinating and well written book. Even if you don't agree with what he is saying, he is very convincing, and entertaining at the same time.It'll certainly get you thinking.

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