Buddhism, Non-Human Animals, and Selfhood

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I argue that there is no necessary conceptual reason against attributing the same kind of selfhood to non-human animals as is ascribed to human beings, because we can meaningfully ascribe selfhood to non-human animals if we draw upon the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood. I begin by outlining our intuitive concept of selfhood as is ascribed to human beings. Then I provide a Buddhist argument against ascribing this intuitive concept to human beings to suggest that we should consider alternative accounts of selfhood. To this end, I briefly describe the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood — on which being a 'self' consists in being a 'person,' which is a conventional functional, folk psychological concept, unlike our intuitive concept of self. Using the Buddhist view, I give a tentative operational definition of selfhood. Finally, I provide empirical evidence that suggests that members of some non-human species may satisfy this definition and thus be selves in the same sense in which human beings are.

1. Introduction

Prior to philosophical analysis, both philosophers and non-philosophers tend to think of human beings pre-theoretically or intuitively as being 'selves,' or subjects who are causally unconstrained by the world. We take ourselves to be distinct from both our mind and body, to be rather what *owns* or *has* a mind and body — the kind of thing that persists across a whole lifetime despite significant changes in both mind and body.[18] In contrast, both pre-theoretically and post-theoretically, we seem to deny that other animals are 'selves' in *any* sense. However, in

[18] Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 2-4, 30; Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 32-3.

this essay I argue that we can meaningfully ascribe selfhood to non-human animals.[19] If we draw upon the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood, then we have *prima facie* reasons to attribute selfhood to some animals.

Altogether, I argue that there is no necessary *conceptual* reason against attributing the same kind of selfhood (properly understood)[20] to animals as we ascribe to humans. For the sake of this paper, I take it that we have a *conceptual* reason against applying our concept of selfhood (properly understood) to animals just in case our concept of selfhood is such that it would be a *category error* to ascribe this concept to animals, insofar as animals are not the right *kind* of entity to which this concept properly applies. Instead, I argue that, if any reasons against attributing full-fledged selfhood to animals exist, then these reasons must be empirical, not conceptual.[21]

I begin by outlining our intuitive concept of selfhood. Then I provide a Buddhist argument against attributing this concept to human beings to suggest that we should consider alternative concepts of selfhood. As an alternative, I describe the Buddhist deflationary account and provide a tentative operational definition of selfhood based on this account. In conclusion, I

[19] Hereafter, I use 'animals' to refer to 'non-human animals.'
[20] By "selfhood (properly understood)," I mean a non-intuitive concept of selfhood that has been developed through philosophical analysis, rather than our intuitive, pre-theoretic concept of selfhood.
[21] Let me clarify further what my thesis is. Given some concept of selfhood C, we have a conceptual reason against attributing C to animals just in case subsuming animals under the extension of C would entail a category error. In this paper, I argue against the claim that there is *no* concept of selfhood C* such that attributing C* to animals, or subsuming animals under the extension of C*, would *not* entail a category error. Consequently, I am arguing that there is *some* concept of selfhood C*—namely, the Buddhist concept of personhood considered as a non-intuitive concept of selfhood—such that attributing C* to animals, or subsuming animals under the extension of C*, would not entail a category error. This is a more precise formulation of my thesis.

provide some empirical evidence that suggests that members of some species may satisfy this operational definition and thus be selves in the same sense in which we are.[22]

2. Our Intuitive Concept of Selfhood

We can explicate selfhood in various ways insofar as different concepts of selfhood exist. A concept of selfhood answers the question "What am I?".[23,24] Both philosophers and non-philosophers seem to share an intuitive, pre-theoretic concept that provides a response to this question. I propose that our intuitive concept of selfhood consists in the following: We take the pronoun 'I' to refer to the self as the subject of experience and agent of action, and we also take the self to be the ontological ground of a person's identity over time.[25] As some numerically identical thing enduring throughout a person's lifetime, the self is unitary, possessing both synchronic and diachronic identity.[26] Consequently, the self is essential to a person, where 'person' denotes some psychophysical complex of mind and body enduring over time in virtue of

