



# The future-like-ours argument, animalism, and mereological universalism

Andrea Sauchelli 

## Correspondence

Andrea Sauchelli, Department of Philosophy, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, NT, Hong Kong, SAR, China.  
Email: andreasauchelli@ln.edu.hk

## Abstract

Which metaphysical theories are involved—whether presupposed or implied—in Marquis' future-like-ours (FLO) argument against abortion? Vogelstein has recently argued that the supporter of the FLO argument faces a problematic dilemma; in particular, Marquis, the main supporter of the argument, seems to have to either (a) abandon diachronic universalism (DU) or (b) acquiesce and declare that contraception is morally wrong. I argue that the premises of Marquis' argument can be reasonably combined with a form of unrestricted composition and that the FLO argument is better viewed as including animalism, i.e., the thesis that we are animals.

## KEYWORDS

abortion, animalism, contraception, future-like-ours argument, unrestricted composition

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In defending the famous/notorious future-like-ours (FLO) argument against the contraception objection, Don Marquis has committed himself to a specific view on the subject of harm.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, he has claimed that some of the premises of his FLO argument do not imply that contraception is morally wrong because the subject of harm is one of us, we are organisms, and thus one of us cannot be harmed before the organisms that we are (identical with) come into existence.<sup>2</sup> The

upshot of this strategy is that Marquis' account of the badness of killing someone/one of us, which is in terms of the deprivation of a future of value, does not apply to the case of contraception, i.e., to the case of the alleged prevention from having an FLO to a sperm and an egg before syngamy. The reason is that, before approximately 14 or 16 days after fertilization, there is no relevant entity that is the appropriate subject of harm. However, Eric Vogelstein has recently argued that a defence of the FLO argument against the contraception objection requires rejecting the metaphysical (or, better, mereological) doctrine of diachronic universalism (DU).<sup>3</sup> Given that such a doctrine is allegedly believed by many metaphysicians—Vogelstein claims that it is a hotly debated but 'compelling thesis'—denying DU is a liability of the FLO argument. Vogelstein also claims that the metaphysical commitments of Marquis' argument—what the FLO argument's premises require to hold at a metaphysical level for them to be true or plausible—do not include a negation of a psychological theory of personal identity. Although Marquis explicitly states that he presupposes (one version of) animalism (a theory that directly negates a psychological approach to *our nature*), Vogelstein

<sup>1</sup>Marquis, D. (1989). Why abortion is immoral. *Journal of Philosophy*, 86, 183–202. Subsequent versions of Marquis' argument is discussed in Marquis, D. (1997). An argument that abortion is wrong. In H. LaFollette (Ed.), *Ethics in practice* (pp. 91–102). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing; Marquis, D. (2002). Does metaphysics have implications for the morality of abortion? *Southwest Philosophy Review*, 18, 73–78; Marquis, D. (2006). Abortion and the beginning and end of human life. *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*, 34, 16–25; Marquis, D. (2007). Abortion revisited. In B. Steinbock (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of bioethics* (pp. 395–415). Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Marquis, D. (2014). The deliberately induced abortion of a human pregnancy is not ethically justifiable. In A. L. Caplan & R. Arp (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in bioethics* (pp. 120–128). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Criticisms can be found in Boonin, D. (2003). *A defense of abortion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; DeGrazia, D. (2012). *Creation ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Steinbock, B. (1992–2011). *Life before birth* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup>For an early contraception objection against the FLO argument, see Norcross, A. (1990). Killing, abortion, and contraception: A reply to Marquis. *Journal of Philosophy*, 87, 268–277.

<sup>3</sup>Vogelstein, E. (2016). Metaphysics and the future-like-ours argument against abortion. *Journal of Ethics*, 20, 419–434. The doctrine that Vogelstein discusses is typically not detailed in temporal jargon and goes under the name of unrestricted composition or mereological universalism. A sophisticated discussion of mereological issues at the beginning of life is Burgess, J. (2010). Could a zygote be a human being? *Bioethics*, 24, 61–70.



claims that the FLO can be detailed independently of such a presupposition.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I argue that, *contra* Vogelstein, Marquis is not committed to a denial of DU or related mereological doctrines (e.g., universal composition) in replying to the contraception objection (Sections 2 and 3). I also claim that one way of justifying the compatibility between the FLO argument and DU involves a commitment to animalism, which I think is Marquis' best metaphysical ally among the theories of our nature that are currently available. As there are various versions of animalism, I will clarify some of the features that these versions are supposed to have for them to be compatible with the FLO argument. In the last section, I explore some objections and replies to my line of reasoning.

