

## IDEALS AND CRITERIA OF PERSONAL CONTINUANCE

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Persons are not timeless: the changes worked by time do not halt at their retina, but they themselves are profoundly affected by them. The most noticeable of these changes, no doubt, are physical; others are mental. Here I will be concerned especially with moral changes: changes in moral attitudes and beliefs. Typically, a person not only changes morally, but also entertains conceptions, explicitly or intuitively, about what kind of moral change, if any, is morally best. Such conceptions may guide the direction of a person's moral change or his resistance to such changes. The question I wish to address here is that of the relation between such conceptions on the one hand, and theories on the nature of a person's identity on the other. Are some of these conceptions supported by particular theories on personal identity, and are particular theories on personal identity incompatible with other such conceptions?

1. "When you are no longer what you were," Cicero writes in his *Ad Familiares*, "there is no reason left for being alive." Whether or not one agrees, it is clear what Cicero seems to have in mind. For instance, Cicero is not saying that a person ought not to change in any respect. If he meant that, his proposition would imply that no one's life is worth continuing. And clearly that is not implied by it. Changes are allowed if only because they are inevitable. Each day's fund of experience adds its effects, if only by making old and familiar what once used to be fresh and new. One is likely both to know more and to have forgotten more; a few illusions, no doubt, will have been cast; former interests may have been lost, and new ones may have arisen.

Yet, for these changes to be part of a worthwhile life, Cicero seems to be saying, something very important at least must have remained essen-

tially unchanged. To express what it is one naturally turns to the contrast between deep and superficial. Something deep must have remained unchanged, subtending the flow of one's experience and the external changes in one's life; a basic way of looking at things, perhaps; an orientation to life; a personal attitude concentered in a vividly remembered experience; a tenor of feeling... Or perhaps none of these *per se*, but something deeper still and only hinted at by these persisting attitudes: a self.

Cicero's prescription of faithfulness to the self is not a piece of prudential advice. He is not saying that the best way to achieve one's aims is to prevent oneself from changing in any fundamental way. Instead, his prescription is meant as a basic constituent of an ethical conception.

Any ethical theory, so it seems, if it is to be complete, must have some story to tell about the right way for a person to continue his life. Either this figures as a basic premiss of the theory or as a consequence of other premisses that are assumed as basic. The first is the case, for instance, in Stoicism. Here we have an ethical conception that is primarily concerned with the preservation of a person's inner state of harmony against the centrifugal forces of his several desires, against the multifarious impressions of the world, and against the disrupting effects of emotional attachments. A prescription of how one is to continue one's life, then, is one of the basic premisses of the theory. An ethical theory like utilitarianism, on the other hand, does not set out from a prescription on this issue; instead, such a prescription must be derived from basic premisses that are not directly concerned with it.

An ethical theory contains a part, then, either centrally or peripherally, dealing with the relation that ideally ought to exist between two episodes in a person's life. Now such an ideal may be specified at a level of generality such that it does no longer contain any reference to the basic values, duties or virtues held by that particular theory (such as inner harmony in the Stoic conception, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number in utilitarianism). I will call such a conception an *ideal of personal continuance*.

An ideal of personal continuance, then, only tells how a person ought to be presently related to the kind of person she used to be, and what her future self ought to be given what she is now, without specifying the particular nature of the values, duties, or virtues, which a moral theory says a person has or ought to have. Since the definition of an ideal of personal continuance is such that it does not tell what is the right thing

to do for a person in given circumstances, or what should be her highest value, or her virtues, a particular ideal of personal continuance may be shared by widely divergent moral theories. Still, it does not seem to make sense to propose an ideal of personal continuance *outside* the scope of any moral theory. It is no good to be told that one ought not to change in such and such a respect; one wants to know why that is. An ideal of personal continuance is basically incomplete: it is an empty form waiting to be filled by a more substantive conception of what is morally good, right or praiseworthy.

The relation between ideals of personal continuance and moral theories, then, is this: an ideal of personal continuance is necessarily a part of a moral theory, and no moral theory is complete without either specifying an ideal of personal continuance or providing a formula for deriving one; yet different moral theories may share one and the same ideal of personal continuance.

2. Most of us are not indifferent to the question what kind of persons we will be in the future. Many of us occasionally have to make an effort not to become a certain kind of person we do not wish to be. In fact, it is probably part of being a person that one cares about such things.<sup>1</sup> But one may care about this in different ways: different and incompatible ideals of personal continuance are possible.

I will not attempt to provide an exhaustive typology of ideals of personal continuance. Four types come readily to mind, however. I will call them: the perfectionist ideal, the conservative ideal, the dialectic ideal, and the ideal of indifference.

According to the perfectionist ideal of personal continuance, two episodes of a person's life are most rightly related if the later one is a better approximation of a not yet realized form of existence that is considered perfect according to a moral theory. The purest example of a perfectionist ideal, perhaps, is the one provided by Buddhism. Here the perfect form of existence consists in the dissolution of the person through a gradual deliverance from all desire. It is necessarily the case, then, that there is no better condition of *personal* continuance than progress towards this goal, for when the goal will have been reached, the person will have ceased to exist. Other moral theories, even of a widely different content, may also contain the perfectionist ideal. Thus, arguably, the Christian moral conception, although on many points incompatible with Buddhist

ideals, shares with it a perfectionist ideal of personal continuance. The Christian ideal is sufficiently demanding that progress towards it is the best condition that is humanly possible; so much so that, the very fact of believing that one has realized it counts as conclusive proof of the contrary.

