

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**WHERE IS THE PERSON?**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

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**Nathaniel W. Gonzales**

Gonzales: Where is the Person?

## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and cited in Bibliography.

Bratislava, February 15, 2023

Nathaniel W. Gonzales.

Signature:

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## Abstract

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This work is focused on the views on personal identity presented by Parfit in his work *Reasons and Persons*. Through analysis, we shall conclude what Parfit's beliefs about key problems in the study of personal identity, like fission and the transplant problem, are. On top of these views, this work will also discuss the nature of the methodology used to draw conclusions in general, not only for personal identity, but for philosophy as a whole, and see how personal identity is important even outside of purely philosophical studies. This work will focus mostly on primary literature, with secondary literature serving as a definitional supplement, or as a source of critique of Parfit.

Parfit's reductionism is an appealing solution to many of the problems of personal identity, but the later prevalent animalism seemingly puts reductionism on more rocky ground. Using Olson's many critiques of reductionism, as well as Johnston's view that criteria of personal identity should not be viewed as merely *a-priori* facts, the author will attempt to show one of the potential conclusions of a reductionist theory, which the author calls the *multiplex person theory*. On top of this conclusion, the author will also question the nature of personhood as a physical concept. If, according to the multiplex person theory, there is no true unity, no single thinker, then it follows that there is no true person as such, and it seems unlikely that any specific particle/cell constellation can be pointed at and called "person."

*Keywords:* personal identity, Parfit, reductionism, animalism, person

## Abstrakt

Autor bakalárskej práce: Nathaniel W. Gonzales

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Táto práca sa zaoberá témou osobnej identity, ktorá je prezentovaná v dielach Parfita, a to konkrétne v práci *Reasons and Persons*. Pomocou analýzy zhodnotíme to, aký pohľad má Parfit na kľúčovú tému osobnej identity, štiepenia a problému transplantácie (všetko ohraničené štúdiou). Okrem uvedeného problému sa predložená práca zameria aj na podstatu metodológie, ktorá je použitá pri tvorbe všeobecných záverov (nie iba pre záverov týkajúcich sa osobnej identity), teda záverov pre filozofiu ako celok. Zároveň uvidíme aj to, ako je osobná identita dôležitou oblasťou aj mimo čistého filozofického štúdia. Predložená práca pracuje prevažne s primárnou literatúrou, kde sekundárna literatúra pomáha ako definičný doplnok či ako zdroj Parfitovej kritiky.

Parfitov redukcionizmus je prítlačlivým riešením pre mnohé problémy osobnej identity, avšak neskôr prevládajúci animalizmus stavia redukcionizmus na neistú pôdu. Pomocou použitia Olsonovej kritiky redukcionizmu, rovnako ako Johnstonovho pohľadu na kritériá (kde kritériá osobnej identity nemajú byť vnímané iba ako a-priori fakty), sa autor pokúsi poukázať na jeden z možných záverov redukcionistickej teórie, ktorý autor nazýva teória multiplex osobnosti.

Okrem tohto záveru sa autor pokúsi spochybnit' prirodzenosť osobnosti ako fyzikálneho konceptu. Ak je pravdou čo hovorí teória multiplex osobnosti, teda že tu nie je skutočná jednota, jediný mysliaci, tak potom tu nie je skutočná osoba ako taká, a teda na žiadnu špeciálnu konštaláciu častice/bunky nemôže byť poukázané ako na osobu. Autor verí, že

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táto dichotómia vo videní osobnej identity, či už môže byť vystopovaná ako konkrétna, reálna vec, je najdôležitejšia pre vytvorenie akejkoľvek teórie o osobnej identite.

*Kľúčové slová:* osobná identita, Partif, redukcionizmus, animalizmus, osoba

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## Chapter 1: British Philosophy in the 1980s

To begin this work, I believe it would be useful to understand the philosophical world that Parfit found himself in while writing *Reasons and Persons*. This understanding may not enlighten as far as theory is concerned, but at the very least it may align us with the general standpoints of analytic philosophy and its methodology, as well as also keeping us aware of what the dangers of such an approach might be.

Let us first start with understanding what analytic philosophy is. It is a style of philosophy defined mostly by its differences in methodology from more classical forms of philosophy that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, specifically in Britain. As Mellor describes in *Analytic Philosophy* what distinguishes analytic philosophy is “that it not only uses analytic techniques, but is explicitly concerned to develop and assess them: not of course as ends in themselves, but as means to philosophical understanding.” (p. 19) This at first glance paints a somewhat vague picture of what analytic philosophy is, but to put more simply, analytic philosophy is the use of analysis to understand a certain concept, but also with the understanding that our methods in the first place are likely to need to be developed while parallelly shedding light on the concept.

Beyond this, analytic philosophy, as Mellor points out, bases our beliefs on evidence and requires “a nose for nonsense” (p. 19) Analytic philosophy has increasingly grown to be closely tied with scientific development, with whole specializations dedicated to theories of science (philosophy of science, philosophy of physics just to name a few) and in this sense, is a sounder way of acquiring knowledge. This close proximity to science has also meant that analytic philosophers will be more careful with their use of language, trying to keep the definitions of terms and concepts as clearly defined as possible. This is a benefit for not only the reader, but with contemporaries as well. It creates a philosophical space where all of the thinkers present are able to contribute to the development of concepts and theories for they know that they are, at the end of the day, all discussing the same thing.

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This is not to say that the whole situation is rosy, as Gellner (1986) points out in *Three Contemporary Styles of British Philosophy*. Following the rise of Wittgenstein, Gellner points out that a seeming philosophical dogma had overtaken British philosophy. Gellner believes that the focus on language, and Wittgenstein's view on the world as being one of linguistic naturalism meant that philosophy no longer focused itself on the solving of philosophical problems, but that our misuse of language meant that philosophical problems would only be dissolved.