## 2 | CONTRACEPTION AND METAPHYSICS

Marquis' FLO argument, frequently described as the best non-religious argument against the morality of (some cases of) abortion, can be summarized as follows. First of all, assume that one version of the deprivational account of the badness of death and/or killing is correct—that is, provided that we have a valuable future, killing one of us is wrong because it deprives one of us of a future of value.<sup>5</sup>

1. The foetus has an FLO, which is (or at least, in most cases, is likely to be) a future of value.
2. Abortion deprives the foetus of a future of value (or of a future that is likely to be a future of value since it is an FLO).
3. Therefore, abortion (in a significant number of cases) is immoral because it deprives the foetus of a future of value.

One version of the contraception objection against the previous argument is as follows:

1. Contraception deprives some sperm and/or ovum of an FLO.
2. Thus, some of the premises of the FLO argument entail that contraception is morally wrong.
3. However, contraception is not morally wrong.

<sup>4</sup>Recent discussions of animalism include Liao, S. M. (2006). The organism view defended. *Monist*, 89, 334–350; Olson, E. (2007). *What are we? A study in personal ontology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Olson, E. (2015). What does it mean to say that we are animals? *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 22, 84–107; Blatti, S. (2014). *Animalism*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/animalism/>; Snowdon, P. (2014). *Persons, animals, ourselves*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Bailey, A. (2015). Animalism. *Philosophy Compass*, 10/12, 867–883; and Thornton, A. K. (2016). Varieties of animalism. *Philosophy Compass*, 11/9, 515–526.

<sup>5</sup>I do not here discuss the proposed criteria for evaluating when a future is valuable. In addition, I use this version of the account of the badness of killing because (a) it captures the spirit, if not the letter, of one of Marquis' own formulations ('According to the future of value argument for the immorality of abortion the best explanation for the wrongness of killing is that killing deprives us of our futures of value. Our futures of value consist of all of the goods of life we would have experienced had we not been killed'. Marquis, 2007, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 399), and (b) it is logically sufficient to support his argument and my reasoning.

4. Therefore, at least some of the premises of the FLO argument are false, and thus, the FLO argument is not sound.

What seems to be proven wrong by the contraception argument is Marquis' version of the deprivational account of the badness of killing.

A reconstruction of Marquis' reply to the above argument is the following:

1. Before a foetus comes into existence (approximately the 14th or 16th day after fertilization), there is no entity that can be deprived of an FLO.
2. As instances of contraception occur before the formation of a foetus, contraception does not deprive an entity/individual of an FLO.
3. Therefore, the FLO argument (in at least some of its premises) does not entail that contraception is morally wrong.

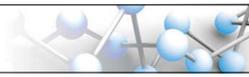
In turn, Vogelstein's argument against Marquis' reply can be summarized as follows:

1. DU is a plausible metaphysical theory—Vogelstein summarizes DU as the theory according to which for every set of objects there exist an object with the members of that set as parts and such a composition occur over time.<sup>6</sup>
2. DU entails that there is an object that is the mereological fusion or sum of sperm and ovum (Vogelstein correctly claims that this object should not be confused with the physical fusion of sperm and ovum, though he does not seem to fully recognize the consequences of this insight).<sup>6</sup>
3. The mereological fusion of sperm and egg, when it becomes something that will have experiences, will itself be an object that has an FLO.
4. Contraception deprives such an object of an FLO.
5. Thus, contraception is morally wrong.
6. The supporter of all of the premises of Marquis' argument faces a dilemma. In particular, she can:
  - (a) Reject DU; or
  - (b) Claim that contraception is morally wrong.
7. Both (a) and (b) are questionable; thus, the FLO argument should 'hold little purchase' for philosophers who are not ready to reject DU or claim that contraception is morally wrong.

