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Thomas M. Ravens

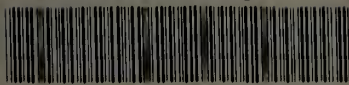
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VIEWS OF THE SELF AND THEIR ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

A Thesis Presented

by

THOMAS M. RAVENS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Philosophy

VIEWS OF THE SELF AND THEIR ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

A Thesis Presented

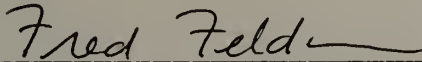
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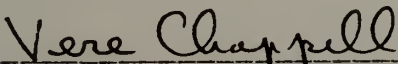
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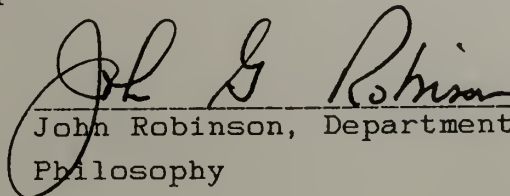
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ABSTRACT

VIEWS OF THE SELF AND THEIR ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

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This thesis examines some views of the self and investigates the ethical implications of these views. The working hypothesis is that our ethical principles are conditioned by what we hold to be the nature of the self. My investigation of the self concerns the question of whether there is a metaphysical self which functions as the subject of human experience, that is, which thinks, feels and acts. I conclude that there is no such self. Next, I investigate how our thinking about persons and our moral principles are affected by the denial of the self. I conclude that some principles of moral responsibility such as promise keeping are unaffected for they only presuppose psychological continuity. However, principles of distributive justice may be affected in scope and weight.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I investigate the question of whether there is a permanent self which is the subject of human experience. Is there an entity or substance which thinks one's thoughts and is the agent of one's actions? Although they may disagree about its nature many philosophers would claim that there is such a subject of experience or self. For instance, the brain, the body or even some immaterial substance or soul could plausibly be considered to be the self. Here I will be largely concerned with the self considered as a metaphysical entity or immaterial substance, separate from the brain, body, and mental and physical events.

One's views on personal identity may well be affected by one's view of the self. If there is a metaphysical self and if personal identity is based on facts about such selves, then personal identity is based on an "ultimate" fact and the question of identity has a definitive, yes-or-no answer. Identity does not admit of degree. On the other hand, if personal identity is only based on the continued existence of the brain, the body or certain psychological features (e.g. memories, beliefs and desires), then the fact that we say that one person at one time is the same as another at another time may be more a matter of convention. Ultimately, a person's brain and

body and psychological features change in time and, in some cases, the changes are quite significant. If there is no metaphysical self, it is reasonable to consider personal identity to be a matter of degree so as to reflect the observable changes in body and mind.

Derek Parfit has advanced the view that human experience can be completely explained in terms of a set of impersonal elements that excludes the metaphysical self. These elements include: a brain and body, mental and physical events, and a degree of psychological connection and continuity. The elements are said to be impersonal because they do not presuppose the existence of a person. The fact that we speak of a "subject of experience" or say "a person has experiences" may be a reflection of language and convention not of reality. If so, there is thinking and doing, but there is no real self which is the subject of these activities.

The view that there is a real, unchanging self or soul is held by many religious traditions which tend to give the self or soul great ethical and ontological significance. This view is consistent with our common sensical view. We tend to think of our lives as though there was a single "person" living throughout. Reid describes this view of the self in the following passage:

my personal identity ... implies the continued existence of that indivisible thing that I call myself. Whatever this self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts, and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers.'

Although he does not claim to know the nature of the "self" in its entirety, he argues for its existence on the basis of two claims: 1) the self is required to explain the facts of personal identity (the continuing existence of myself) and 2) the self is required because thinking requires a thinker and acting requires an actor.