[22] One caveat. Our *intuitive* or *pre-theoretic* notion of selfhood, not a philosophically sophisticated notion of such, is the primary object of critique in this paper. (More generally, though, I am interested in arguing that it is false to think that there is no concept of selfhood such that we can attribute this concept to other animals. See footnote 21.) Indeed, the Buddhist deflationary view is a philosophically sophisticated view of selfhood developed in response to the problems arising for our intuitive view. Nevertheless, I do not argue in favor of the Buddhist account. Rather, I draw upon this account only to show that no necessary conceptual reasons prevent us from ascribing the same kind of selfhood to animals as we ascribe to ourselves. (By drawing upon the Buddhist deflationary view, I show *prima facie* that there is *some* concept of selfhood such that we can attribute this concept to other animals in addition to human beings.)

[23] Ganeri, *The self: Naturalism, consciousness, and the first-person stance*, 35.

[24] For arguments in favor of the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood, see Garfield (2022). For a taxonomy and general overview of various philosophically sophisticated accounts of selfhood, including the Buddhist account(s), see Ganeri (2012).

[25] Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 33; Siderits, *Personal identity and Buddhist philosophy: Empty persons*, 29.

[26] Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 35.

the self.[27]

Garfield (2022) identifies four essential properties of our intuitive concept of selfhood: A self has *priority*, *unity*, *subject-object duality*, and *agency*.[28] A self has *priority* because it has a kind of existence more fundamental than, or 'prior to,' that of mind and body: A self is the kind of thing that *owns* or *has* a mind and body, and it is the kind of thing *that experiences* and which would exist even without experience. The self also exemplifies *unity* because it is a unitary thing, not a multiplicity: 'I' refers to a metaphysical simple, not a complex of entities or processes. Additionally, the self constitutes the subjective, internal pole of a *subject-object duality*, whereas objects in the world constitute the objective, external pole of this duality. In this way, the self is an internal entity, opposed to all external entities existing in the world (including *other* selves). Finally, the self is thought to be the *agent* who is causally and morally responsible for action. As such, the self is causally unconstrained by the world and, thus, radically free and autonomous.[29]

The question arises whether we can attribute our intuitive concept of selfhood to other animals. The answer seems to be negative. Dornbach (2023) grants that "higher animals" have a "rudimentary selfhood," but nevertheless maintains that complete or consummate selfhood is unique to humans.[30] Bekoff (2003) makes a similar claim, contending that other species may possess "body-ness" or "mine-ness" (a proprioceptive awareness of one's body or body parts in

[27] Ibid, 32.
[28] Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 28.
[29] Ibid, 33.
[30] Dornbach, "Animal selfhood and affectivity in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical biology," 225.

space), but not full-fledged "I-ness." Saidel (2018) also concludes that while many animal species have rich mental lives, they lack any concept of self, which only humans have. The common basis for these claims seems to consist in the proposition that there is some categorical difference, or a difference in kind, between humans and animals that precludes subsuming members of other species under the extension of the concept of 'self.'

Nevertheless, even if we cannot attribute *consummate* selfhood to animals, perhaps we can still attribute some rudimentary approximation of such to animals, such that both humans and animals nevertheless count as being 'selves.' Whether this is so depends on how we cut the pie. If humans are 'full-fledged selves' and animals are 'rudimentary/approximate selves,' then since both sub-categories fall under the general kind 'self,' both humans and animals are 'selves.' However, even if we cut the conceptual pie this way, we can nevertheless just as easily say that there is a difference in (sub-)kind between humans and animals, since animals are not 'full-fledged selves,' but only 'approximate selves.' Ultimately, it seems that animals are simply not the right kind of entity to which the *full-fledged* conception of selfhood applies because they are not unitary subjects of experience and uncaused, autonomous agents possessing mind and body.