## 3 | OBJECTIONS TO VOGELSTEIN'S ARGUMENT

Vogelstein's argument does not require DU to generate a dilemma similar to that included in premise (6) of the last argument; in addition, a weaker version of DU would be dialectically better. More specifically, Vogelstein's argument may work even if DU were replaced by what is

<sup>6</sup>Vogelstein, *op. cit.* note 3, p. 429.



called mereological universalism (or unrestricted composition; I use these terms interchangeably), i.e., the thesis according to which composition is unrestricted—for any objects, there is a single object that is composed of those objects.<sup>7</sup> The reason is that many philosophers do not accept perdurantism and/or a theory of the nature of time (eternalism) such that time is akin to space and objects are extended in it. If DU is taken to entail that composition over time involves the condition that, for objects at different times to compose fusions, these objects should also exist, then the thesis also entails perdurantism and possibly, a certain view on the nature of time. Since some philosophers do not accept the latter thesis on the nature of persistence and time, a weaker version of DU is dialectically better.<sup>8</sup>

Far more serious are the problems related to premise 3. Vogelstein's original passages on which (parts of) my reconstruction of his argument is based are:

FLO-def: X, at time *t*, has an FLO if and only if (a) X exists at *t*, and (b) X exists for some period of time after *t*, during which X has valuable experiences that make X's life after *t* worth living, on the whole.<sup>9</sup>

If the sperm and ovum that will combine to form a human organism indeed comprise a single thing, and that thing will itself become something with experiences, then such an object possesses an FLO.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, DU entails that there exists objects that are first sperm-ovum mereological fusions and later the human organism or person that forms from the union of that sperm and ovum. Therefore, if DU is true, then contraception would deprive something of an FLO, and thus given P1 would be morally wrong.<sup>6</sup>

One way of arguing against premise 3 is to say that, although a sperm and an egg may compose an object (in the sense of a mereological fusion or sum), Marquis can still claim that a sperm and an egg before the fourteenth or sixteenth day, taken as a single object and when not properly

arranged, do not yet constitute an organism.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the mereological sum of a sperm and an egg is not the same object as the organism that other cells, causally related to the gametes, will compose (if at all) at a later time. In fact, the identity conditions of the sum of a sperm and an egg are different from the identity conditions of an organism; in particular, the sum of a sperm and an egg ceases to exist after syngamy (or at any time when the sperm and the egg fuse). On the other hand, organisms can survive the (gradual) replacement of (some of) their parts (at least those who believe in the existence of organisms claim so). The supporter of the FLO argument may thus claim that the mereological sum of a sperm and an egg is not itself the organism that will have an FLO—even though the mereological sum of a sperm and an egg may compose an object. In addition, Marquis may claim that it is organisms that, under the right conditions, will/may have experiences and/or an FLO, definitely not mere mereological sums of sperms and eggs. To repeat, the mereological sum of sperm and egg, which may even be considered as an object (mereological sum/fusion) or even an aggregate (a composite object 'whose appropriately individuated parts are united by adhesion'), does not have an FLO—given that it is not the kind of entity that can have valuable experiences.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the mereological sum/aggregate is not itself something that will have experiences—what has/will have experiences is the sufficiently developed organism under the right conditions, an entity ontologically distinct from the mereological sum of a sperm and an egg and/or from the aggregate sperm-egg. Thus, the premises of the FLO argument can be compatible with the belief that contraception is not morally wrong: before an organism comes into existence, there is no entity *like us* that is deprived of an FLO.

One way of summarizing the previous lines of reasoning is the following:

1. A sperm and an egg may compose a mereological sum or an aggregate, but they, as mereological sum/aggregate, do not compose a human organism (if only because before, e.g., the fourteenth or sixteenth day after fertilization, there do not seem to be a human organism with identity conditions like ours).
2. Human organisms, *contra* mere sums/aggregates of sperm and egg, may have FLO. (Since we have futures of value and given that we are human organisms [the animalist assumption], human organisms have futures of value.)

<sup>7</sup>See Lewis, D. (1986). *On the plurality of worlds* (pp. 212–213). Oxford: Blackwell; Lewis, D. (1991). *Parts of classes* (Section 1.3). Oxford: Blackwell; Rea, M. (1998). In defence of mereological universalism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58, 347–360; Varzi, A. (2003). Perdurantism, universalism, and quantifiers. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 81, 208–215; Van Cleve, J. (2008). The moon and sixpence: A defence of mereological universalism. In T. Sider, J. Hawthorne, & D. W. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in metaphysics* (pp. 321–340). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; and Korman, D. (2015). *Objects* (p. 14). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup>See Miller, K. (2005). The metaphysical equivalence of three and four dimensionalism. *Erkenntnis*, 62, 91–117; and Varzi, A. (2007). Promiscuous endurantism and diachronic vagueness. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 44, 181–189; for discussions on how an endurantist may formulate/employ mereological universalism. If endurantists may formulate/employ such a principle, then there is no immediate dialectical advantage in adopting a weaker version of DU. The rest of the paper does not hinge on this issue.