The view that there is no separate entity or metaphysical self is held in the West by empiricism and in the East by philosophical Buddhism². Hume argues against the existence of the self by denying that there is an entity which is permanent or identical through time. He points out that the idea that people often have of a permanent self (or, in general, of an object identical through time) results from a general tendency to mistake a succession of related objects for an identical object. This idea of an identical entity is only achieved through a distortion of the empirical fact that our perceptions are actually changing. Such is the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants, animals and the mind:

In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption [that actually exists]; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation.³

For Hume, the self or soul, considered as a permanent entity identical through time, is illusory.

I will investigate the question of the self by analysing some approaches and arguments given for and against various views of the self. I will be largely concerned with the question of whether there is a metaphysical self. Secondly, I will investigate the moral implications of the view that there is no real self. How does the nature of self affect moral responsibility? Are our views on desert and commitment a function of whether there is a metaphysical self? How are certain moral principles, such as principles of distributive justice, affected by what we determine the self and personal identity to be?

CHAPTER II

VIEWS OF THE SELF

A. An Empirical Approach to the Self

Derek Parfit, in Reasons and Persons, has taken up the empiricist cause armed with an array of Twentieth-century thought experiments. He makes effective use of the idea of teletransportation and brain fission to shed light on, and perhaps to undermine, our common sense notions of self and personal identity. The principle view of self under contention is the view that the self is a metaphysical entity that is the subject of experience (i.e. of thinking, acting, and feeling).

One argument which Parfit gives against the view that there is a separate entity which is the subject of experience is that we would have no way of knowing whether there is a single such entity or whether there is a series of such entities psychologically continuous with one another⁴. By psychological continuity, he means continuity on the basis of memories and the continued existence of intentions, interests, beliefs and other psychological features. Assuming that there is a series of entities, memories and other psychological features might be passed from one entity to another just as a baton is passed from one runner to the next in a relay race⁵. Since what we are aware of when we reflect on the past includes only our memories and other kinds of

psychological connection, we have no way of knowing whether there has been a single continuous entity or whether there has been a series of entities.

Parfit uses the thought experiment of teletransportation to illustrate how, even if the self was a metaphysical entity, we would have no way of knowing that the current self was not just one in a series of such entities⁶. If the belief in a metaphysical self requires that we admit the possibility of a series of such selves, the belief becomes less plausible. In teletransportation, our bodies and brains are scanned to obtain the exact state of our body chemistry. This information is then transmitted to our destination, Mars say, where an instrument receives the signal and creates an exact replica of the original. There are two versions of the experiment - one in which the original is destroyed and another, termed the "branch-line case", in which the original is able to continue living for a time. In either case, the replica created on Mars wakes as though from a short nap. He has the same memories as the original; he has the same feelings toward family and friends. He is by all appearances the same person.

Let us assume that we have an example of the branch-line case⁷. Suppose that at the moment just prior to scanning, the original has the thought, "Snow is falling". Then just after the scan, which is instantaneous, he has the thought, "So it must be cold". The replica, on the other hand, wakes up a moment later in a similar cubicle

on Mars with the apparent memory, "Snow is falling". He then thinks, "So it must be cold". The replica and the original have, at this point, the same state of mind. For example, both have the memory, "Snow is falling". Further, they both have psychological continuity with the past for the past is equivalently represented in both brains. But in the case of the replica, though there is psychological continuity, it is a fact that the memory, "Snow is falling", and those which precede it ought to be attributed to another entity. However, the replica has no way of knowing that this is so.

The thought experiment suggests that the existence of psychological continuity (e.g. memories) does not imply the continuity of "self" existence. A given self has no way of knowing that there have not been other, prior selves which were psychologically continuous with each other and with the current self. He is only aware of something less - namely the psychological continuity between his life and the preceding ones.