In the 1960s, a shift happened, and one of the most prominent ways of doing philosophy was what he calls *Quiddity on Wheels*. This name originates from scholastic Quiddity, which was the view that the world could be described through the use of formal concepts. This restarting of Quiddity likely came from the development of modern formal logic and set theory in mathematics, compounded by Wittgenstein's view that the world could be viewed either through pluralistic naturalism or formalistic monism; that the world could be described purely through language or through logic. The problem however with formal concepts, is that in many ways it shoves phenomenon and concepts into boxes that they likely do not fit. It is too rigorous, essentially. This is not to entirely undermine Wittgenstein, as his views on conceptual monism, that the world can be understood as a cross-relation of numerous facts in one system is in fact the basis on which modern science functions.

Why is it important that we keep this in mind? In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit presents a criterion of personal identity that is first and foremost a logical *relation*, a formal concept. For Gellner, it is entirely possible that if we try to formulate personal identity in such a way, that we are putting its concepts into molds which potentially do not fit and can mislead us in our views.

It is also important for us, as later thinkers to keep in mind. Analytic philosophy in general has taken a fair few steps away from Quiddity on Wheels, linguistic naturalism for example is no longer taken as seriously as it was when Wittgenstein was still at large. On top of this, logic, in my view, has stepped away from being a way in which the universe is structured, but rather as a methodological tool. If I have propositions A and B, with conclusion C arising in the form of if A and if B then C, then C's truth value relies

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on A and B's truth values. It serves as a way of presenting evidence and further gives us reason to believe our conclusions.

Finally, there is the question: why should this work fall under the umbrella of analytic philosophy? There is the practical reason that *Reasons and Persons* also falls under this umbrella, so keeping this continuity is almost necessary. Regardless of this, I believe that the problems of personal identity are only really problems for analytic philosophy. If I follow more traditional views on philosophy, then I can claim that we are just transcendental egos or something of the sort and call it a day. This is not to say that traditional philosophy is in any way inferior, but if we do not, as we shall see, base our views on findings in science as evidence, then personal identity as such is not a philosophical problem.

## Chapter 2: Personal Identity: Problems and Methodology

Personal identity, and further, the problem of personal identity is perhaps one of the most important problems of contemporary philosophy of mind. With a foundation stemming most from the likes of Locke and Hume, questions of personhood, how a person persists over time and the likes still puzzles thinkers today. From a purely philosophical standpoint, the implications of theories of personal identities have great impact on other metaphysical notions, like agency, free-will and accountability to name a few. There are also great moral and ethical conclusions to draw from such theories; what impact decisions made today have on future persons for example.

Outside of these metaphysical musings, theories of personal identity can also be seen to have more practical, and naturally, more scientific outcomes as well. Philosophy of psychiatry, a relatively new sphere of philosophy, which began to emerge at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as dealing with philosophy of medicine, the ethics of psychiatric treatment and the general notion of mental illness, is also reliant on our notions of personal identity. This work will not concern itself with the philosophy of psychiatry at large, it is now far too broad and like many analytic philosophies of today, extremely specialized. What I would instead like to show, is that even great metaphysical problems can be seen to have profound impacts on the daily lives of many individuals.

### 2.1 A Study of Peripheries

One of the central methodological problems of personal identity is that much of its contemplation is founded in imagined, extreme cases. Parfit, the focus of this work, and many other personal identity theorists, especially those who vouch for the psychological approach, call unto sci-fi and extreme medical procedures to make points. This approach may seem dubious at first glance, but I think in many ways it is hard to find regularities

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and draw conclusions from homogeneity. Say for example, we wanted to understand the mechanism behind a certain behavior, say physiologically. We may be able to purely describe all of the mechanisms behind a group's behavior, but this knowledge in a vacuum can tend to be purely descriptive. Thus, in order to explain *why* certain behavior is only visible in certain peoples, it is also paramount to understand why this behavior is not visible in others. If I believe that in transferring the brain to a new body, the resulting person is the person in the brain, I should also be able to explain why. This is the value of said thought experiments.

In so-called normal cases of personal identity, it is enough to claim that person A, who has lived a healthy life, free of psychological trauma, with certain dispositions, memories, views etc. is clearly the same person. This does not challenge our intuitions. It is in these peripheral cases (though perhaps it is a bit insensitive to call mental disorders peripheral) that we can learn about the boundaries of persistence, what it is that challenges personal identity.

## 2.2 Some Examples

Radden (2004) in *Identity: Personal Identity, Characterization Identity, and Mental Disorders*, discusses examples in psychiatry that challenge our notions of personal identity. One such case is Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) which, according to the *DSM-V* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) is a dissociative disorder characterized by “the presence of two or more distinct personality states” (p. 292) Radden, using Flanagan, discusses the normal person as being a multiplex. This is to say that a person is not a single unity, but rather the collection of various views, inclinations and desires, all of which are in contention but interconnected. DID on the other hand, is multiple; there are many “narrators” of which there may be a lack of connectedness via memory, behavior and affectedness. Some criteria provided for this multiplicity by Wilkes for example, claims that each personality state can be seen to have its own agency, personality, persistence and disordered awareness.

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This is not the only view however, there are those who claim that there is no multiplicity whatsoever, and also those who claim that personality states resulting from DID are simply “subselves.” The issue of the self has also been raised regarding DID, ranging from denying the self altogether, claiming that it is an illusion, or trying to defend the self’s existence.

Manic Depression is also a base for discussion on personal identity. A view of manic depression can be one such that the manic and depressive states of a sufferer can be distinct persons. Certainly, the motivations, affections and behaviors of a person will vary greatly depending on whether they are in a manic or depressive state. Are they separate selves? Radden claims that there is even persistence of identities deriving from these states; they can last for a relatively long time. There is also a cognitive aspect, deficiencies of memory and awareness between states has also been documented.