Like the perfectionist ideal, the conservative ideal of personal continuance depends on the notion of a condition that is morally the best one. Only this time the condition is thought of, not as a more or less unreachable aim that one is to strive to bring about, but instead as already having been realized in one's life and hence something to be kept and to be preserved as best as possible. We find an expression of this ideal, for instance, in Rousseau's conception of an innate and originally innocent condition of humanity that one is to recover and preserve. But the ideal is perhaps best illustrated by both the life and the work of a novelist who tenaciously clung to it: Marcel Proust. The very title of his life's work, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, expresses what in later life he came to consider the only valuable way of continuing that life: to try to recreate, through memory, the vivid and impressionable existence that was once his and that, without this effort, would be lost forever. He considered it an act of faithfulness, not only to his intimate self, but also to his dear ones, above all his mother, who he had lost by that time. The intimacy and sweetness of home, the terrible sadness and jubilant elation of his youth, the mystery of flowering plants and shaded groves, the impression of almost personal presence provoked by a freestanding tree in a landscape and by churchtowers on the horizon, all these cannot be left to wither and wilt. These impressions, whose vividness was a mark to him of the engagement of his most intimate self, had to be tended as one's only garden. Accordingly, Proust not only set out to record them with exhaustive brilliance, he also anxiously avoided any new impressions that might interfere with the life of those he treasured inwardly. He started to live and write at night, in the shuttered house stuffed with his dead parents' furniture, and to sleep through the days.<sup>2</sup>

A duty of faithfulness to certain qualities, values or ideals is to be considered part of an ideal of personal continuance to the extent that the reason for one's faithfulness is not restricted to a belief in their moral superiority over others. For otherwise one's reason for being faithful would have nothing essentially to do with facts about one's particular history. To be an expression of an ideal of personal continuance, the

reason of that faithfulness must be expressed, although not exclusively, in terms of personal history: at least part of the reason why such and such qualities, ideals or values ought to be preserved should consist in the simple fact that they are one's own.

Most of us believe, I think, that one ought to be faithful to the values and ideals of one's past; but most would probably not wish to deny that they may have to be put aside in favor of other, more weighty moral considerations. This brings us to the dialectic ideal of personal continuance. This ideal recognizes both the claims of faithfulness to the past and the claims of perfection, but in a less dogmatic way than each of the above ideals.

The definition of the dialectic ideal of personal continuance does not rest on a prior definition of a perfect form of existence, either as a condition to be achieved in the future, as in the perfectionist ideal, or as a condition to be preserved, as in the conservative ideal. The subject may be aware, for instance, that the values he sets out with are not those of his own choice; he might realize, for instance, that if he were to have been raised in a different culture, he would have had a wholly different outlook. Nevertheless, he remains faithful to these values and defends them when needed; at the same time, however, he remains open for suggestions that some of these values ought to be adapted or even rejected. It is to be expected, then, that life's experience will leave a mark on his initial moral conceptions; he may even tend to view that experience as a test of the values he holds, as a result of which he may come to see as a moral weakness something he was taught to consider a moral strength, and conversely.

The best relation between two episodes in a life, according to this dialectic ideal, is not continued progress to a fixed ideal, nor maximal preservation of what is conclusively accepted as ultimately valuable. Rather, the required kind of continuance here is perhaps best expressed by saying that any future change in a person's basic outlook ought to be acceptable if it were presented to him now, along with an account of the reasons and causes that led him to this change. In other words, the kind of change the person wishes for himself is that if, *per impossibile*, he were able to take a prospective look at the experiences of his future life, with a full appreciation of the causes at work, he would approve of the way his personal outlook evolved through them.<sup>3</sup> I believe that an ideal not unlike this governs very many lives. Some may consider it a creative

task, to be consciously pursued, while others may rather self-evidently accept it as being the right kind of attitude without seeing it as a cause of enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup>

Ideals of personal continuance may be more or less important relative to the part of morality that is expressed without them, for instance, in terms of duties or of virtues, even to the extent that the requirements of personal continuance may conflict with that other part of morality. This may be illustrated by the increasing store that is set by the value of authenticity. This value clearly expresses an ideal of personal continuance: the perfectionist ideal, the conservative ideal or, perhaps most aptly, the dialectic ideal. It does not tell me outright what to do, as a normal moral prescription does, but makes it depend on the kind of history I have, on the kind of values I have embodied up to now, on the moral direction in which I am heading. To act authentically may *mean* the same thing for you as for me, but what it amounts to in your case as compared to mine may be widely different. Unlike a morality of duties or virtues, it tells us to do the same thing only in the most tenuous sense. Earlier times have been notoriously lacking in appreciation of this value: the heretic's authenticity was not counted in his favor. Modern morality, however, seems to be evolving in a direction in which authenticity is considered an important source of value in its own right.<sup>5</sup>

The last ideal of personal continuance I want to discuss is that of indifference. It may appear odd to call indifference an ideal, especially if it concerns the issue of what kind of person one might be in the future. Still, it may not be improper to call it an ideal. As I have indicated, moral conceptions may be classified, not only by the *content* of the particular ideal of personal continuance they hold, but also by the *place* at which they hold it: as one of their basic principles. An indifferent ideal of personal continuance is possible if it is held in the latter way: for an attitude of indifference with respect to an issue may be called an ideal to the extent that it is a consequence of one's adherence to more fundamental moral values.