It is *this* point that I suggest is misguided.[31] I suggest that this presumed difference in kind, or even sub-kind, is mistaken, and I argue that, instead, conceptual reasons like those

[31] More generally, I suggest that the proposition that there is *no* concept of selfhood that can be ascribed to both human and non-human animals is false and mistaken. See footnotes 21 and 22.

suggested above need not preclude animals from being selves in the *same sense* in which human beings are selves. To this end, I first argue that our intuitive concept of selfhood is mistaken in important ways, and that the concept of self that best answers "What am I?" is not our intuitive concept of selfhood. Then I draw upon the Buddhist deflationary account to show that conceptual reasons need not bar members of other species from being full-fledged selves, insofar as we have available an alternative concept of selfhood that *prima facie* provides a better response to the question "What am I?" than does our intuitive concept.

3. A Buddhist Critique of Our Intuitive Concept

In this section, I adduce a Buddhist argument against the existence of the self as it is intuitively understood, and in the next section, I outline the Buddhist deflationary account that is meant to supplant this intuitive view of the self. While offering the argument below, I do not suggest that this argument is conclusive. I only suggest that it is both plausible and counts as a *prima facie* reason against our intuitive view. Given a plausible deflationary account of selfhood and the problems to be identified for our intuitive view, the proponent of this view has the burden of proof to show why we should favor her view over the deflationary one.

Buddhists grant that we have an intuitive self-concept but deny that this concept actually captures what it means to be a human being.[32] Consequently, Buddhists reject that the 'self' as intuitively understood exists. The Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150 CE?) provides the

[32] Ganeri, *The self: Naturalism, consciousness, and the first-person stance*, 31; Rahula, *What the Buddha taught*, 20–28; Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 35–37.

following reasoning for the conclusion that the self, as it is intuitively understood, does not exist.[33]

Nāgārjuna suggests that if we countenance selves, as intuitively understood, in our ontology, then we must specify how the self so understood is related to the psychophysical complex constituting a person. (A psychophysical complex is (roughly) just a bundle of mental states and physical states at a time, including thoughts, sensations, and bodily processes.[34]) The self can be related to the person in two ways. The first view is that the self is identical with, or reducible to, the psychophysical processes constituting a person. This view is *Reductionism*. The second view is that the self is irreducible to the psychophysical processes constitutive of a person, but is nevertheless related to these processes in some specifiable way. This view is *Non-reductionism*.[35] Nāgārjuna argues against both views.

First, consider Reductionism. Nāgārjuna suggests that the nature of the self as it is intuitively understood is inconsistent with the nature of the psychophysical processes comprising its (putative) reduction base. According to Reductionism, the self is identical with, and reducible to, (some proper part of) the psychophysical complex constituting a person. If the self is identical

[33] MMK, XVIII.1.
[34] See Rahula, *What the Buddha taught*, 51–66, for a more careful examination of what Buddhists take the nature of the constituents of a psychophysical complex to be.
[35] Reductionists and Non-reductionists disagree about which kinds of entities constitute our ontology. Non-reductionists take 'selves' to be part of our ontology because, they claim, selves cannot be reduced to psychophysical processes. Reductionists deny this point on the grounds that we can reduce 'selves' to more basic psychophysical processes, which instead comprise our ontology. Nevertheless, Reductionists do not deny that selves exist *simpliciter*: 'selves' simply consist in the existence of these more basic psychophysical processes (Siderits, 2015, 9–10).

with, and reducible to, the psychophysical complex, then the identity conditions for the self must be the same as the identity conditions for the psychophysical complex.[36] However, while a psychophysical complex has synchronic identity, it lacks diachronic identity. This is because psychophysical complexes are impermanent bundles of mental and physical states that change over time.[37] In contrast, the *self*, by its nature, possesses diachronic identity.[38,39] Therefore, the self and any given psychophysical complex differ in their identity conditions. If identity is necessary for reduction, then it follows that the self cannot be reduced to any psychophysical complex. Altogether, Nāgārjuna argues, Reductionism fails. (The same kind of argument can be used to show that the self cannot be reduced to any *proper part* of some psychophysical complex.)