I will not go in depth on these issues thusly presented, as I have stated, the philosophy of psychiatry is not the primary focus of this work. But more general questions regarding personal identity can be taken from what we have discussed so far. To illustrate, let us say that person A suffers from some form of DID. At one moment, they claim to be person A and call themselves by person A’s name, and in the next moment do the same as person B. We can claim then that two persons preside within the same brain. Due to the nature of DID, the emergence of person B follows from the experience of some form of traumatic event. It would strike most as puzzling if, one day, person A, who they already know, suddenly came to them as person A, and then began a conversation as person B.

This notion highlights a few problems, one being the mind/self problem. What is the self? Are person A and person B even persons? Are they simply different selves residing within one person? This conclusion, though somewhat enticing, falls victim to the too many thinkers problems. As self A and self B at least on some level are disconnected by memory and also behaviorally, then it seems reasonable to further claim that self A and self B are independent thinkers. If there is no connection between self A and self B, then is the notion of a person even necessary? It would be good to note that this whole line of thinking appears to be Quiddity.

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The other problem we find in the person A person B dichotomy is the nature of persons in general. In most literature on personal identity, the general assumption is one person per brain at any given moment. Proceeding persons, later selves and so-on do not present such issues because they are spatiotemporally separate from persons of today.

As has been shown so far, theories on personal identity can be challenged without actually making theoretical claims on personal identity. We live in a world today where mental health has never been so widely discussed and studied, and following the COVID-19 pandemic, I imagine that this is the case even more so. Personal identity, though primarily a metaphysical issue, has real world problems and outcome

## Chapter 3: Parfit and Relation-R

### 3.1 Reductionism and the Psychological Approach

*Reasons and Persons* by Parfit (1986) is one of his primary works, discussing the topics of morality, rationality, theories on both, as well as being one of the primary works following the Lockean tradition of personal identity, today called the *Psychological Approach*. Before going into detail on Parfit's view, it would be good to give a definition to the concept "person" as given by Locke. Gordon-Roth (2020) gives a good summary of Locke's view in *Locke on Personal Identity*: "thinking intelligent beings that can reason and reflect and consider themselves as the same thinking things in different times and places, but also entities that can be held accountable for their actions." Conceptually, we can say that a person then is a conscious, intelligent, and self-aware being that has agency.

Parfit, in *Reasons and Persons*, aims to provide his view on personal identity, what it means to be a person overtime, and as we will later in this chapter discuss, the many "extreme cases" that serve as the foundation for many of our views on personal identity.

The first, most important distinction in identity as a concept is the division of numeric and qualitative identity. Numeric identity is the logical and mathematical statement of the existence of any specific object or being. I am numerically distinct from other people, no matter how similar we may be, even in the case of me having clones. Qualitative identity is the combination of all the many physical and psychological features that comprise me as a numeric identity. One of the most pressing questions asked by philosophers is: how can an object or a being change qualities overtime and remain the same numeric identity? Or, restated, how can a person be one and the same person at two different points in time.

Parfit calls his view Reductionism, and as stated previously, can be categorized under the broader umbrella, the psychological approach. Reductionism can be many views, but the

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two most prominent adhere to *criterion of personal identity*. The first such criterion is the *Physical Criterion*, which roughly claims that a person at one point in time is the same person in a different point in time if and only if there continues to be enough of the brain, and it is owned by the same person. The second criterion is the *Psychological Criterion*, which claims that a person at one point in time is the same person at another point in time if and only if there is enough *psychological continuity* between the two temporal points. Psychological continuity is the holding of many direct chains of psychological connectedness, which include things such as memory, beliefs, and dispositions.

Parfit validates for the psychological criterion, and from this point we will use his terminology and call psychological continuity **Relation-R**. Stated simply, the reductionist claims that in cases that my brain is moved from my body to another, or is copied and sent somewhere else, that since the resulting person will be psychologically continuous with me, we may as well consider said resulting person to be me. This movement of the brain may result in the death of my human animal, but the holding of Relation R in another body can be considered as good as survival in a similar way that a permanent loss of consciousness can be viewed *as good as death*. (Refer to section 3.5 for a better understanding of this view)

One of the potential objections to Relation-R, as Parfit imagines someone like Butler would give, is that consciousness, and further psychological continuity, presupposes personal identity for the reason that, in having memories for example, you are aware of the fact that it is you who experienced such memories. Parfit uses a concept he calls *quasi-memories*, which are memories that you seem to remember experiencing yourself but are instead had by another person (through for example storytelling, or in a sci-fi setting, that you have implanted into your brain). The assumption Parfit makes is that this shows that remembering an event does not need to mean that you are the person who actually lived this experience. Thus, Relation-R need only be the connectedness of many such quasi-memories, as this would still qualify as being a person.

A note I would like to make, is that at first glance, it would appear that if, we believe that the psychology of a person, their thoughts, beliefs, memories etc. are based on physical processes, then the physical and psychological criterion are essentially different

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descriptions of the same fact. Enough of my brain must continue to exist in order for me to have psychological continuity. Parfit however, claims that the physical and psychological criterion are incompatible with each other. The reason for this is that the physical criterion calls for the continued existence of the *same* brain, which can be conceptually restated as the need for ownership and uniqueness. In the following sections we will discuss why Parfit believes that this view of the physical criterion is indefensible by considering the different, imagined, extreme cases, which seem to show us that the maintaining of my psychology through many different bodies and time is enough to constitute the continued existence of myself as a person.

### 3.2 Fission (Splitting)

I shall begin with the case of fission. Fission can be understood as the splitting of the two hemispheres of the brain. Parfit notes that in the 70s and 80s, surgical treatment of epilepsy had been done through the form of splitting the fibers that divide the left and right hemisphere. An unexpected, but relevant, side effect of this procedure was that the treatment led to what can be understood as the creation of two streams of consciousness in the brain. Clinical tests showed that both sides of the brain were perceptive and responsive to the outside world, though, due to the fact that communication between the two sides was no longer possible, neither side was aware of the thoughts going on in the other.

The reason that fission is an important problem for personal identity is the fact that it has also been shown that the brain is not so strictly specialized as once conceived. In the absence of the other half, it is entirely possible for one hemisphere to learn all of the processes that the other hemisphere was responsible for; essentially, half of a brain can be considered a person. There are strange philosophical implications that can arise from such procedures, however.