Holding the indifferent ideal of personal continuance does not mean, then, that one simply does not care what kind of person one ought to be in the future, but that one is willing to let the answer to that question depend on an answer that is given to another question. A good example is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism, though perhaps not Mill's version, does not contain an ideal of personal continuance as one of its basic premisses.

Instead the content of such an ideal will be determined by whatever attitude turns out to produce to the greatest sum of overall happiness. That also means that the prescribed ideal need not be a fixed one, as is the case, for instance, in Stoicism. Instead, its content may depend on the nature of the circumstances, so that it may conceivably vary with variations in the latter. Thus it has been observed that closely knit communities often tend to be rather unwilling to let their members undergo substantial personal changes. Instead, an individual is pinned down, once and for all, on her character, her family affiliation, her social status. Individuals deviating from them are ridiculed, or morally sanctioned in other ways, not so much for the direction of their deviation, as for simply having deviated. Now it is conceivable that this practice might be endorsed by a utilitarian: for the circumstances might be such that the advantages arising from the stability and predictability of this form of live outweigh the occasional sense of moral suffocation in an individual. Modern metropolitan and free-market conditions, on the other hand, may rather favor utilitarian endorsement of the opposite ideal. An increasing willingness to undergo substantial personal changes may be the attitude here that best matches the environment's fluctuating demands, while at the same time contributing to the individual's feeling of satisfaction derived from her successive positions in it. If conditions are such that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is better achieved by living "serial lives," without much concern for the degree of unity between them, then utilitarianism dictates that one ought not to give weight to any ideal of "faithfulness to the self".

3. Questions of personal continuance are important to us. Our interest in novels testifies for it. Part of their hold on us is not only that they present us with first-hand testimony of personal queries about moral situations confronting their protagonists, but also that these queries are couched in terms of the problem of personal continuance. The protagonist's question that moves us is not so much: how is *someone* to act in the situation confronting me, but rather: how am *I* to act in this situation? It is a question that concerns not only the outcome, or the duty or virtue involved, but the growth or survival, the diminishment or loss, of the protagonist's particular self. This is why novels keep us in their grip.

The novel, so conceived, does not adhere to the ideal of indifference. But that view may be contested. An autobiographical short story by Grace

Paley, *A Conversation with My Father*, deals with precisely this problem.<sup>6</sup> The eighty-six year old father and his daughter, the author, differ sharply about the nature of a good story. Their disagreement turns on the father's unwillingness to see the lives depicted in his daughter's stories as instances of a worthy ideal of personal continuance. He asks her to write "a simple story .. the kind de Maupassant wrote, or Chekhov.." Trying to comply, she proposes the following:

Once in my time there was a woman and she had a son. They lived nicely, in a small apartment in Manhattan. This boy at about fifteen became a junkie, which is not unusual in our neighborhood. In order to maintain her close friendship with him, she became a junkie too. She said it was part of the youth culture, with which she felt very much at home. After a while, for a number of reasons, the boy gave it all up and left the city and his mother in disgust. Hopeless and alone, she grieved. We all visit her.

When the father complains that she has missed the point of his objection, the author tries the story again, rendering some of the characters' changes somewhat more intelligible (the boy was not a hopeless junkie but "an ideologue and successful converter," editing a periodical that he managed to get sold in Lower Manhattan newsstands; the mother became addicted too "because she had always believed in giving bad habits room at home where one could keep an eye on them"; the boy is converted back to a rigidly healthy life style through his love for "a stern and proselytizing girl"; after unsuccessful attempts to convert the mother, the two move to another neighborhood and refuse to see her "until she had been off drugs for sixty days"). The author's father remains unsatisfied: "Poor woman. Poor girl, to be born in a time of fools, to live among fools... what a tragedy. The end of a person." The author objects:

"No pa," I begged him. "It doesn't have to be. She's only about forty. She could be a hundred different things in this world as time goes on. A teacher or a social worker. An ex-junkie! ... She could change..."

The father persists that it has to be "the end", but the author does not give in. She continues her story:



She did change. .. Right now, she's the receptionist in a storefront community clinic in the East Village. Most of the customers are young people, some old friends. The head doctor has said to her, "If we only had three people in this clinic with your experiences.."

The father keeps insisting: "No .. truth first. She will slide back. A person must have character."

The emotional difference between the author and her father clearly does not rest on their adoption of different *criteria* of personal identity. They both believe that the woman at the end of the story and the woman at the beginning of the story are one and the same person. Their disagreement is about ideals of personal continuance. Underneath the father's vehement criticism, it is not difficult to detect Cicero's claim: "When you are no longer what you were, there is no reason left for being alive." The only thing left is to go on living like a fool: "the end of a person." The author obviously does not espouse her father's judgment. Although the woman, by a series of abrupt and unintended changes, has been taken far away from the kind of person she used to be, there may still be a lot of good things in store for her, as well as for others. That is what will make hers a worthwhile life, not that it expresses "a character." This is a judgment that is more easily espoused from a utilitarian point of view.