<sup>9</sup>Vogelstein, *op. cit.* note 3, p. 422.

<sup>10</sup>The precise formulation of the identity conditions of an organism is a matter of substantial dispute. Many philosophers claim that an organism that is significantly like us—on the supposition that we are human organisms—comes into existence at some point after fertilization, for instance, after 14 and 16 days. For a discussion, see Smith, B., & Brogaard, B. (2003). Sixteen days. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 28, 45–78 and DeGrazia, D. (2005). *Human identity and bioethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Holding that mereological fusions or sums exist amounts to holding that 'whenever there are some things, there exists a whole that consists exactly of those things of two or more parts'. See Varzi, A. (2016). *Mereology*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mereology/>

<sup>11</sup>See Lowe, E. J. (2009). *More kinds of being* (pp. 96–109). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell for the distinction(s) between aggregates, substances, and organisms.



3. Given that the mere mereological sum of a sperm and an egg is ontologically different from an organism and/or from an entity that will have experiences—after all, a mereological sum as such ceases to exist when one of its parts ceases to exist *and* an egg and a sperm do not have experiences—the entity merely composed of a sperm and an egg is not the entity that has/can have an FLO—as the mereological sum of a sperm and an egg (or the aggregate sperm-egg) is an object that will *not/cannot* have experiences.
4. Thus, contraception does not deprive an entity of an FLO.
5. Hence, unless other conditions apply, the supporter of the FLO argument does not have to claim that contraception is morally wrong.

The main point of the above argument is that the FLO argument implies only that human organisms have a future-like-ours, since we have futures of value and we are human organisms. The mereological sum (or the sperm-egg aggregate) of a sperm and an egg is not/will not/cannot be the organism that has an FLO as they—the mereological sum (or the sperm-egg aggregate) and the organism—have different criteria of identity and the mereological sum and the sperm-egg aggregate are not the kind of entities that will or can have experiences. The mereological sum of a sperm and an egg and/or the aggregate sperm-egg are not entities that have a future-like-ours, as they (*qua* mereological sum and/or *qua* aggregate) will not/cannot have experiences at all. The argument does not claim that only (human) organisms can have a valuable future. Rather, the argument implies that mereological sums and/or aggregates do not have FLO—since they are entities (if at all) that will not/cannot become capable of having experiences.

Here are some further considerations in favour of the above reasoning. In defence of premise (1), we can also say that, (a) according to the thesis known as composition as identity (CAI), composites are identical to their parts taken collectively, which means that the composition of sperm and egg is not a further entity over and above the sperm and the egg involved in the composition; and (b) those who deny CAI would claim that sperm and egg compose a further object over and above each single entity.<sup>12</sup> Consider (a): many philosophers claim that there is an ontological distinction between a sperm and an egg and a fertilized egg 14 or 16 days after fertilization—what many people recognize as the beginning of a new entity: an organism.<sup>13</sup> The sum of sperm and egg, in itself, is not such an organism because organisms have an internal and teleological

<sup>12</sup>See Varzi, *op. cit.* note 10.

<sup>13</sup>See Van Inwagen, P. (1990). *Material beings* (chapter 9). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Merricks, T. (2001). *Objects and persons* (Section 4.6). Oxford: Clarendon Press, and Olson, *op. cit.* note 4, Sections 9.4–9.5 for discussions on various principles of composition, in particular the principles of composition of organisms. For instance, Olson writes (Olson, *Ibid.*, p. 226):

[i]t is plausible enough to say that things compose something if their activities constitute a life. A life provides just the sort of unity that leads us to suppose that the particles caught up in it compose something bigger.