Anyone studying this thought experiment who accepts Parfit's claim that everything that happens in it could happen, in principle anyway, will be receptive to Parfit's "Reductionist" view of personal identity. The Reductionist view assumes that a human being can be completely described in terms of impersonal elements. The term "impersonal" is used because the existence of a person, an entity separate from the elements, does not

have to be supposed in order to describe a human being. Specifically, the view states that human existence consists in the existence of a brain and body; the occurrence of physical and mental events; and the existence of psychological continuity by means of overlapping strong chains of psychological connectivity (including direct memory connections, the connection existing between the holding of an intention and a later act in which the intention is carried out, and the holding of interests, beliefs, attitudes and other psychological attributes over time).²³

One objection to the experiment is to reject it for being inconceivable. If one held that a metaphysical self or soul was required to have a human being, then it would be inconceivable that the Replica could be created as it is in the experiment. Without a soul, the Replica would be an inert mass of chemicals. However, even these "Non-reductionists" after studying the experiment might well consider the possibility that our memories could be memories of some previous self - as far as we can tell. All we have access to when we look into our pasts is our memories. However unlikely it may seem, it is conceivable that our memories are memories of other selves psychologically continuous with us.

A second thought experiment employed by Parfit involving brain fission has more authority because the technology involved is more realistic. As is well known, the left and right hemispheres of the brain have different

functions: the left hemisphere houses the speech faculties and is largely involved in sense and motor control of the right side of the body; the right hemisphere is similarly tied in with the left side of the body. In certain patients having severe epileptic seizures, the corpus callosum, the bundle of nerve fibers connecting the two hemispheres, were severed. Researchers then discovered that by giving different instructions to the left and right visual field of these patients, they could be led to be simultaneously engaged in two independent tasks. This fact of independent, simultaneous functioning of the two hemispheres might lead one to conclude that there are in effect two minds. However, in day to day life, these patients are able to function normally. They are able to integrate the functioning of the two hemispheres quite successfully to the point where they appear to be ordinary one-minded people. (The often noted exception is the patient who found himself embracing his wife with one arm and pushing her away with the other.)

Parfit capitalizes on the fact of the independent functioning of the two hemispheres to build his "split-brain" thought experiment. Suppose, there were a way to disconnect temporarily the corpus callosum of a person who was one of the minority of persons whose hemispheres are supposed to be equal in ability. Assume that this person has control over this brain splitting and chooses to go

into the "divided" mode in order to solve in parallel some problems on a physics exam. Parfit reports this person's thinking from their point of view:

When I disconnect my hemispheres, my stream of consciousness divides. But this division is not something that I experience. Each of my two streams of consciousness seems to have been straightforwardly continuous with my one stream of consciousness up to the moment of division. The only changes in each stream are the disappearance of half my visual field and the loss of sensation in, and control over, one of my arms. Consider my experiences in my "right-handed" stream. I remember deciding that I would use my right hand to do the calculation. This I now begin. In working at this calculation I can see, from the movements of my left hand, that I am also working at the other. But I am not aware of working at the other. I might, in my right-handed stream, wonder how, in my left-handed stream, I am getting on. I could look and see. This would be just like looking to see how well my neighbor is doing at the next desk...."

This thought experiment is made plausible by the fact that this kind of human behavior has been observed (granted only externally).

If we accept that two independent thought processes could occur in "one mind" or one brain, then we have a basis for an argument that integrated thinking processes do not require a separate self. If we were to assume that a separate entity (which has thoughts) is required in order to have thinking, then it would be difficult to explain the above thought experiment. One would have to explain how we got from one "I" to two "I" 's. We would have to determine whether the two "I" 's which come into existence are in fact the same as the original "I" or whether one is the original "I", but the other is

different. We would have to say that since the left "I" (I1) is independent of the right "I" (I2), they are different from each other (that is, I1 does not equal I2). In addition, since each new "I" appears to be continuous with the old "I" (Io) (with the exception of the loss of visual field and sensation), each of the two "I" 's has an equal claim to being the original (i.e. it can be claimed $I1 = Io$ and $I2 = Io$ which entails that $I1 = I2$). But, they cannot both be the original because they are different from each another. The only other option is that at the time of brain fission the original self, Io, is destroyed and two new selves, I1 and I2, come into existence. This option is also problematic because one would have to explain where the new selves came from. The notion that there is an "I" is false in this experiment. We can represent the argument (involving the first option) as follows:

1. SHOW: it is not the case that a thinking process requires a self or subject.
2. A thinking process requires a self. assumption
3. In brain fission there are two independent thought processes. observation
4. In brain fission there are two selves, I1 and I2. 2,3
5. If two selves are independent, then they are not identical. Def. of self
6. I1 does not equal I2 4,5
7. Because they are psychologically continuous with the prefission self, Io, $I1 = Io$ and $I2 = Io$. premise

8. I1 = I2

7

9. I1 = I2 and I1 does not equal I2

6,8

The Reductionist view, because it does not posit any entity beyond the thinking process and the other empirical facts, accomodates the facts of this experiment without any problem. On the Reductionist view, since there is a degree of psychological continuity between the original self, I0, and the two new selves, I1 and I2, there is a degree of personal identity or personal sameness. One is not required to say that the old self and the new selves are entirely the same or different. The "all or nothing" claims that lead to contradictions such as is found in step 9 above are avoided.

Thomas Nagel reaches a similar conclusion on the basis of the facts of the scientific tests performed on actual patients¹⁹. He argues that one is not justified in concluding either that these patients have two minds or selves (because experimentally they demonstrate independent mental processing) or that they have one mind or self (because they demonstrate integration of function in day to day life). His conclusion is that significant conscious mental activity, as exemplified by these patients, does not require a single mental subject or a single self. As the experiments demonstrated, there can be two independent thought processes within people who at other times appeared to be a single mental subject or self. Further, he claims that the idea of a single mental

subject is illusory, even for normal people, because it masks the reality of integration between hemispheres that is actually taking place.

The Reductionist point of view, however much it is compatible with these thought experiments, is incompatible with our common sense notion of the self and the continuity of personal identity. Further, it seems to be in conflict with those religious myths found in Christianity and in Hinduism that posit the existence of an underlying soul. In much religious thought, the soul is the human being's point of contact with God. It is also the basis for the morality of love, for the profound respect that many feel we should have for other people regardless of the particular personality they may have.

It is worth considering whether the Reductionist view simply undermines the values of Western culture or whether it can be seen more progressively as part of a dialectical evolution of our culture. For now, with so much at stake, I will consider a point of view different from the Reductionist one and more sympathetic to our common sense notions.

B. The Self as Subject

Colin McGinn, in The Character of Mind, considers thought experiments similar to those that Parfit uses, but he comes to different conclusions. McGinn considers the case of a person whose memories, character traits and so

on are extirpated by a super-scientist and, in one version, are replaced by the exact same ones.' In another version, they are replaced by memories and character traits of a completely different person. Suppose we have an instance of the first case, in which the patient's memories are extinguished and then replaced a moment later. McGinn states that if you are the person (or self) undergoing the operation, it is implausible to claim that you do not survive, even though there has been mental discontinuity. He takes this to be a refutation of the Reductionist view that mental continuity is a necessary condition for continuity of selfhood or personal identity.

This objection is valid if we take "mental continuity" during a given period of time to mean that at each moment in that period there are other moments adjacent to it such that there is an overlapping of psychological states between a given moment and adjacent moments. Certainly, if there was a complete blank at a given moment, there would be a psychological discontinuity on this definition. On Parfit's definition of mental continuity, the moment of memory extinction would not constitute a discontinuity and, therefore, the example does not present a good objection. For Parfit, psychological continuity is established by the existence of overlapping chains of psychological connections such as the connection established by the existence of a memory. The fact that after the moment of memory annihilation, the

person has memories from the time previous to the annihilation entails that there is a psychological connection and, therefore, mental continuity. Recall Parfit's teletransportation thought experiment where there is continuity of personal identity between the original and the replica even though before the moment of teletransportation, the replica did not exist as a physical entity.

This thought experiment is actually very similar to the teletransportation one because in both cases an individual's psychological state is created instantaneously. In both cases the "new" individual's mind is constituted with memories and other psychological connections which give the appearance that they had been living for some time. The two experiments differ, however, in that in McGinn's experiment there is physical continuity while in the teletransportation experiment there is not. Perhaps McGinn is implicitly arguing for a physical criterion for continuity of identity.