4. Rival theories on personal identity can be usefully classified as either reductionist or non-reductionist. A reductionist theory holds that the fact of a person's identity can be expressed in terms of other notions that do not refer any longer to the notion of a person. On a non-reductionist view, this is not the case: what it is to be the same person over time is held to be something simple and primitive, that cannot be further analyzed in terms of other notions.

The most widely held reductionist view is known as the psychological theory of personal identity. According to that theory, a person's identity over time consists in the holding of relations of psychological continuity between a temporally extended sequence of mental states. These relations are: relations of memory (actual or potential), similarity of character, preservation of beliefs, desires and intentions, and the kind of relation holding between the formation of an intention and its execution at some later time (which may, but need not, be accompanied by a memory of forming the intention).<sup>7</sup>

Proponents of the psychological theory tend to differ on a further condition: the way in which these relations need to be produced. Normally they are produced by processes in the brain; but what if the contents of my (sick) brain are copied into an artificial device which is then inserted in its place and if, judging from the qualities of my subjective experience, I cannot possibly tell the difference? Some proponents of the theory say that in that case I survive, while others deny it on the ground that the relation of personal identity requires the presence of its normal cause. Others do not require the cause to be normal, but only reliable, while still others judge that a totally random production, at no matter what future time and place, of a being that happens to be psychologically continuous with me would be me.

If the relations of memory, similarity of beliefs, desires, intentions, character, etc., hold to a sufficient degree between two conscious episodes (and are caused in the right way) then, the theory says, these two episodes belong to the same person. This does not mean that it is held to be impossible for a person to change substantially over a period of time. The relations that are constitutive of identity may hold either directly, or indirectly. A memory relation between a mental episode now and an earlier mental episode is *direct* if the episode now contains a memory of the former episode; it is *indirect* if this is not the case, but there is at least one mental episode which now can be remembered (directly or indirectly), and which held a memory of the earlier episode (directly or indirectly). Similarly for the other relations. The distinction between psychological *connectedness* and psychological *continuity* is important here, as well as in the further discussion. Psychological connectedness between two conscious episodes consists in the holding of a sufficient number of *direct* relations between them. Two episodes between which there is no psychological connectedness may nevertheless be psychologically continuous: the latter relation depends on there being a minimum of *indirect* relation between them. Identity is taken to be defined in terms of psychological continuity rather than psychological connectedness. What is required for two mental episodes to belong to the same person is not direct relations of memory and strong relations of similarity in beliefs, desires, character, etc., but only an overlapping sequence of such relations that is compatible with substantial changes.

On the reductionist view sketched, an individual mental state belongs to a person, not because there is some underlying "thing," a "self," that

“has” this mental state, but because it is psychologically connected with a sequence of other mental states. The non-reductionist conception denies this. A person is not just a sequence of thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc., but the single underlying “self” that “has” all these thoughts, feelings and experiences. This “self,” it is held by these theories, is an immaterial thing, a mental substance or a Cartesian ego. It remains identical to itself and is indivisible. One is intimately aware of its present existence in one’s experience; its existence in the past is shown by the quality of one’s memories: for these show not only that an experience was had by a consciousness that is so and so related to my present experience, but that *I*, the subject of this present experience, is the very same subject who had that past experience.

5. I will not present any arguments in favor of, or against, these theories here, nor will I try to say which of the two is right. The question I wish to ask is whether holding a view on the issue of personal identity commits one to a particular ideal of personal continuance.

Intuitively, one might suspect this to be the case. Let us return to Paley’s story. Father and daughter disagree in their ideals of personal continuance. Now, one might suspect that the father would be inclined to accept the non-reductionist conception of personal identity, while the daughter would be inclined to accept the reductionist conception. The attitude of faithfulness to the self, endorsed by the father as the only right one, seems to be motivated by a belief in the existence of an underlying, indivisible self. By contrast, the daughter’s support of a more indifferent attitude to questions of personal continuance seems more compatible with the reductionist view, according to which a person’s identity is only a matter of the presence of a sufficient degree of psychological continuity.

Is this correlation only a psychological fact, without conceptual ground? One might argue that this is the case. A criterion of identity only tells how conscious episodes must be related in order to belong to one and the same person or to different persons. A moral theory tells us how persons ought to behave: although it obviously employs a criterion of personal identity, its content is not determined by it.<sup>8</sup> Still, it is true that if the criterion of identity of two competing theories on personal identity were to “cut” persons in radically different ways, it might make a radical difference, not to the formulation of a moral theory, but the way that theory applies to “our” lives. For according to the right theory of per-

sonal identity, it might turn out that we have been making mistakes in our actual judgments of identity, and so have been applying the moral theory in the wrong way. But this is not the case. The different competing theories of personal identity do not differ in the way they individuate persons under the normal conditions of life; this difference only shows up when one turns to imaginary cases that may not even be physically or technically possible. On this ground, then, one might argue that the choice of a theory of personal identity makes no difference whatsoever to the choice of an ideal of personal continuance.