The precise formulation of the identity conditions for organisms is itself a contested topic in the philosophy of biology. See Wilson, J. A. (2010). Ontological butchery: Organism concepts and biological generalizations. *Philosophy of Science*, 67, 301–311; and Clarke, E. (2010). The problem of biological individuality. *Biological Theory*, 4, 312–325.

organization that the sum of sperm and egg, *qua* mereological sum before the 14th or 16th day after fertilization, lacks. A similar reasoning applies to the sperm-egg aggregate. Consider (b): the further entity composed of the sperm and the egg does not have the internal structure that we generally associate with the internal structure that determines the identity conditions of organisms (e.g., a special functional unity or unity of life) and/or the identity conditions of an entity that has or will have experiences. Arguably, the entity *simply* composed of a sperm and an egg before the 14th or 16th day does not display a sufficient internal structure that would justify the claim that such a sum is identical to an organism. Thus, regardless of whether we adopt CAI, the sum of a sperm and an egg does not compose an organism, and such a sum is, if at all, an entity that is ontologically different from a subsequent causally related organism that comes into being at some point after syngamy. Such an organism is, in turn, the proper bearer of an FLO (although perhaps not the only one).

A further defence of premise (3) may start with an excerpt from David Lewis' *On the Plurality of Worlds*:

Restrict quantifiers, not composition. [...] We have no names for the mereological sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty's ear-rings, [...]. It is very sensible to ignore such a thing in our everyday thought and language.<sup>14</sup>

One of the general lessons that we can extract from this passage is that the relationship between ontology—intended as the study of what exists and its basic categories—and the language and concepts that we use to specify some of our practical and moral concerns is not always transparent. In specifying the entity that has an FLO—that is, in clarifying one of our relevant moral and practical concerns—Marquis should say that not any entity is the proper subject of ascriptions of an FLO. In particular, he should have emphasized that the quantifiers that he used to articulate his account of the badness of killing should be understood as excluding certain entities (e.g., mereological sums not capable of having experiences). After all, it must be remembered that (a) Marquis is not offering a full account of the wrongness of killing and (b) Marquis' FLO argument is not a potentiality argument. In particular, he does not claim that it is morally wrong to deprive an entity of the possibility of becoming an entity with an FLO. Rather, Marquis' claim is that abortion is (in certain cases) wrong because the entity that is deprived of an FLO is an entity that already has an FLO. The animalist assumption is crucial in explaining why Marquis' argument is not a merely potentiality argument. Abortion is wrong, according to him, because it deprives a foetus of an FLO, and the foetus, though only at an early stage of development, is already one of us and has an FLO.

Marquis does not need to claim that only organisms can have an FLO to counter the contraception objection. All that he has to say is that the mereological fusion of a sperm and an egg (or the sperm-egg aggregate) is not, in itself, the object that is also the organism that has an FLO. Hence, the object composed of a sperm and an egg (or the aggregate sperm-egg) before the organism (causally) connected to it comes into existence is not the same entity that will have an FLO.

<sup>14</sup>Lewis, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 213.



## 4 | REPLIES AND FURTHER METAPHYSICAL COMMITMENTS

Vogelstein claims that the FLO argument is not committed to animalism. The main point is that, according to him, many 'psychological theories of personal identity' [sic] do not negate that organisms can have experiences. Thus, the FLO argument can still work without assuming any view according to which we are human organisms. The reason is that the FLO argument, even without assuming one specific view of our nature, nevertheless implies that abortion would deprive organisms of valuable experiences and is thus immoral—regardless of whether we are these organisms.<sup>15</sup>

Animalism, which in a non-essentialist version states that we are human animals (organisms), involves the belief that we are not essentially persons, based on the presupposition that the persistence conditions of human organisms do not coincide with the persistence conditions of psychological entities (and based on the further presupposition that persons are essentially psychological entities, that is, entities essentially having mental properties).<sup>16</sup> However, *contra* Vogelstein, I have included animalism in my defence of the FLO argument above. One of the reasons for this choice is that (a) Marquis himself explicitly assumes (the truth of) animalism in certain passages and (b) animalism provides a neat explanation of the general idea that fetuses are entities that may have a valuable future—we are human organisms in the first place and we have a valuable FLO; fetuses are human organisms; hence, fetuses have (in most cases) a valuable FLO.<sup>17</sup> Thus, I believe that the FLO argument is dialectically better when it includes a commitment to animalism. In particular, an *essentialist* version of the theory—we are essentially human organisms. In addition to the above two reasons, this inclusion also provides the basis for an answer to the contraception objection.<sup>18</sup>

However, consider the following reply.