Let us now consider the second version of McGinn's thought experiment, the one in which the memories and character traits introduced are completely different from the ones that had been extinguished. McGinn claims that, although a different person is created, the "self", understood as the subject of experience, remains and is numerically identical to the self that existed prior to the operation. Regardless of the fact that the new

"person" has different memories, beliefs and different ways of thinking, the self remains the same. Clearly, for McGinn psychological continuity is not required to have continuity of self-existence. McGinn claims that the self is a simple substance whose essential nature can be captured only in non-reductive terms. In other words, the nature of the self is not expressed by describing mental phenomena such as chains of psychological connectedness. Personal survival (survival of the self) consists in the continued existence of the self or the supposed subject of consciousness over time. The content of consciousness can be a discontinuous as you like.

McGinn's point of view is open to two responses. First, it is open to Parfit's criticism that one has no way of knowing that there have not been a series of selves psychologically continuous (or, in this case, discontinuous) with one another. Second, since continuity of self-existence is maintained even through a complete psychological discontinuity, McGinn's thought experiment indicates that particular psychological attributes cannot be associated with a given self. The self in this view appears to be a kind of generic entity, an empty frame before which the contents of consciousness flow by.

McGinn changes his tune somewhat when he considers the thought experiments of brain fission and brain fusion. However, he is still unable to abandon the conception of the self as a simple substance whose identity through time is required for survival. Consider the thought experiment

in which a brain is divided and then transplanted in two other bodies creating, apparently, two separate people. McGinn does not attempt to explain how the self, as a simple substance, could survive brain fission although he denies that the self is annihilated. The fact that from the point of view of the physical basis of mind it makes sense to talk of brain parts leads him to posit tentatively the existence of "self parts". Presumably, in a case of brain fission, some of the self's parts will go to one of the new "persons" and some will go to the other. Significantly, he is tending toward a conception of self as being a complex substance rather than a simple one. He does not go very far with this new concept, however. He contends that there is an antinomy between the notion of a simple, single self compatible with the "psychological discontinuity" thought experiments and the idea of self-like parts which is derived from fusion experiments (where two half-brains from two different persons are fused to form a single person). I contend that this antinomy rests on the idea that there is an entity, the metaphysical subject of experience, in addition to the empirical facts: the brain, the body and mental and physical activities.

C. Other Arguments Against Reductionism

Madell in The Identity of the Self makes an argument against the Reductionist view on the basis of a person's anticipation of pain. He argues that if I know some

future person will be in pain, I am much less concerned by the fact that that person will be psychologically continuous with me (by virtue of having certain memories, character traits, etc.) than I am by the fact that that person is me. Madell interprets the Reductionist view as saying that:

the real object of concern as regards future pain is that the person who will be in pain will have certain memories and personality traits; and it seems absolutely clear that this is not what one is afraid of at all. What one is afraid of is just that the person who will be in pain is oneself.¹²

As an argument against the Reductionist view, this claim is not convincing. It is more an indication that most people are not Reductionists. Non-reductionists think that their identity does not consist merely in psychological continuity but consists in some further fact about persons (i.e. the existence of a metaphysical self). A Non-reductionist will be more concerned about a future pain if he strongly believes that it will happen to himself than he will be concerned by a pain which he thinks will be experienced by someone merely psychologically continuous with himself. A Reductionist who conceived of personal identity as consisting only of psychological continuity would have a different attitude toward future pain. The Reductionist would be equally concerned by the fact that a future person, with whom he was psychologically continuous, would be in pain as the

Non-reductionist would be by the alleged fact that a future person, who "is" himself, will be in pain.

CHAPTER III

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NO-SELF VIEW

A. Reductionist Consequences - an Overview

In this section, I will assess the impact of Parfit's Reductionist view, using as a starting point Parfit's own assessment. I will look at how our views on rationality and morality are affected if we hold that there is no real, permanent self or subject of experience and that "personhood" only includes the existence of a body and brain, the occurrence of mental and physical events, and the existence of psychological and physical continuity.