Derek Parfit, however, has argued that adopting the psychological theory commits one to fundamental changes in one's moral beliefs.<sup>9</sup> In the introduction to his *Reasons and Persons* he refers to a distinction between two kinds of philosophy described by Strawson, descriptive and revisionary. He writes: "Descriptive philosophy gives reasons for what we instinctively assume, and explains and justifies the unchanging central core in our beliefs about ourselves, and the world we inhabit. I have great respect for descriptive philosophy. But, by temperament, I am a revisionist (...) I challenge what we assume. Philosophers should not only interpret our beliefs; when they are false, they should change them."<sup>10</sup>

Intuitively, Parfit agrees, most people are non-reductionist. One typically reasons: what is present now, here, this very consciousness that is mine, either will be present at a future moment, or it will not. That this will be the case or not does not appear to be a trivial fact about the world. It is not that *some* consciousness will be there or not, but *my* consciousness. This fact makes a world of difference. I am saddened by the news that someone is to die, but I am horrified when I learn it is me. My horror is induced by a belief that what is present here and now, my consciousness, will be present in the future too. There is a center of consciousness, I seem to assume, *myself*, the originator of my actions, that either will be present or not at some point in the future. And this is what makes the fact of my death so dreadful: for I, this center of consciousness, can imagine a time at which this very center of consciousness will not exist anymore.

But there is no such fact, Parfit contends. And because this is so, my emotional reaction is not rational: it rests on a false belief. The only fact there is is that *a* consciousness either will exist or not that is to such and such a degree continuous with this, present, consciousness. One should not fear death, then, not because, as Epicurus says, one will not be there

anymore *after* death has arrived, but because, in a sense, one will not even be there *when* death arrives. All there *really* is to a person's identity are different kind of links between a temporally extended series of experiences: links of memory, continuity of character, continuity of beliefs, of desires, of projects, the link between intentions and a future actions fulfilling them. The center of consciousness which I am in the habit of projecting as the basis of any experiences that ever will be mine is an illusion. The presence of psychological continuity will make it the case, of course, that *I* will die, but that fact, in Parfit's words, is not the *deep* fact one took it to be.

Parfit believes that from this *is* an *ought* follows. This ought has a negative as well as a positive side. Negatively: identity should no longer matter to us. Positively: what should matter to us is psychological connectedness.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the force of these claims, I quote Parfit's discussion of an example: division. "In this imagined case," Parfit writes, "each half of my brain is successfully transplanted into another body. What happens to me? Unless we grotesquely distort the concept of a person, the only possible answers are that I shall be one of the resulting people, or the other, or neither. If we believe that identity is what matters, each of these answers is hard to accept. Given the exact similarity of the two resulting people, it is hard to believe that I shall be *one* of these two people. If I shall be *neither* of these people, and identity is what matters, I ought to regard division as equivalent to death. But this is also hard to believe. My relation to each resulting person contains everything that would be needed for survival. The relation cannot be called identity because and only because it holds between me and *two* future people. In ordinary death, this relation holds between me and *no* future person. Though double survival cannot be described in the language of identity, it is not equivalent to death. Two does not equal zero."<sup>12</sup>

What one should do, therefore, is to detach the attitudes normally attached to the relation of identity, and to attach them to the relation of psychological connectedness. Double survival is as good as ordinary survival, in some respect even better. That we cannot apply the language of identity here and say who is me, does not matter. One should learn to see the question: "Will I exist or not?" as not important. And not only in this imagined case, but also in the normal case. Contrary to what we are inclined to think, identity in itself is not important: the importance it

normally seems to have to us derives from the importance of the relation of psychological connectedness.

Detaching moral and prudential attitudes from the relation of identity, and attaching them to the relation of psychological connectedness has two kinds of consequences in Parfit's view. The first consequence will be our main concern. It is that a number of self-directed and other-directed attitudes should vary in strength according to the degree of psychological connectedness. Apart from questions of predictability, the greater concern I have for what will happen to me in ten minutes than for what will happen to me ten years hence is justified, Parfit says, by the greater degree of psychological connectedness between my present consciousness and the consciousness that will be there in ten minutes. Or if you have made me make a solemn promise to you, but you have changed considerably since then, I ought not to feel obliged to comply when you now relieve me from that promise. Similarly, if a convict is now less closely connected to himself at the time of his crime, he is less responsible and deserves less punishment.

The second consequence is that the contrast between intra-personal episodes and inter-personal episodes should be less important. Take the issue of compensation. We tend to think that to make a person suffer now in order to grant him a benefit later is more justified than to make her suffer in order to grant a benefit to someone else. But since identity is not important, we should be less impressed with this contrast. We should consider it more wrong to make a person suffer for a future benefit to herself than we do now, and relatively less wrong to make her suffer in order to benefit someone else. The prime demand of justice, Parfit argues, is to distribute benefits in such a way that in *all* stages of *anyone's* life suffering is relieved as much as possible.