Reductionism takes the person to be nothing more than some psychophysical complex.[40] Non-reductionism denies this exhaustiveness claim to hold that the person consists of *both* some psychophysical complex and some irreducibly distinct constituent. This additional constituent is the self.[41] If the self is some *sui generis* entity, then the self is not identical with any psychophysical process (or set of processes), in which case the self must instantiate some kind of

[36] By 'identity conditions,' I mean the conditions that define some entity's identity. One version of Leibniz's law states that $x = y$ iff (a) every predicate P of x is a predicate of y and (b) every predicate Q of y is a predicate of x. Conditions (a) and (b) specify the identity conditions for x and y. Thus, if the self is identical with some psychophysical complex, then every property of the self must be a property of this complex, and vice versa.
[37] Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 37–46.
[38] Siderits, *Personal identity and Buddhist philosophy: Empty persons*, 30.
[39] Indeed, this is why we appeal to the self to explain the personal (diachronic) identity of psychophysical complexes, or persons, over time (see Siderits, 2007, 32–33).
[40] Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 50.
[41] Ibid, 32.

property not instantiated by any psychophysical complex. A psychophysical complex instantiates physical and psychological kinds of properties. Hence, the self must instantiate some kind of property that is non-physical and non-psychological. Call this kind of property a 'NN property' (for 'non-physical and non-psychological'), in contrast to a 'PP property' (for 'physical and psychological').

The problem with Non-reductionism is that it is unclear what the relevant NN properties would consist of. Presumably, the only kinds of properties relevant to specifying the relationship between the self and some psychophysical complex are those discoverable in experience. (Otherwise, it is unclear how we would know the properties in question.[42]) However, the kinds of properties discoverable in experience are PP properties, not NN properties. Furthermore, even if we grant that NN properties exist, we still must explain how the self, which instantiates NN properties, can causally interact with the physical and psychological part(s) of reality, which instantiates only PP properties. Such an explanation must answer two questions: (a) What kind of causal relations hold between NN properties and PP properties in virtue of which selves can causally interact with the physical and psychological part(s) of reality? (b) If we can explain all causal phenomena involving PP properties without positing NN properties, then why should we

[42] Perhaps we know NN properties by *a priori* intuition. While plausible, I am unconvinced by this suggestion. If we know NN properties by *a priori* intuition, then that NN properties exist is a necessary truth. However, that NN properties exist does not seem to be necessarily true at all. What is necessarily true is what is true at all possible worlds. Certainly, though, we can imagine possible worlds at which it is false that NN properties exist; indeed, that the self exists seems to be a contingent, non-necessary matter. More precisely, we can imagine possible worlds at which it is false that the NN properties *relevant to the self* exist, even if we want to grant that for all possible worlds, it is true that there exist *some* NN properties—just not those NN properties that are relevant to the existence of the self.

posit any causal relations that would answer (a)? If we can explain all causal phenomena by appealing solely to PP properties, then seemingly any answer to (a) will be *ad hoc*, in which case we will fail to provide a plausible answer to (b). It is unclear how the Non-reductionist can satisfy the burden of proof here and show how we ought to respond to (a) and (b) non-arbitrarily.

Until this burden of proof is met, Non-reductionism fails to offer any good reason to grant the existence of the self as a *sui generis* entity. Reductionism also seems unsatisfactory. Because these views apparently exhaustively explain the relation between self (as intuitively understood) and psychophysical complex, Nāgārjuna concludes that the self does not exist. Granting this argument's plausibility, we should conclude, with Nāgārjuna, that the self, as intuitively understood, does not exist. Whether Nāgārjuna's argument is conclusive, I cannot determine here, due to this paper's scope. Instead, I describe the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood.