<sup>15</sup>Among the major 'psychological theories of personal identity', Vogelstein lists McMahan's proper-part view and Baker's constitutionalism. One of Vogelstein's inaccuracy here is that of classifying these theories as views on personal identity. In the current debate, however, these are classified as theories of our nature as there are theories that do not assume that we are essentially persons. Animalism, constitutionalism, the proper-part view, etc. are generally considered to be theories that belong to the field of personal ontology. See Baker, L. R. (2000). *Persons and bodies: A constitution view*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; McMahan, J. (2002). *The ethics of killing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and especially Olson, 2007, *op. cit.* note 4.

<sup>16</sup>See Sauchelli, A. (2017). The animal, the corpse, and the remnant-person. *Philosophical Studies*, 174, 205–218; for a non-essentialist version of animalism.

<sup>17</sup>[W]e know that fetuses have a future of value because we were all fetuses once and their futures of value are the goods of our past lives, our present lives, and our future lives. (I am assuming that we are biological organisms. [ . . . ]) Marquis, 2007, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 399. This presupposition of Marquis' argument is more explicit in subsequent (post-1989) versions of the FLO argument.

<sup>18</sup>I do not believe that adopting (one version of) animalism is the only strategy that the supporter of the FLO can follow to reply to the contraception argument. For what matters, I am not a supporter of the FLO argument either, but I think that its problems lie elsewhere.

1. In defending his FLO argument, Marquis may well adopt (one version of) animalism, at least one version according to which we are essentially human organisms—and such human organisms begin to exist at some point after an egg is fertilized.<sup>19</sup>
2. However, animalism is committed to the negation of DU (or of other related theses, such as unrestricted composition).
3. Hence, the supporter of the FLO argument is committed to the negation of a plausible metaphysical theory (or family of metaphysical theories).

Why should we believe premise (2)? The short answer is that animalism seems to have a problem with embracing a generous ontology—the type of ontology that we would have if we were to accept different versions of unrestricted composition (of which I take DU to be one variety).<sup>20</sup> In particular, if we take the Thinking Animal argument to be one of the main reasons for believing that animalism is plausible, then, the combination of this argument, an unrestricted theory of composition, and the general structure of an argument called the Thinking Part argument creates significant problems for animalism.

More specifically, Eric Olson reconstructs the Thinking Argument in favour of animalism as follows:

1. There is a human animal in my chair.
2. If something is a human animal in my chair, it is thinking.
3. I am the one and only thinking being in my chair.
4. Therefore, I am a human animal.<sup>21</sup>

Now, take the following structurally similar argument—the Thinking Part argument—which Eric Yang formulates as follows:

1. There is a left-hand human complement in my chair. (A left-hand human complement is an object composed of all of the parts composing a (fully developed, etc.) human body minus a left hand. The existence of such an object is entailed by DU.)
2. If something is a left-hand complement in my chair, it is thinking. (After all, left-hand amputees are capable of thinking; thus, having a hand is not an essential feature of thinking entities.)
3. I am the one and only thinking being in my chair.
4. Therefore, I am a left-hand complement.<sup>22</sup>

One of the problems that the general form of this argument raises for animalism is that it generates too many candidate entities to be identified with us. One of the further consequences is that we would have no

<sup>19</sup>For criticism, see Mills, E. (2008). The egg and I: Conception, identity, and abortion. *Philosophy Review*, 117, 323–348.

<sup>20</sup>It seems that animalism is not the only theory having problems with inflated ontologies. However, one of the main arguments in support of this theory is that it fares better with respect to arguments such as the Thinking Animal argument. More in what follows.

<sup>21</sup>Olson, E. (2003). An argument for animalism. In R. Martin & J. Barresi (Eds.), *Personal identity* (pp. 318–334). Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>22</sup>Yang, E. (2015). Unrestricted animalism and the too many candidates problem. *Philosophical Studies*, 172, 635–652.