6. I have not done justice to Parfit's complex argument on these issues. But I believe I have indicated enough to be able to proceed to a discussion of two kinds of questions. First, if Parfit is right that rejecting the notion of an underlying, unchanging, indivisible self commits one to these changed attitudes, what, if anything, does this imply for ideals of personal continuance? Secondly, is it true that an acceptance of the reductionist view would leave very much intact the importance psychological connectedness now has to us? I will argue that acceptance of the reductionist view is incompatible with any ideal of personal continuance other

than that of indifference, because concern with the qualities of mental states that are merely psychologically connected to the present ones cannot be motivated anymore on other than instrumental grounds.

The first question is the least interesting one, as it presupposes the truth of Parfit's claim that psychological connectedness will continue to be important if one accepts the reductionist view; for my answer to the second question will challenge that claim. Still, in case that answer would turn out to be misguided, the answer to the first one might still hold.

Suppose, then, that the view that a person's identity consist in the presence of an indivisible Self, a Cartesian ego, an immaterial substance, is mistaken. And suppose that Parfit is right that giving up this belief commits one to these changed attitudes. Then, I contend, it follows that the perfectionist or dialectic ideals of personal continuity are not the right ones for a person to have.

Take the perfectionist ideal. On that ideal, I am concerned with the future: what kind of person I will be then is important to me. On that ideal, too, I am more justified to be concerned with myself in the future when it will be the case that I have come close to that perfection, than when it will be the case that I have remained far removed from it. Given that I am now rather removed from the ideal, it is likely that I am more closely connected with my future self in the latter case, in which I will fail to approach the ideal, than in the former case, in which I succeed in coming closer to the valued form of perfection. That means that Parfit's view and the perfectionist ideal yield prescriptions that are incompatible. If Parfit is right, it would be right for me to be concerned more with myself in the future in the case in which I am further removed from my ideal of perfection, and to be concerned less with myself in the future in the case I will have approached that ideal. Hence, if Parfit is right, I am not justified in adopting the perfectionist ideal.

The same conclusion may be argued in a different way. As I have indicated, Parfit believes that changing one's beliefs about identity should affect one's beliefs about compensation. It becomes less right to make someone suffer for a future benefit to himself. The objection is not so much that otherwise one would be acting paternalistically, but that the person's present self and his future self are more tenuously related than we used to think. There is no deep fact about this future self's being the same person. For the same reason, then, it is also less right for a person to make *himself* suffer now in order to secure a future benefit to himself.

But if so, it must be less right, too, to adopt the perfectionist ideal. For adopting that ideal means imposing burdens on one's present self that one would not impose when adopting some other ideal. And it would be more wrong to do so to the extent that one's present self is further removed from the ideal and one is more likely to approach it in the future. For if so, one would be imposing burdens for the benefit of someone who is only tenuously connected to oneself at present.

These arguments show, then, that if Parfit is right, the perfectionist ideal of personal continuance is not the right one. For the same reason, they also show that if Parfit is right, the dialectic ideal of personal continuance is not right. For here too, the ideal held by the person may render him more concerned with a future self that is less closely connected to himself, and may make him willing to impose burdens on his present self in favor of the realization of that kind of self.

One might be justified in adopting these ideals, however, if one did so because of their instrumental value in realizing another value. As I have indicated, Parfit proposes that for reductionists relief of suffering at any stage of anyone's existence ought to be a major concern. Therefore, if the kind of perfection strived for is to be an optimal reliever of suffering, the perfectionist ideal might be justified: some stages in a person's life are made to suffer, namely those stages in which I impose burdens on myself to become an optimal reliever of suffering, but this is more than compensated by the resulting relief in suffering in other people's lives. Imposing burdens on a present self in favor of the realization of certain qualities in a future self that will make that self *less* psychologically connected to the present one may be justified, then, by its instrumental value with respect to some other ideal.

7. If this is true, however, it should make one question the very value psychological connectedness is assumed to have in the reductionist view. If persons are just sequences of thoughts, feelings, experiences, ..etc, why should it be important to them that there exist similar sequences in the future of similar thoughts and feelings and containing memories of the present ones? In particular, if persons have values, ought they not rather to accept that degree of psychological connectedness, whatever it is, that is most instrumental in realizing these values?

I believe there is something basically wrong with Parfit's assumption of the importance of psychological connectedness. Not that I think psy-



chological connectedness unimportant: it is *very* important. What is wrong about Parfit's assumption, I contend, is that he tends to present the importance of psychological connectedness as somehow deriving from the truth of his reductionist theory. But it does not. Its importance derives from the importance *identity* has to us.

Let me illustrate this point by taking a second look at the case of division. How does it achieve its effect of showing that what matters is psychological connectedness? The reasoning is: if half of my brain would survive and support the mental life that is mine, while the other half perishes, I would survive. Now, if the other half is *not* destroyed, but instead both halves are each lodged in qualitatively identical copies of my body, the surviving persons cannot both be identical to me. Nor does there seem to be any reason why I would be identical to one of the resulting persons, but not the other. So the question: "Do I survive?" must be answered negatively. But that doesn't matter. The existence of the two persons is infinitely more like survival than like death. All that really matters, therefore, is psychological connectedness.