4. The Buddhist View of Selfhood

Conventional Functional Persons

Buddhists (and I) distinguish between 'self' and 'person.' A *person* consists of some conventional label that we apply to a set of psychophysical complexes that are causally continuous over time, while the *self* (as intuitively understood) is the essential feature in virtue of which a person has diachronic identity.[43] Although Buddhists reject that the self exists, they do

[43] Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 32.

not reject that the *person* exists.[44] More specifically, Buddhists deny that *either* selves or persons comprise the ontology of the world because, Buddhists suggest, ultimately our ontology consists entirely of impersonal psychophysical processes.[45] Nevertheless, Buddhists grant that there is a sense in which the concept of a *person*—but *not* our *intuitive* concept of selfhood—may be (coherently) constructed or built out of our ontological concepts of psychophysical processes. Consequently, Buddhists take *persons* to be 'conceptual fictions' that we conceptually construct out of our more fundamental ontological concepts of impersonal psychophysical processes.[46,47]

Altogether, Buddhists hold that we apply our concept of personhood as a conceptual fiction or logical construction to socially embedded organisms as such organisms consist of sets of causally continuous psychophysical processes.[48] Overall, the Buddhist account of *personhood* provides a positive response to the question "What am I?" so it counts as a philosophically sophisticated, non-intuitive account of *selfhood*. In other words, the Buddhist concept of

[44] Collins, *Selfless persons: Imagery and thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, 79; Siderits, *How things are: An introduction to Buddhist metaphysics*, 18.
[45] Ibid.; Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*; Siderits, Buddhist reductionism; Sauchelli, "Buddhist reductionism, fictionalism about the self, and Buddhist fictionalism."
[46] See Collins, *Selfless persons: Imagery and thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, 103–10; Rahula, *What the Buddha taught*, 51–66; Siderits, "Buddhist reductionism"; Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 22–24, 26, fn. 10.
[47] Chisholm (1976) makes a useful distinction that is relevant here between *entia per se* and *entia per alio*. In contrast to *entia per se*, *entia per alio* are "ontological parasites that derive their properties from other things," and which "never [are] or [have] anything on [their] own," but "[are] what [they are] in virtue of the nature of something other than [themselves]" (p. 104). Consequently, *entia per alio*, unlike *entia per se*, do not exist in the 'strict and philosophical sense,' but only in a 'loose and popular sense.' I think that Buddhists would grant Chisholm's distinction between things that exist in a 'strict and philosophical sense' (i.e., *entia per se*) and things that exist in a 'loose and popular sense' (i.e., *entia per alio*). Given this distinction—unlike Chisholm—Buddhists would suggest that *persons* are *entia per alio*, not *entia per se*.
[48] Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 5; Richards, "Conceptions of the self in Wittgenstein, Hume, and Buddhism: An analysis and comparison," 51; Sauchelli, "Buddhist reductionism, fictionalism about the self, and Buddhist fictionalism"; Siderits, *How things are: An introduction to Buddhist metaphysics*, 29–46.

personhood is itself a non-intuitive concept of selfhood. To avoid confusion, I use 'person' here to refer to the *positive* Buddhist concept of selfhood, given that I have been using 'self' to refer to our intuitive self-concept.

The concept of personhood on the Buddhist view is importantly different from the intuitive concept of selfhood, in more ways than I can describe here.[49] Most importantly, a person is essentially embodied: she is not ontologically independent of some psychophysical complex, nor does she meaningfully constitute an 'owner' of this complex. Persons are also embedded within the world as a kind of natural phenomenon and, consequently, are causally interdependent with other natural phenomena.[50] Finally, because an organism must fulfill some (proper) social role to be a person[51], I suggest that personhood, unlike our intuitive concept of selfhood, is what I call a *conventional functional concept*. Altogether, according to the Buddhist view, persons lack the essential features that characterize our intuitive concept of selfhood: priority, unity, duality, and agency.