One such example is the thought experiment Parfit creates called *The Physics Exam*. He imagines a case where people could split their brains at will, and he does so in order to

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more quickly complete a physics exam. He splits his two hemispheres and has each of them work on a different part of the exam or problem. This split is not permanent, as afterwards he reunites the two halves of his brain and continues his life normally. There are questions that can arise from this, do the two streams of consciousness present after splitting have reasons to be considered different people? And is the person resulting from reunification the same person as he was before being split?

Parfit does not believe that the split sides should be considered different people. For him, it would be absurd to think that splitting my brain for a short period of time would suddenly create two new persons. For him, he believes that the brain should be viewed more as a river, branching in any which way. Thus, there is no reason to think that the unity of consciousness between both sides is necessary for the person after reunification to remain the same person as before. Reunification is important, as the reductionist needs only for a single state of awareness to remain, and this unity of awareness should in theory be held once the brain is reunified.

There is the question as to what would happen if the two hemispheres never end up being reunified. Parfit does not give a direct answer to this, though in the next sub-chapter we will discuss an analogue case, though Parfit presents it as a case of the transplant problem. At any rate, if reunification never happens, then a single state of awareness is no longer present. At the point of splitting, both hemispheres (we assume) are psychologically continuous with the other. Parfit claimed that neither side is aware of the other, and there is clinical evidence of this, but for example, would a hemisphere feel emotion or mood changes caused by processes in the cerebellum as a result of some thought in the other hemisphere? It would seem that we could, after some period of time, claim that both hemispheres are their own people. If the case with the cerebellum I presented were reality, what could we conclude? These are questions that, for a lack of knowledge, I will not attempt to answer, but I think that these are all instrumental questions for how we view personhood.

### 3.3 The Transplant Problem

The transplant problem is one of the fundamental thought experiments for our views on personal identity. If brain transplants were possible, and I had my brain moved to another body, who would the resulting person be? Would I continue to be me, the person in the brain, the person in the body I am being moved to, or a new person entirely? Given Parfit's views on psychological continuity, it should be obvious that Parfit believes that persons go with their brains; it is the brain after all that makes us psychologically continuous.

There are possible objections, that it may depend on what type of body I am being moved to, but Parfit believes that this does not show whether it would matter if I was moved to any kind of body. As discussed during fission, the brain can continue as itself even if only one hemisphere is transplanted. For Parfit, this intuition is strong evidence to show that psychological continuity is what matters.

There is a case of brain transplants where our intuitions, however, are not so clear. Parfit calls this thought experiment *My Division*. Imagine a case where I am a triplet, and I have a functioning brain but a non-life supporting body, and my other two triplets have the opposite problem. To make the best of a bad situation, doctors split my brain and transplant a hemisphere into each of the respective triplets. The question is, who are the resulting people and what happens to me?

There are four potential outcomes that Parfit outlines, either I as the original do not survive, I survive only as one of the two, I survive as the other, or I survive as both. Parfit believes that none of these outcomes are defensible. The brain can survive being split, so it is absurd to believe that I have not survived. If I have survived only as one half, that would seem to be claiming that the other half does not, but this also is absurd to believe. Believing that I survive as both is also absurd because it would imply that in fact three persons survive, with I as the original surviving as some disconnected being. In short, none of the views so far presented are coherent with our intuitions as to what a person is.

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Parfit concludes, that the reductionist view is the only correct view in this case. The reductionist cannot claim who the person was. They can only state the fact that division happened, but they cannot say who they are. All we know, is that the two halves are psychologically continuous with each other.

### 3.4 Branch-Lining and Non-Branch-Lining Cases

All of the cases discussed so far can be categorized into one of two categories, Branch-Lining and Non-Branch-Lining Cases. The difference between the two basically is whether in any given case, say that my brain is split or my cells are copied and sent to a different location, I exist in two locations at the same time. *My Division* is a Branch-Lining Case so long as both hemispheres are put into a different body. If only one hemisphere ends up being transplanted, then this is not a Branch-Lining Case.

This distinction is in fact an extremely important one. If we believe any criterion of personal identity, like Relation-R, then we believe that if only one half of my brain is transplanted and the other is not (and it is not in a condition to provide consciousness) then I go with the half that is transplanted. This is theoretically fine, but the problem arises when we take a Branch-Lining Case. If both halves of my brain are transplanted into different bodies, as Parfit pointed out, we have no way of knowing firstly, what happened to the original me, and secondly, which one of the resulting twins is me. As we will discuss in 4.1, the conclusion seems to be that my continued existence is purely circumstantial, and not properly based on any criterion. If the doctor dropped one hemisphere of my brain and it could no longer support consciousness, then the resulting person is me. Based on some of our intuitions, both hemispheres do not even need to be placed in bodies, perhaps it would be enough to put one half in a life supporting jar. Am I then in the jar or in the body?

It should be obvious by now that Branch-Lining Cases are problematic. Parfit points out that people like Williams ended up developing Non-Branch Lining requirements (also called uniqueness requirements) as a result. This effectively means that any criterion of

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personal identity that allows for branching cannot be accepted. Parfit, however, declines this notion. Parfit believes in fact, that in any case, it is not my personal identity that matters, but whether the resulting people are psychologically continuous with me. For the reductionist, when stating the facts, stating what happened, we can claim that X is R-Related to Y, but we cannot say whether X and Y are the same person, and so in a sense what is essential to the existence of the resulting person Y is not that they are X, but that they have R relatedness to X.

A small note, Parfit does not appeal to any specific sort of uniqueness requirement. It is essentially a theoretical redundancy for the reductionist. He does say however, that Branch-Lining may not be considered personal identity, so long as it is personal identity that matters, but that this change is not significant for the reason that, as already stated, it does not change the facts. Essentially, if we believe that personal identity is what actually matters, then it seems that, from a theoretical standpoint, we have no choice but to adopt the uniqueness requirement.