Let me begin by discussing some Parfitian terminology. Strictly speaking, on Parfit's view, the terms "self", "person", and "individual", as they are conventionally used, lack a referent. Conventionally, we speak of selves, persons, and individuals as though they were permanent, enduring entities, but, ultimately, we can only be referring to aggregates of "impersonal elements" - all of which are in flux. The impersonal elements include: the brain and body, the occurrence of mental and physical events and the existence of psychological continuity by means of overlapping chains of psychological connections (including direct memory connections, the connection existing between the holding of an intention and an action in which the intention is carried out, etc.) There is no "self" or "person" apart from the impersonal

elements. However, within a lifetime there are often periods of relative sameness or "person stages". These person stage can be referred to as "selves" or "persons".

It is difficult to deny that a person's body changes throughout their life. It is clear that a child's body is different from that of an adult which in turn is different from that of a person in advanced age. Psychological change is also undeniable. It is quite normal for the interests and beliefs of a child to change as a person becomes an adult. The changes that occur in the brain are perhaps less easily demonstrated for the brain is not directly observable. However, there is much indirect evidence from the field of psychology to indicate that the brain is also in flux. For example, Piaget has studied the cognitive development of the human being and has found that our cognitive capabilities are not acquired all at once but sequentially during childhood. One could infer that the brain is changing during the course of this development. Even during adult years, the brain undergoes change. After age twenty, studies indicate that one's mental capacity is reduced by about ten percent every ten years. In the senility of old age, one can also assume that the brain is undergoing change.

Because of the physical and psychological evidence of physical and mental change, and in view of the Reductionist denial of a metaphysical self uniting all the stages of a given life, we might question our tendency to

consider a "lifetime" as though it were lived by a single entity. An alternative is to consider a lifetime as though it were lived by a series of "person stages". Such a view is indeed suggested by the fact that there are varying degrees of physical and psychological continuity throughout a lifetime. Periods of great continuity and, therefore, relative sameness could be considered person stages. Intervening periods of low continuity may be considered to be transition periods between person stages.

Let us now analyse some of the supposed consequences of the Reductionist view. Parfit claims that the Reductionist view implies that personal identity is "less deep" than it is on the Non-Reductionist view for the latter view claims that personal identity "involves a further fact" beyond psychological or physical continuity.¹³ What does Parfit mean by the phrase "personal identity is less deep"? He means only that, on the Reductionist view, the fact of personal identity consists only of the empirical facts of physical continuity and/or psychological continuity. It does not include the existence of a metaphysical self or a subject of experience. Without a persisting, metaphysical self underlying personhood, there is, no metaphysical basis for considering a person or, rather, the series of person stages over a lifetime (i.e. from birth to death) to be a single entity. It is only by convention (on the basis of physical and psychological continuity) that we refer to

from birth to death. The Non-Reductionist view, on the other hand, includes the fact of the existence of a metaphysical self so it is ultimately true that a "person" is a single entity throughout their life. Parfit's claim, because it amounts to a denial of a metaphysical self, is metaphysical although his phrase - "less deep" - may be somewhat misleading for it implies an empirical claim.

Parfit goes on to make the claim that, on the Reductionist view, the connection between "myself" now, the current person stage, and future and past person stages is "less deep" and more like my connection to contemporary others.¹⁴ This claim might be justified in the following way. If, on the Reductionist view, there is no metaphysical self connecting me to future or past person stages then metaphysically my relation to future or past stages is more like my relation to contemporary others for, in both cases, there is no metaphysical connection. Again, this is a metaphysical claim. Another way of justifying this claim is to point out that there are relations of similarity, influence, and interest both within a life (between different stages of life) and between contemporary persons. In other words, just as there are similarities between myself now (the current person stage) and later stages of "my life", there are similarities with contemporary others. Also, just as I share interests with future and past stages, so do I share

them with contemporary others. If there is not a metaphysical self unifying a life, then the connection between person stages within a life and the connections between contemporaries are more alike. This is because in both cases there is no metaphysical connection while relations of similarity, interest and influence persist. If there were a metaphysical self, then the connection between different stages of a lifetime would include a metaphysical component which is lacking in the relationship between contemporary others.