Since personhood constitutes a conventional functional concept, persons are individuated based on what they *do* or the *roles* they play[52], where these roles are grounded in social conventions.[53] Moreover, the conventionally grounded functional property of being a (particular)

[49] See Collins, *Selfless persons: Imagery and thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, 71–78; Sauchelli, "Buddhist reductionism, fictionalism about the self, and Buddhist fictionalism"; Siderits, "Buddhist reductionism"; Siderits, *Buddhism as philosophy: An introduction*, 56–58; Siderits, *How things are: An introduction to Buddhist metaphysics*, 29–46.
[50] Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 21.
[51] Ibid, 42.
[52] Carlisle, "Becoming and un-becoming: The theory and practice of *anatta*," 77.
[53] See Siderits, *How things are: An introduction to Buddhist metaphysics*, 29–46.

person can be implemented by different entities at different times because different entities may play the same conventional functional role at different times. Since the concept of 'person' is conventionally grounded, persons possess diachronic identity in a *conventional* sense: Persons are akin to characters in a play, who persist across contexts and times while played by different actors.[54] Consequently, changes in psychophysical facts do not imply the existence of different persons over time. If different psychophysical complexes play the same conventional functional role at times t_1 and t_2, then we can meaningfully say that the same person exists at both t_1 and t_2, even though this role is being played at different times by different psychophysical complexes.

As a conventional functional concept, personhood is a folk psychological concept. Andrews (2020) describes folk psychology as consisting in "seeing others as intentional agents with their own traits and goals who are embedded in a community of others."[55] We employ folk psychology as a kind of theoretical framework to explain others' actions and behaviors in terms of the desires and beliefs that we attribute to them using the same theory.[56] Folk psychological explanations are *functional* in nature because they treat desires and beliefs as inputs productive of actions as outputs.[57] The conventional functional concept of personhood is a folk psychological concept because we use it when we engage in folk psychological explanations of why individuals behave as they do.

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[54] Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 37–43.
[55] Andrews, *The animal mind: An introduction to the philosophy of animal cognition*, 31.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 33.

A Buddhist Operational Definition of Personhood

If personhood is a conventional functional, folk psychological concept, then members of other species may plausibly satisfy the criteria for this concept and count as being *persons*. Unlike our intuitive concept of selfhood, there is no *conceptual* reason to deny that other animals may count as being persons because, like human beings, at least some other animals are embodied beings who are causally embedded in the natural world and fulfill certain kinds of social roles. By attributing personhood to other animals, we do not commit a category error.[58]

Using the Buddhist account above, let us introduce the notion of a 'Personal Description,' abbreviated PD. Plausibly, an organism is a person if and only if they satisfy some PD. A PD specifies some exhaustive set of behavioral and psychological dispositions, habits, and social roles (all indexed to time). Ideally, a PD specifies a complete functional description of what it means to be a *particular* person. As such, a fully specified PD must describe the behavioral, social, and psychological characteristics of a particular person so completely and uniquely that it is very unlikely that this PD would be satisfied by more than one organism at a moment in time. Let us define personhood thus:

> Some organism *x* is a person if and only if *x* implements some Personal Description (PD), which is an exhaustively complete functional description consisting of some set of social roles, behavioral dispositions, psychological dispositions, emotional dispositions, etc.

[58] That is, we do not make a category error by attributing personhood to other animals, even if as a matter of empirical fact no other animals are persons. This is because it is conceivable that at least some other animals satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for being persons. In contrast, it is not conceivable that other animals satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for being selves, according to our intuitive concept of selfhood.