### *3.5 We are not Human Beings*

The last pieces of Parfit that are important to discuss come from a 2012 lecture titled *We are not Human Beings*. In said lecture, Parfit (2012) mostly focuses on solving problems presented by the animalist view on personal identity. More detailed discussions on animalism will be given in 4.1, but for now it is enough to know that the animalist criterion for personal identity is of biological continuity, and not psychological continuity as Parfit and other Lockeans have so far claimed. In short, this means that, as Parfit states “we shall continue to exist if and only if our bodies continue to exist, and to be the bodies of living animals.” (p. 9) The main point of contention then between a Lockean and an animalist comes from defining what a person is. For the animalist, the person can be equated to the human animal, while Lockeans distinguish between the person and the human animal.

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There are three main problems Parfit attempts to solve, being the *too many thinkers problem*, the *epistemic problem* and the *too many persons problem*. If the human animal and person are two distinct beings, then when the person thinks then the animal must also think the same thought. Parfit quotes McDowell, who claims that this thought is absurd, how can it be that two things live the exact same life? This is the *too many thinkers problem*. If I am composed of two thinkers, then how am I ever to know whether I am the human animal or the person? This is the *epistemic problem*. Finally, following the Lockean definition, it is entirely plausible to say that the human animal also classifies as a person. It follows from this that Lockeans claim that two or more persons may exist in one body. This is the *too many persons problem*.

Parfit believes that there is a very simple solution, one which he borrows from McMahan, called the *embodied part view*. On the embodied part view, we are simply parts of human animals, the thinking and controlling parts of the human animal. Parfit gives a real life example as to why he thinks this matches with our intuitions: Nancy Cruzan had taken severe damage to her cerebrum, such that she entered a vegetative state for multiple years, until her parents managed to appeal with the United States Supreme Court to have her artificial feeding tube removed. After her death, her gravestone was etched with the date of the car crash with the label "Departed" and a second date being the date of her clinical death, labelled "At Peace." Parfit believes that this is evidence to believe that the human animal is not capable of thought on its own. Following Parfit's conclusions drawn in 3.3, the conscious part of the human animal is able to think without the human animal, say for example in a vat with the necessary nutrients to keep (assumingly) the brain alive and able for functioning.

It seems so far that Parfit might still be running into a *too many thinkers problem* once again, as it appears that even if the person is distinct from the human animal, the human animal still thinks as well. To get around this, Parfit refers to Johnston, who claims that it is not entirely ridiculous to think that two beings think simultaneously, but that what is important is that one of the beings thinks derivatively from the other. For Johnston, this train of thought never leads anywhere as, being an animalist, he claims that the person

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thinks only because the animal does. His conclusion, at any rate is that we are animals no matter the case.

Parfit flips Johnston's original line of thought from saying the animal is the non-derivative thinker to the opposite, that the person is the non-derivative thinker. Parfit does this because Johnston originally denies non-derivativeness for the reason that it implies that he is identical to the animal, and not to the person. Again, the reason ultimately why Parfit claims that the embodied part, the person, is the non-derivative thinker is because of the fact that, in theory, the brain is able to maintain conscious and thoughts without the need for a fleshy shell.

Parfit believes that there are two possible objections to the embodied persons view, as he has now come to call it. The first being that if I refer to myself or to another person, specifically to their physical parts, these physical parts are not literally parts of their persons. His answer to this is: in language, when we refer to ourselves, we also refer to things outside of ourselves, like our clothes. If I spill soup on my shirt, I say I spilled it on myself when, in reality, I just spilled it on my shirt. He says, "If we are the conscious controlling part of an animal, we are very closely related to the rest of this animal's body, in which we can feel sensations, and with which we can see, hear, smell, and touch the world around us." (p. 20)

The other objection he notes returns to the *epistemic problem*. The use of I is ambiguous, and seemingly can refer to either my embodied person, or to my human animal. Parfit suggests discerning the *Inner-I* from the *Outer-I*. The Inner-I is the non-derivative thinker, the control center of the human animal, and the Outer-I is the derivative animal that has a thinking part. When the Inner-I refers to itself, it knows that it can be the only true thinker of this thought. It logically follows then, that the Outer-I also knows that it is the derivative thinker, the animal, because it has a part that thinks for it.

We have now covered the main views on personal identity presented by Parfit, from the reductionist point of view, the many cases of psychological continuity, to how Parfit handles the many different thought experiments and problems present when discussing personal identity, and finally ending with Parfit's conclusion as to our nature as persons as a whole.

## Chapter 4: Other Views

### 4.1 Animalist Critiques of the Psychological Approach

In the previous section, I described briefly the animalist view on personal identity, and some of the problems it presents for the psychological approach. Now would be a good time, I think, to discuss in more detail said problems.

Olson, (1997) voices his support for animalism (as he calls it, the biological approach) in *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*. One of the first and most fundamental distinctions comes from how either approach views what “person” as a concept is. Olson uses Wiggins’ concepts of substance concepts and phase sortals. Put simply, every object falls under a type or “concept” that tells us what said object is and what it does. Substance concepts then, are concepts where every object that is such a concept has persistence criterion that are the exact same for every object. Phase sortals are concepts or types that can belong to an object for a period of time. The psychological approach claims that “person” is a substance concept, and Olson and the other animalists believe that “person” is merely a phase sortal.

It is obvious that this distinction creates serious problems for the psychological approach. If person is not a substance concept, then it logically follows that there can be no general rule of persistence for persons, and if we believe that person is a substance concept, then it follows that if I entered a vegetative state, then I would no longer exist.