What really is shown by this argument, I contend, is not that psychological continuity matters *simpliciter*, but that it matters from a standpoint of frustration: *when identity cannot be had*. When we are confronted with a case in which identity cannot be had, but psychological connectedness can, we transfer the importance identity has to us, to the relation of psychological connectedness. We reason: if identity cannot be had, we will settle for what comes closest to it and whose presence is a necessary condition of it: psychological connectedness. The subsequent mistake is that we are led to believe that psychological connectedness has value *per se*. The value of psychological connectedness has been established, but, I contend, only from the perspective of identity.

If this is true, psychological connectedness would cease to have any particular value for one who would succeed to drop the perspective of identity altogether. At this point, this is no more than a suggestion. Let me try to render it more plausible.

Parfit claims: "Though persons exist, we could give a *complete* description of reality *without* claiming that persons exist."<sup>13</sup> In such a description, then, the persons described should describe *themselves* in accordance with the requirements of that description; otherwise the description would not be complete because it leaves out the persons' self-conception. So they should not conceive of their identity in any other way

than as consisting in the presence of a sufficient degree of non-branching psychological continuity between a sequences of conscious states. Thus, "I" would mean to them, not "the agent pronouncing this, " but "the sequence of mental states with which the present mental state is psychologically continuous;" for according to the psychological theory the existence of an agent over and above the sequence of conscious states is an illusion. Let me call persons who can thus be part of "a complete description of reality without claiming that persons exist," because they have no self-conception that is incompatible with such a description, *P-persons*.

Now there is a world of difference between doing something (raising one's arm) and having something happen to one (one's arm's rising without one's intending to raise it), between looking at something and merely undergoing a sequence of impressions, between making up one's mind on an issue and having a thought occur to one out of the blue.<sup>14</sup> Parfit need not deny this. But he would insist that this difference is not a deep fact. The difference is not that in the one case an agent is doing something, whereas in the other case he is not doing anything. Although the subjective impressions of a "doing" and of a "happening" are very different, both are just elements in a sequence of mental states, either as fully determined effects of earlier causes, or as indeterministic events. It is just that one has the *impression of acting* when a mental event is brought about in such and such a way. If P-persons describe their actions as being brought about *by themselves*, this is true, as Parfit says, only because of "the way they talk."<sup>15</sup> The expression does not *mean* more to them than something like: this mental event bringing about that bodily movement is psychologically connected with these and these other mental states. Although P-persons might have the *impression of acting*, they could not *really* mean that an action is brought about *by themselves*. For if they did, the description of persons would not be complete without mentioning persons in an irreducible way.

P-persons would therefore necessarily have a different conception of themselves than the one that comes naturally to us: for we believe we *are* agents, not just because of the way we talk. Our conception of ourselves is that we bring things about. The question I would like to consider, now, is this: from this different viewpoint of P-persons what place would be left for an ideal of personal continuance?

I am not entirely sure that P-persons, not conceiving of themselves as

real agents, could be said to entertain values (as opposed to having desires). If they could not, then the argument is disappointingly short: neither are they able to entertain any ideals of personal continuance. But let me assume they are able to entertain values; for instance, the value Parfit says ought to be predominant if the reductionist theory is true, namely that of relieving suffering in any person-stage, whether within one's own sequence or in other sequences. The question then is: on what ground would P-persons be justified to entertain, in addition, values that are specific to those mental states that are psychologically connected to their present one(s), and which they don't need to have to mental states not so connected? On what ground would they be justified in willing that these states, in particular, come as close as possible to a given ideal of perfection, or that they are not only connected but maximally connected to the states that are presently theirs, or are dialectically related to these?

I contend that they would be justified in caring specifically for the qualities of those future mental states only on purely instrumental grounds. Thus, they might want the future mental states which will be psychologically connected to the present ones to have such and such qualities, because these qualities are required to realize the value they hold. And they might be justified to direct this effort more to future mental states that will be psychologically connected to their present ones to the extent that it is easier to produce these qualities there than in other future mental states. Yet, if technological means were to provide equally efficient levers to modify future states other than those that will be psychologically connected to the present ones, there would be no justification left to direct one's efforts more to those states than to these others. Apart from this instrumental reason, then, the fact that certain future mental states are psychologically connected to their present ones should have no particular importance for P-persons.

The same holds for a P-person's relation to past mental states to which he is psychologically connected. What ground could there be for him, for instance, to be faithful to the values held then? Either he presently has those values, or he does not. If he does, then that is the ground for his abiding by them. But if he doesn't, then on what ground should he feel himself called upon by the requirement of faithfulness? For there is no such fact as *that*he did once entertain these values, over and above the fact they were just part of a sequence of mental states to which his present mental states are psychologically connected. It is true, for instance,

that he has memories of those mental states, but on what ground would that mean that they have a claim on him? On what ground would their belonging to this sequence have more weight for him than their belonging to another sequence, if he does not happen to share those values? He may agree that a person's past typically *causes* him to have certain values, but not that these values have a special claim in case it so happens that they are no longer held.

I conclude that persons who have an outlook on their identity satisfying the requirements of Parfit's completely describable reality would not be justified in entertaining an ideal of personal continuance other than the indifferent one. If identity does not matter, then neither should psychological connectedness; hence there is no justification for specifically caring for the qualities of those future mental states that will be psychologically connected to the present ones. A reality that describes itself in exclusively impersonal terms cannot at the same time provide a place for values that are truly personal.