Parfit also makes a claim concerning the relationship between personal identity and the degree of separateness of different persons. He states that the fact that, on the Reductionist view, the identity of an individual is "less deep" or "involves less" (i.e. the fact that identity does not presuppose a metaphysical self), implies that the non-identity or separateness of different persons is "less deep". For Parfit, there is one fact, identity or sameness of person, and the denial of that fact. If personal identity is "less deep" or "involves less", then the denial of identity, that is, non-identity or difference, is "less deep".

If some unity is less deep so is the corresponding disunity. The fact that we live different lives is the fact that we are not the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep so is the fact of non-identity. There are not two facts here, one of which is less deep on the Reductionist view, while the other remains as deep. There is merely one fact and this fact's denial. The separateness of persons is the denial that we are all the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep, so is its denial.¹⁵

By saying that there is only one fact - personal identity - and the denial of that fact, Parfit ties or relates the separateness of persons to the identity of persons. This is significant for otherwise the separateness of persons would be unaffected by the denial of the metaphysical self. For Parfit, one cannot discuss the separateness or the difference of different human lives without reference to the unity of a single life. The otherness or separateness of different lives is derived from the sameness or the unity of a single life and vice versa. Separateness (or difference) and unity (or sameness) are polar opposites, each existing in dependence on the other. The lessening of one polar opposite lessens the other.

Parfit's claim can also be approached in the following way. Let us again suppose that there are relations of interest, similarity and influence (i.e. psychological connectedness roughly) both between the person stages in a lifetime and between contemporary "persons". Parfit claims that the non-identity (or difference) of contemporary persons is "less deep" or "involves less" if there is no self underlying and unifying the "person stages" in a lifetime (i.e. if personal identity is "less deep"). However, whether or not there is in fact a metaphysical self, the relations of similarity, interest and influence between contemporaries are the same.¹⁵ The relationship or the connection between contemporary others would appear to be independent

of the question of the self. We can make sense of Parfit's claim if we assume he is implicitly using a relational concept so that, when he says that the separateness of "persons" is less deep, he means that the separateness of contemporary persons is less deep relative to the depth of the connectedness between the "person stages" in a lifetime (i.e. relative to the depth of personal identity). If this is the case, then Parfit's claim is more plausible for personal identity is "less deep" on the Reductionist view.

Parfit claims other, more specific consequences for Reductionism based on his view that the criterion for continuity of personal identity is psychological continuity. For example, he claims that future or past "selves" that are psychologically distant can be considered to be different persons.¹⁷ Parfit implies that since an individual's lifetime is not tied together by a metaphysical self, and since periods of an "individual's" life are sometimes psychologically separate, we might as well adopt conventions that reflect the fact that people change psychologically and appear to be different "persons" at different periods of their life. However, it might be objected that there is often continuity between the different "person stages" in a lifetime so that we cannot say that the "person stages" are entirely different. This objection will be significant when we come to discuss the ethical implications of the Reductionist view. Parfit would respond by asserting that

the degree of continuity between "person stages" is much less than the "degree" of continuity within a "person stage". Hence, it is more appropriate to represent an "individual" as a series of person stages than as a single "person".

Parfit also claims that personal identity is a matter of degree because psychological continuity is a matter of degree. The implication of this claim is, presumably, that where psychological continuity (and, therefore, continuity of personal identity) exists only to a small degree, then a change in personal identity is underway. At first glance there may be a problem with this claim. If one is familiar with the concept of continuity in Cartesian mathematics, then the idea that there are degrees of continuity may be quite foreign. However, since Parfit defines psychological continuity on the basis of overlapping chains of psychological connections (such as direct memory connections) and since psychological connections vary in their number and their strength, then we might grant that psychological continuity can be a matter of degree as the number and strength of psychological connections is bound to vary.