Why should we think that person is not a substance concept? Calling something a person tells us what it does, what it is like, but not what it is. Using the definition of person by Gordon-Roth in 3.1, it seems obvious that if I call something a person, that it is an intelligent, self-aware, and conscious being, then I could be talking about a human, about God, about an advanced artificial intelligence and a plethora of other possible beings. Olson likens person as a concept to locomotor. Locomotor as a concept is a descriptive

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one of a thing's abilities or disposition. It would be impossible to create a locomotive criterion for the fact that the way a human being locomotes is vastly different from that how a plane locomotes. The same applies to thinking and intelligence. In my vegetative state, I still have a brain, even if limited in functionality. So, my being a person is not in virtue of my brain, but in what my brain is capable of doing.

It is from this general line of thinking that animalists claim that fundamentally we are not people, but animals. Animal, as Olson claims is a "paradigm case of a substance concept, and so is an ideal candidate for determining a thing's persistence condition ... an excellent answer to the question what something is- what it is that can move or think" (pp. 42-43) If person is only a thing that something *can* be, then it does not mean that we all must be people. At the very least however, we are all human animals and seemingly have persistence criterion that match that of the animal.

Olson also has issues with the need for non-branching cases as a product of the transplant problem. This was the idea that if my brain is transplanted into another body, or if my brain is copied and clones are made of me, then I survive so long as myself and my copy do not exist in the same temporal position. This uniqueness requirement has serious implications on fission, as the conclusion is that you only survive if *one* hemisphere is moved or survives. In the case of my cloning, it seems then that my survival is reliant on milliseconds of separation.

Say that before each person were to die, doctors would scan and clone your body and just after death recreate you. Parfit, and many others would claim, that you survive as your clone. Now however, say (quite morbidly) that your heart continues to beat for longer than the doctors had anticipated, and mere seconds before your pulse flatlines, the doctors spawn your clone. Strangely, according to certain theories with a non-branching requirement, this couple seconds would lead to you not surviving. Olson claims that no one adopts the uniqueness requirement because they think it is correct, but because it is a "theoretical necessity" stemming from the transplant problem.

Olson (2015) also gives direct reactions to Parfit's embodied person theory in *On Parfit's view that we are not Human Beings*. Remember that Parfit avoided the *too many thinkers problem* by claiming that the person and the animal both think, but that the animal only

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thinks in a derivative sense, and thus the person is the non-derivative thinker. Olson calls this view *thinking subject minimalism*, and he has serious problems with this view. He claims that if we believe in minimalism, then we can claim that the human animal is composed of many various actors that non-derivatively perform some process, like walking. Thus, the animal only walks derivatively as well, as the animal also includes parts that are not directly involved in its walking. The further conclusion that can be drawn from this view is that we are then a combination of many different things that only do one thing individually, and thus we are merely the thing that tells the other parts what to do. And finally, it follows that people do not exist that people exist as such, as the controlling part only tells the other parts what to do and is itself not capable of thinking processes like remembering or imagining. As Olson points out, Parfit's embodied person theory creates problems for his own views on personal identity.

## 4.2 Methodological Problems and the Role of Philosophy

In the previous chapter, we presented the views of Parfit and explained why we have reason to believe them through the use of the many thought experiments he presents in *Reasons and Persons*. We also noted in 2.1, that this is the general trend in thinking on personal identity. Does this really need to be the case and is this a legitimate way of viewing such problems at all?

Johnston (2014) in *Personal Identity: Are we Ontological Trash*, reaches a similar conclusion, that since personal identity is understood as a *concept*, which means that it is only natural that our views on personal identity are based on intuitions. If personal identity is simply a concept, then it is something for which we should be able to draw conclusions on *a-priori*. As he states: "In the case of the concept of personal identity the dominant method in analytic philosophy was then to collect "intuitions" about real and imaginary cases of personal survival and ceasing to be" (p. 386) In this sense, Johnston frames the methodological problems of the philosophy of personal identity as being

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epistemic in a more general sense (not to be confused with the *epistemic problem* discussed in 3.5)

He gives an example: if the belief that persons are separate entities as Parfit would have put it were true, this would have serious implications on how we view the nature of persons as a whole. It would further mean that any criterion of personal identity we would attempt to create must also account for this fact. But, if the way we present criterion is in the form of, say for example Relation R, that person X at T1 is the one and same person as Y at T2, if and only if X and Y are both R-Related, then X and Y being the same person is simply an *a-priori* fact. If we change R to be that of a person being a separate entity, say a soul, then the truth of R turns into an *a-priori* fact.

Johnston, correctly in my mind, concludes that the truth value of R is not an *a-priori* matter, and gives a long example as to how one may go about proving the theory of us being separate entities. The details of this example are not necessary to be discussed, instead I will give an analogue to what we have discussed so far. Do we have any reason to accept psychological continuity as being the true criterion of personal identity? Parfit, from what we have observed, seems to give us reasons to believe that it is in the holding of certain chains of connectedness in my psychology that I continue to exist over time, and remain the same person even if my brain is transplanted into another body. Logically, as formulated above, this is a reasonable assumption. There is one problem however: are body to body brain transplants even possible? If my cerebrum only can be transplanted, what role does the animal brain have, if any, in my thinking? Say that it is possible, does changing my body, the environment my brain exists in, have significant impact on my psychology?

Frankly, the questions presented above seem to be answerable only through empirical evidence. The more relevant question for philosophers in these cases seems to be: Are we justified in drawing serious theoretical conclusions from our intuitions on imagined cases? Now, this is not to say that the concept of psychological continuity is wholly *a-priori* in nature, I am aware of the various chains of memories I have had through my life, as well as my beliefs and dispositions, and if there was change, then I am aware of the causality behind such changes. Another question is, is my psychological experience of

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some event evidence enough for me to believe that it is something that actually exist.

Think of phantom limbs for example. There are a many number of cases of amputation where the patient later in life swears to feel that they still have the removed limb through the nervous system, even if they know for a fact that they do not have said limb anymore.