Consequently, if we define personhood in terms of the implementation of a PD, which specifies a complete functional description of what it means to be a particular person, then we thereby specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a particular person. An organism who implements a PD over time will display psychological and behavioral continuity over time. Thus, this definition allows us to capture diachronic personal identity in the conventional sense, described above, of playing the same "character" over time.[59] Altogether, like the Buddhist concept of personhood, a PD is a *conventional functional* kind of description.

We can construct a tentative operational definition on the basis of this definition of personhood. Since a PD is a functional kind of description of a person, and since operational definitions utilize functional descriptions, we can use the content of a PD in our operational definition, where the content of a PD concerns psychological and behavioral continuity over time. Therefore, determining whether an organism is a person on the basis of the operationalization of our concept of personhood will depend on that organism's behavioral and psychological continuity over time.

Another important feature to consider when ascribing personhood to an organism *x* is how *other* organisms engage with *x*. We engage with persons differently depending on which sets of behavioral and psychological dispositions we attribute to them in our interactions with them. Similarly, determining when to ascribe personhood to an organism *x* on the basis of our operationalization of this concept would benefit from considering the *reactive* behavioral

[59] See Garfield, *Losing ourselves: Learning to live without a self*, 37–43.

dispositions of *x's* conspecifics (or non-conspecifics).

> As a tentative operational definition of personhood, let us say that:
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> An organism *x* is a person if and only if (1) *x* exhibits a unique pattern of behavioral and psychological traits (as specified by some PD) over a significant period of time and across a diverse set of contexts and roles; and (2) *x* engages with conspecifics (or non-conspecifics) who exhibit consistent patterns of behavioral and psychological traits in their interactions with *x*.

Specifying what a "significant period of time" or "a diverse set of contexts and roles" consists in requires further analysis that cannot be completed here due to space. Further analysis of the nature of 'role' is also pertinent. 'Uniqueness' here *tentatively* consists in an organism's implementing some set of behavioral and psychological traits specified on some ideally exhaustively described PD. Furthermore, if conspecifics (or non-conspecifics) interact with an organism *x* by exhibiting consistent patterns of behavioral or psychological traits, then these conspecifics (or non-conspecifics) are likely tracking the behavioral and psychological traits uniquely instantiated by *x*. Consequently, as I point out above, identifying these consistent patterns of interaction may be pertinent to identifying the personhood of animals.

Using this operational definition, I now provide some empirical evidence for the claim that some animals may be persons in the same sense in which human beings are.

5. Evidence for the Personhood of Non-Human Animals

Empirical evidence suggests that members of some species may plausibly satisfy the proposed definition for personhood. As Bekoff (2003) notes, members of various species—including chimps, rhesus monkeys, wolves, crows, bears, and even sweat bees and ants—each interact and

communicate in various contexts. The ability to consistently interact across various contexts may require behavioral and psychological continuity to undergird and facilitate communication. Consequently, members of some, or all, of these species likely display behavioral and psychological continuity in their communicative interactions across contexts and roles. Ergo, members of these species count as *prima facie* candidates for personhood.

Furthermore, ethological research suggests that members of various species exhibit personality traits, including great tits, octopuses, dogs, and orangutans.[60] Additional research suggests that even some *insects*, including bees and crickets, may display personality traits.[61] If an organism exhibits personality traits, then *ipso facto* that organism has behavioral and psychological continuity across time. Thus, species whose members demonstrate variable personality traits *ipso facto* count as species consisting of *prima facie* candidates for personhood.