principled reason to believe that we are a whole human organism rather than, for instance, a left-hand complement. More specifically, DU entails the existence not only of organisms, but also of left-hand human complements, right-hand complements, left-ear complements, or right-eye complements, and so on. All of these human complements seem to be thinking—after all, a left-hand amputee (and all of the other kinds of amputees) seems to be capable of thinking. Subtracting one hand to a body does not seem to make a difference with respect to its capacity to think. So, it seems that we should say that a left-hand complement can think. However, a left-hand complement is not a whole organism. Now, am I a left-hand human complement or a whole organism? Which one is thinking my thoughts?<sup>23</sup> However, it doesn't seem that I can be both (since they are different). In addition, how can I tell whether I am the whole organism or the left-hand complement?<sup>24</sup>

One strategy for replying to these problems is to argue that composition does not always occur. In particular, an animalist can adopt a biological-minimalist ontology: only maximally united parts that form an organism compose a whole. Thus, based on this view, only organisms (and, possibly, mereological simples) exist.<sup>25</sup> Hence, Vogelstein may have been right after all (although for the wrong reasons): the FLO argument (at least when it includes animalism) may be committed to the negation of one version of mereological universalism.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

The long and complex reasoning above seems to have shown that adopting animalism is a good way to reply to the contraception objection, but that animalism has problems with certain allegedly appealing mereological principles. I will conclude this paper with one way of replying to this last line of reasoning. In particular, the supporter of the FLO argument and animalism may adopt a version of animalism that includes (one version of) unrestricted composition—Yang calls it 'unrestricted animalism'. Yang claims that unrestricted animalism can reply to the previous problems by holding that it is the whole organism that is conscious while casting doubts about whether its proper-parts are. One way of arguing for this position is by holding the following principle:

(MC): For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is conscious, then there is no  $y$  such that  $x$  is a proper part of  $y$  and  $y$  is conscious.

<sup>23</sup>See Bailey, A. (2015). The priority principle. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 1, 163–174; for a recent discussion about the importance of proper ascriptions of mental properties in the debate on our nature.

<sup>24</sup>Yang, *op. cit.* note 22 discusses various other problems related to combining unrestricted composition with animalism. In particular, see *Ibid.*, pp. 637–644. See also Yang, E. (2013). Thinking animals, disagreement, and scepticism. *Philosophical Studies*, 166, 109–121 for further discussion.

<sup>25</sup>Watson, J. L. (2016). Thinking animals and the thinking parts problem. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 263, 323–340 criticises this strategy.

Adopting this principle, Yang suggests, would imply that premise (2) of the Thinking Parts argument is false.<sup>26</sup>

Yang also offers another similar strategy to deny premise (2), which he calls 'Life and Thought'. In brief, the main point is that the proper-parts of the animal that are supposed to be conscious are better understood as being 'caught up' in the life of the organism of which they are parts. These parts can be viewed as sub-systems of the broad organism to which they belong, and they should not be understood as forming an independent conscious life of their own. Yang argues that, since conscious states (of human beings, at least) belong to an entity that has a life as a whole, conscious states should be assigned or ascribed to the organism as a whole. In short, it is the organism as a whole that is the proper subject of conscious states.<sup>22</sup> The main gist of these lines of reasoning is that there are versions of animalism that do not have to deny one version of unrestricted composition. However, their 'cost' is that of denying that the proper-parts of the thinking animal of which they are parts are the proper subjects of conscious states. There are reasons and strategies that allow such theoretical moves endorsed by contemporary metaphysicians. Thus, again, the supporter of the FLO argument can argue that her argument (its premises and a reply to the contraception objection) are compatible with DU and that her argument is better served by adopting at least one version of animalism.

In conclusion, this paper can be seen as an attempt to provide a clearer view of what metaphysical theories better serve the FLO argument. Obviously, this does not mean that, all things considered, the FLO argument is plausible. In particular, some may argue that, since the FLO has such and such metaphysical commitments, it is not plausible because of them. However, it is important to get these metaphysical presuppositions and commitments right to criticize the FLO argument more effectively.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## ORCID

Andrea Sauchelli  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7665-8875>

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

ANDREA SAUCHELLI is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His areas of current interest include: (a) Personal Identity, the Self, and Applied Ethics; (b) Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art (Art and Ethics).

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<sup>26</sup>For defences of (versions of) this principle, see Merricks, T. (1998). Against the doctrine of microphysical supervenience. *Mind*, 107, 59–71; Merricks (2001), *op. cit.* note 13; and Merricks, T. (2003). Maximality and consciousness. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66, 150–158; and, for discussion, Sider, T. (2003). Maximality and microphysical supervenience. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66, 139–149.