8. Parfit might reply in the following way. One is irrational if one acts on a false belief, especially if one knows it to be false. The belief that there is a "self" distinct from the sequence of mental states "had" by it is mistaken. Ideals of personal continuance other than the indifferent one depend for their justification on such a belief. Therefore one is irrational in adopting an ideal of personal continuance other than the indifferent one.

But I doubt that these ideals of personal continuance can *only* be justified by a belief in the existence of a self as a simple fact, an unextended and indivisible Cartesian ego, an immaterial substance, a soul. Perhaps they are not even justified by such a belief. If a future person's experiences are only related to mine in the sense that they belong to the same immaterial soul, that may not be a reason to care more about their quality than about anyone else's. To the extent that there is nothing intrinsically personal about my soul, apart from its being an entity making the sequence of psychologically related states that are mine possible, there may be nothing especially justifying concern for that "thing."<sup>16</sup>

Most of us do care, in one way or another, about what kind of person one will be in the future. Perhaps we should try to conceive of this, not as being justified by a particular fact, but as being part itself of what makes up the fact of personal identity. If this is true, however, a com-

plete description of reality without claiming there are persons would be impossible: persons could not be described by it. For as I have tried to argue, a genuine ideal of personal continuance can only be held by subjects who believe they are *not* just sequences of thoughts and impressions.

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## NOTES

1. There is an analogy here with Harry Frankfurt's notion of second-order volition; see his "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in: G. Watson (ed), *Free Will*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982.
2. It might seem somewhat incongruous to call Proust's version of the conservative ideal part of a *moral* conception. Proust himself certainly did not think of universalizing his ideal. So even on Hare's formal conditions alone, it does not count as a moral view. To Proust, morality was part and parcel of the esthetic life and the life of affections, and held no deep value when divorced from them. Still, Proust's ideal of personal continuance was defined in terms of what was most valuable (to him) and of what kind of life was best (for him); if it is not entirely right to call it an ethical conception, it is equally wrong to call it an egoistic or prudential conception, or even a purely esthetic conception.
3. I am aware that this description of the dialectic ideal of personal continuance is rather imprecise and incomplete; thus the ideal seems also to include the requirement that one should not unreasonably defend one's moral outlook against possible "falsification" by avoiding to look certain experiences in the face; yet I cannot attempt to do better here.
4. The term "dialectic" may be somewhat a misnomer, for the dialectic ideal of personal continuance may be fully divorced from the idea of moral progress. I have chosen the term rather to indicate that the kind of change that is considered most acceptable by the ideal is the one that is the outcome of a kind of dialogue, between one's own values and other values, but also between one's values and an unprejudiced evaluation of one's own experience.

5. It is worth pointing out that the ideal of authenticity seems to resist absorption by a number of standard moral theories. It certainly seems hard to square with utilitarianism's exclusive focus on consequences. At the same time it is un-Kantian in its appeal, not to universal reason in a person, which is the same as in any other person, but to elements that may be allowed to be contingently personal.
6. In the collection of short stories *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. New York, Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1984.
7. Not all proponents agree on the list. Locke, the theory's originator, included only the relation of memory as constitutive of identity, but since then the list has gradually expanded. It still remains somewhat vague. Thus Jennifer Whiting adds concern for future experiences as an element that is itself constitutive of personal identity ("Friends and Future Selves," *The Philosophical Review*, XCV, 4, 1986); other recent writers have added the continuity of the person's self-conception and so-called non-autonomous relations of access (Carol Rovane, "Branching Self-Consciousness." *The Philosophical Review*, p.355-395; Stephen L. White, "Metapsychological Relativism and the Self." *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXVI, 6, 1989, pp. 298-323). There is no established view either on the proper weighing of the different kinds of constituents of the relation of psychological continuity (Parfit, for instance, expresses a preference for continuity of character over preservation of memories, and says that those connections that are distinctive, or different in different people, should be weighed more (Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.515, note 6). The vagueness of the definition of personal identity need not be seen as a flaw: the proponent of the psychological theory might maintain that another mistake in our ideas on personal identity is the assumption that this relation must be entirely *determinate*.
8. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 124-125 (note 16); see also: John Rawls, "Independence of Moral Theory," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 48, 1974-75, pp. 5-22.
9. Derek Parfit, "Later Selves and Moral Principles," in A. Montefiori (ed.), *Philosophy and Personal Relations*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973; *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

10. Parfit, D., *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.x.
11. Not psychological continuity, although personal identity is defined in terms of that relation. The reasoning is that we can conceive of a case ("Methusaleh") of a person living long enough so that towards the end stage of his life he does not have any memory of the first stage of his life; in addition, there is no similarity in beliefs, desires, attitudes, etc. between them; it is clear, says Parfit, that in such a case the subject of the first stage has no particular reason to be concerned with the subject of the last stage.
12. *Reasons and Persons*, p. 278.
13. *Reasons and Persons*, p. 212.
14. See my "The Heterogeneity of Thinking," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 42, 1989, pp. 717-742.
15. *Reasons and Persons*, p. 223.
16. See Whiting, J., "Friends and Future Selves," *The Philosophical Review*, XCV, No 4, 1986, p. 547.