Further research also suggests that members of certain species, including chimpanzees and orangutans, apparently understand personality differences among conspecifics.[62] That members of these species track personality differences illustrates that they track behavioral and psychological continuity among conspecifics. This suggests both that the conspecifics whose

[60] See Amy et. al., "Effects of personality on territory defense in communication networks: A playback experiment with radio-tagged great tits"; Mather & Anderson, "Personalities of octopuses (octopus rubescens)"; Gosling & John, "Personality in non-human animals"; Weiss et. al., "Personality and subjective well-being in orangutans (Pongo Pygmaeus and Pongo Abelli)"; Freeman & Gosling, "Personality in non-human primates: A review and evaluation of past research."
[61] Walton & Toth, "Variation in individual worker honey bee behavior shows hallmarks of personality"; Gosling, "Personality in non-human animals."
[62] Subiaul et. al., "Do chimpanzees learn reputation by observation? Evidence from direct and indirect experience with generous and selfish strangers"; Herrmann et. al., "Direct and indirect reputation formation in nonhuman great apes (Pan Paniscus, Pan Troglodytes, Gorilla Gorilla, Pongo Pygmaeus) and human children (Homo Sapiens)."

personality traits are perceived may be persons and, if this claim is justified, that the perception or identification of personhood may not be unique to humans.

Finally, Andrews (2020) provides evidence for the existence of social norms among certain species, such as chimpanzees.[63] She operationalizes the concept of social norms thus:[64]

> A social norm is to be identified by the existence of three elements: (a) There is a pattern of behavior demonstrated by community members; (b) individuals are free to conform to the pattern of behavior or not (the behavior is voluntary); and (c) individuals expect that community members will also conform, and will sanction those who do not conform.

Since this definition builds behavioral continuity into it, members of any species satisfying this definition *ipso facto* count as being *prima facie* candidates for personhood. Also, this definition requires that individuals expect community members to conform to certain patterns of behavior. Organisms with these expectations likely track community members' unique sets of psychological and behavioral traits. If so, these organisms might satisfy the second clause of the operational definition of personhood. Importantly, satisfying this clause (and Andrews's definition for social norms) does not require the capacity to mindread.[65] All that is required is that conspecifics can *behaviorally* track an organism's unique set of psychological and behavioral traits.

Altogether, using this operational definition of personhood based on the Buddhist view, we have preliminary reasons to suspect that further empirical evidence will favor attributing

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[63] Andrews, *The animal mind: An introduction to the philosophy of animal cognition*, 220–21.
[64] Ibid, 218.
[65] *Mindreading* consists in the ability to infer others' mental states based on observable behavioral cues. See Lurz, "Animal mindreading: The problem and how it can be solved," 229.

personhood to members of other species. The Buddhist account of personhood serves as a deflationary, but philosophically sophisticated account of selfhood. Thus, if we have preliminary evidence for some animals being 'persons' on the Buddhist view, then these animals may be candidates for selfhood in a special, philosophically sophisticated sense (not in our intuitive, pre-theoretic sense). Since we can appeal to the conceptual scheme constituting the Buddhist view of personhood to plausibly ascribe full-fledged selfhood to other animals, conceptual reasons need not bar animals from being 'selves' in the same sense in which humans are.[66]

In conclusion, if we accept the Buddhist view of personhood over our intuitive view of selfhood, then whether other animals are full-fledged selves depends on what the empirical evidence dictates. Apparently, the empirical evidence suggests that members of some species *do* in fact possess the necessary and sufficient psychological and behavioral traits for consummate selfhood in the sense of Buddhist personhood.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that if we draw upon the Buddhist deflationary account of selfhood to develop an operational definition of personhood, then we can attribute selfhood (in the sense of Buddhist personhood) to some animals. However, I have not argued that the Buddhist view is conclusive. I have adduced this view only to argue that conceptual reasons need not bar us from ascribing the

[66] In other words, since the Buddhist concept of personhood is itself a non-intuitive concept of selfhood, and since it is conceivable that we can subsume the members of at least some other species under the extension of this concept of personhood, it follows that it is conceivable that there is *some* concept of selfhood such that subsuming other animals under the extension of this concept does not entail a category error.

same kind of selfhood to other animals as we ascribe to ourselves. If the Buddhist deflationary view is plausible, and if the tentative suggestions of the empirical evidence are correct, then we have one less reason to think that the difference between human and non-human animals consists in a difference of *kind*.

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