To the question at hand, whether we can draw theoretical conclusions from intuitions. To be honest, I am less inclined to believe that this is so. Rather, I believe that our intuitions on certain cases can lead to very relevant *questions* regarding a specific concept, and that these questions may lead to research that can prove or disprove our intuitions. In this sense, our intuitions should be viewed more as a springboard than they are as a basis. We can ask what happens if my brain is transplanted to another body, and we may be able to give some idea of what *might* happen, but ultimately what is more important is that we are given a subject of significant studies. The title of this section includes *the role of philosophy*, and though it has not been strictly stated, I believe that this proposing of questions, this freedom of curiosity is philosophy's biggest tool, and why philosophy today is still worth studying, even if it is not necessarily our jobs anymore to provide very serious, empirical, and scientific answers.

It seems that I have basically given philosophy no space as a tool for acquiring knowledge, but this is not the case. As I will discuss in the next two sections, there appears to be a quite clear fork in the road for theories on personal identity, that are both valuable in approaching until we know which fork we are meant to take. Personal identity, as I have stated many times, also has deep implications on our morality, and so for this reason it is also valuable to continue to muse on these "what-ifs."

### 4.3 The Multiplex Person Theory

There is one last theoretical conjecture I would like to provide to the discussion, perhaps bringing everything discussed so far full circle. Let me return to a view on personhood within the philosophy of psychiatry mentioned in 2.2, that normal persons are multiplex. We defined this as being a collection of separate, but interconnected views, instincts,

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desires, beliefs etc. If we combine this view of personhood with Parfit's conclusion, that we are not human beings, but rather parts of human beings, we are led to some rather puzzling, yet conclusive results.

One of the elements of Parfit's view that bothered Olson the most, was that of the non-derivative thinker. Olson claims that, since there are multiple functions of thinking, like imagining and remembering, then there must also be parts of parts that are non-derivative imaginers and non-derivative rememberers, all of which are numerically distinct from us. The problem here, is not us being parts, but the assumption that thinking is non-derivative. If our thinking is essentially a collection of other processes, then there is no thinking as such. Perhaps thinking then could be seen as a type, but my thinking is necessarily derived from my imagining, from my remembering and so on. Thus, there is no singular thinker, instead we are a multiplex of thinking type processes that are separate yet interconnected.

I believe that this is the conclusion as to the nature of persons that the psychological approach can draw given the evidence shown to us by Flanagan, but also by studies of the brain as a whole; we have no evidence yet that there is proper unity within the brain, rather a set of many interconnected parts that are fluid in nature. As a theory, perhaps it is incoherent, but I think this is a symptom of our thinking. Personhood, in the Neo-Lockean tradition is broad, indefinite and imprecise. I will not attempt to claim whether I think that the multiplex person theory as I shall call it is true, but I think that so long as we have agreed with Parfit and the psychological approach, this is as much as we can conclude.

Personhood, as I have alluded to, is enigmatic. Say that we reached the point where it was possible to scan the brain, understand its extremely complex mechanisms to a point where we could see particle interactions, neurons firing etc. and with confidence say that now this brain is imagining something. My question would be simply: Where is the person? Would we be able to observe a specific set of particles and cells, point and say "Yes, there is John"? Frankly, I am skeptical that this is something we could ever say.

If this were possible, it would have drastic moral implications. Highly developed artificial intelligence, like us in all ways minus a fleshy shell, would not be people. God could not

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be a person, nor could sentient extraterrestrials. The final, and perhaps most important theoretical point I would like to make is this: personhood, as we intuit it is not some physical trait, it may be a collection of many such physical traits, processes and reactions, but personhood is most importantly a human concept, a sociological one, a legal one and a psychological one.

#### 4.4 What matters?

Parfit believed that if we are reductionists, we cannot reasonably claim that personal identity matters. Animalists reach a similar conclusion. The multiplex person theory as I have presented it seemingly nullifies personal identity in the claim that my personhood as such does not exist as a real thing. It follows from this that there can never be a criterion for personal identity under the multiplex person theory that strictly defines all of the necessary characteristics of being a person. If we tried to create one, it would like go as follows: Person X at T1 is the same person as Person Y at T2 if and only if X and Y are Z-Related, where Z is the continued existence and interconnectedness of all of the parts necessary for X to be a person and for them to be Person X.

This criterion is extremely vague and could be used as a one size fits all for every object that exists. Replace person with asteroid and our criterion still works. This implies that my existence as a person is as arbitrary as the existence of some asteroid floating in space. Notionally, I think that this is likely the case, but in claiming this we are effectively denying the many social realities present in the so called “human condition.”

What matters then? Frankly, even if I have philosophical and scientific reasons to believe that I am as arbitrary as a space rock, it still matters to me that I am Nathaniel W.

Gonzales, that I am the author of this work, that I have some collection of memories of myself as a child and so on. Denying this, would be to dissolve a great philosophical problem as Wittgenstein would have wanted it, but in my view, the problem still remains. Thus, I think that what matters are the questions that we can further ask.

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If the Lockean person in a strict, physical sense does not exist, can we create a new concept of personhood that we would be able to trace more concretely? This should I think be the most paramount question for the theorists of personal identity. The continued study of the brain and work on the mind/body problem, though I have claimed that we are not likely to point and find a person there, are likely to shed much needed light on how we understand concepts so critical for the way we think. Speaking of thinking, the multiplex person theory and reductionism are all based on the notion of us as thinkers, whether derivative or non-derivative. Do we know enough about what thinking is, and what it is that actually thinks for any of our views to mean anything?

In short, we have reasons to believe that personal identity at the very least, does not matter. This does not mean that my lived experience does not matter. If my brain was split into two, that would matter. The fact that likely neither side would be exactly me, and over time may as well be considered two separate people, distinct from myself before splitting, also matters. Who exactly they may be ultimately depends on who they would view themselves to be, and what others would consider them to be.

What if my view is wrong, and it is entirely possible to point to a specific cell/particle constellation and say that there is the person? If we wish to continue being a reductionist, then we have two choices: either we claim that this is personal identity, or we claim that this is *human* personal identity. As a theory, the latter is the more attractive alternative for this reason: the moral implications, as I stated previously, would be extreme if we attempted to claim that it is only humans that are persons. We have no evidence to say otherwise presently, but I believe that thinking to the future, that this is the wrong position to have, morally, but also as a scientific fact. If extra-terrestrial life were to be discovered, for example, and showed all of the attributes necessary to fall under the concept person, then we would likely be misled in *not* considering them as persons. So, we can either conclude that person in a strict sense either does not wholly exist, or that if persons in a strict sense do exist, in following our intuitions and exclusively studying humans, we can at best attempt to create criteria of human personal identity.

As I believe I have shown, the key concept for personal identity, the notional foundation for any theory on personal identity seems to currently not be finding the correct criterion

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of personal identity, but instead finding the right understanding of what a person is. We are in a phase scientifically that we are unable to give any specific definition of what a person is outside of what it does or what it is capable of doing. I have claimed that I do not believe that it will ever be fully possible to point at a certain set of cells and particles in a human and say that that is a person. A question I imagine that would be aimed my way is: should we be animalists or reductionists (or some other form of the psychological approach)? The answer to this question is likely to be found in whether or not personhood can be traced in proper unity within the brain or the organism at large. If we believe it can exist, then we should like to be reductionists, as it allows us to believe that the person and the human animal are two different entities. If we do not agree with this conclusion, then it follows that we are just animals with more developed psychologies. Persons we may still be in some sense, but not persons as such.

There may be one other way for us to decide which side of the personal identity spectrum we are on, though I have fears about such a method. Perhaps we should understand persons in a way that benefits us morally? In fact, we may have quite strong reasons to want to conclude our position from this viewpoint. As in the case with Nancy Cruzan mentioned in 3.5, being a reductionist opens the doors for discussion on topics like euthanasia, abortion, assisted suicide and such. This sounds appealing, but I think that this approach could prove to be dangerous. The aforementioned topics are quite political in nature, and I have the fear that if we began drawing our conclusions on the nature of personhood based on what we believe is right, then we morph the problems of personal identity from being epistemological and metaphysical in nature, to moral, ethical, and ideological ones. Theories on personal identity can be misused in the name of the wrong thing, and I am not sure that this is a defensible methodology in any way.

I will close with this. My personal identity is likely not determinate. If modally there were many different possible causal chains, then the person that I become simply depends on which causal chain it is that I end up moving on. In this sense, what matters is that I was someone in the past, I am myself today, and I will hopefully continue to be someone tomorrow. Summed up, even if my personhood is not founded in any one specific thing,

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the fact that I feel like a person, and like a specific person for that matter at any given time, is probably what matters the most for us.

## Resumé

Cieľom predloženej práce bolo predstaviť pohľady na osobnú identitu, ktoré prezentuje Parfit, konkrétne na to, čo volá redukcionizmom a prediskutovať výzvy animalistického pohľadu kladené na osobnú identitu. Parfit verí, že najdôležitejším momentom pretrvávajúcej existencie osoby je to, čo nazýva psychologická kontinuita. Psychologická kontinuita je súbor kauzálne prepojených spomienok, skúseností, pohľadov, dispozícií a podobne. A teda, ak mozog zastrešuje psychologickú kontinuitu, tak ak bude tento mozog človeka prenesený do nového tela, tak osoba v novom tele bude tá istá osoba, ktorá bola pôvodne v mozgu.

Autor tvrdí, že tento pohľad iba ponúka špecifický pohľad na to, čo osoba je a odvodzuje to od Lockovej definície osoby ako inteligentného, sebauvedomujúceho si bytia s morálnymi činmi. Sledujúc animalistickú kritiku redukcionizmu a Lockov názor, že byť osobou neznamená byť konkrétnym, zjednoteným a vystopovateľným bytím, ale radšej súborom mnohých rozdielnych psychologických faktorov sa autor pokúša ukázať, že ak je toto pravda, tak v zásade sme iba viac psychologicky vyvinuté zvieratá.

Použijúc Olsonov argument, že osoba ako koncept je „phase sortal“ a nie hmotný koncept (kategórie podľa Wigginsa) zistíme, že osoba ako koncept nemôže mať kritérium. Ľudia môžu byť osoby, ale tak isto aj Boh, mimozemšťania a umelá inteligencia môžu byť osobami. Práve kvôli tomuto faktu môže byť chápanie osobnosti vypracované na základe rôznych odlišných spôsobov. Autor taktiež používa Johnstonovu kritiku všeobecnejších metodologických tendencií pri teóriách osobnej identity. Logický výrok: X v čase T1 je tá istá osoba ako Y v čase T2 platí vtedy a len vtedy, ak X a Y sú Z-prepojené ukazuje, ako je väčšina kritérií pre osobnú identitu prezentovaných. Johnston tvrdí, že ak je to aj prezentované touto formou, tak Z-prepojenie, ako napríklad psychologická kontinuita, je chápané ako a-priori fakt. Johnston tvrdí, že toto nie je zmysluplný spôsob určovania pravdivostnej hodnoty akéhokoľvek logického vzťahu.

Záverom tejto práce je to, čo autor nazýva teória multiplex osobnosti., ktorá je odvodená z Flanaganovho názoru, že normálna osoba je multiplexom pohľadov, intuícii, túžob a

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podobne. Teória multiplex osobnosti podľa všetkého implikuje, že osoba nie je zjednotený, konkrétny koncept ale skôr ľudský koncept. A teda autor taktiež tvrdí, že osobnosť ako taká nie je niečo, čo môže byť vystopované. Nevyzerá, že by sme boli schopní ukázať na nejaký špecifický klaster buniek a tvrdiť, že osoba existuje práve tam. A teda, rozdiel medzi animalistami a priaznivcami Locka spočíva v otázke, či osoby existujú konkrétne a oddelene od ľudí alebo či sme iba psychologicky viac vyvinuté zvieratá. Vzhľadom na túto otázku autor tvrdí, že práve odpoveď na túto otázku je najdôležitejšia pre všetkých teoretikov osobnej identity.

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