At this point we have considered some issues related to Parfit's general claim that "personal identity is less deep." I have postulated that this is a metaphysical claim for it is based on the Reductionist denial that there is a metaphysical self - the denial that there is a

self that has (or is the subject of) experiences. When the metaphysical self is put aside, what is the effect? The most significant result is that there are no "ultimate" criteria for establishing that there is personal identity. Identity can only be based on empirical facts such as psychological and physical continuity. On these bases, the question of identity ceases to have a definitive, yes-or-no answer in some instances (such as brain fission). Without the metaphysical self, personal identity becomes more arbitrary. When the existence of a persisting, metaphysical self is denied, the establishment of personal identity is governed by conventions not by ultimate, definitive facts.

Some may think that, whether or not there is a metaphysical self, there is physical and psychological continuity throughout a normal "persons's" life and these are the only objective, cognitively significant concepts by which to determine if there is identity. On this view personal identity is not significantly affected by the metaphysical question. Clearly, one's view of personal identity is only affected by Reductionism if it had been tied to the existence of a metaphysical self. If all along one's concept of personal identity was based on empirical data like physical and psychological continuity, it would be unaffected.

Parfit implies that many of us are closet Non-reductionists with a tendency toward belief in a self even

if we deny it in our intellectual lives. Without a metaphysical self, there is less basis for thinking that an "individual" is a single entity throughout their lifetime. We may decide to think of a "person" at two different times as being the same person (on the basis of continuity) but this is by convention. Ultimately, the matter of our bodies and the thoughts of our minds are constantly changing however much it may appear to us (based on our memories) that we are a single entity. If there are stages of one's life that are marked by relative, qualitative sameness, and if these stages are separated by periods of rapid change, then it is plausible to consider these "person stages" as though they were lived by different people. It is plausible on the basis of two facts. First, there is no ultimate basis for determining whether there is continuity of personal identity, a concept which is conventional. Second, a lifetime appears as though it was lived by a series of different "persons".

Later I will question whether Parfit's stated criterion of personal identity does in fact indicate that personal identity necessarily changes in circumstances in which observable changes (such as changes in desires and intentions) occur. However, most would agree in principle that if personal identity was established on the basis of continuity of psychological characteristics, such as memories, interests, intentions, then a change in personal

identity would be possible in the course of a period of psychological transformation, where, if personal identity was related to a metaphysical self, a change would not be possible. Thus, it is plausible that different periods of a life could be seen as being "lived" by different "persons".

Let us now briefly mention some of the ethical implications of these views. First, if it is plausible on Parfit's Reductionist view to see different periods of an individual's life as though they were lived by different "persons", then principles of distributive justice may apply within a lifetime - a morally significant result. This conclusion is only valid if the person stages of a given lifetime are sufficiently separate to be considered separate persons and if principles of distributive justice do in fact distribute between such "separate persons".

There are alternative views which deserve mention at this point. First, even if Reductionism is true, principles of distributive justice may not apply within a lifetime. It might be argued that the continuity that exists between different person stages is sufficient to connect up the various stages so that, for instance, benefits to any one stage must be viewed as benefits to all.¹⁴ Person stages are not suitable objects of just distribution. Perhaps what matters is that chains of person stages be justly treated.

Another view is that, even if Reductionism is false, distributive justice may apply in a lifetime. Even if an

individual is a single entity throughout their life, it might be claimed that, for instance, benefits to it at one time must not be viewed as benefits to it at all times.¹⁸ Non-reductionism may be compatible with the application of the distributive principle within a lifetime if it states that equal benefits/burdens should be given to equally deserving person stages. Since Non-reductionists may admit the existence of person stages within a single person's life, this is a plausible approach.

Another significant ethical consequence of the Reductionist view is based on the claim that the "person" as an entity separate from the brain, body, and mental and physical events does not exist, just as a "nation" does not exist as an entity separate from its citizens. By this claim, when we refer to the experiences of different persons, it is as though we are referring to citizens in different countries. With respect to nations, Parfit points out that we tend to focus on the citizens, regarding them less as citizens (of a particular nation) and more as people. Indeed, we tend to think that a person's nationality is not morally important. Similarly, when considering persons on the Reductionist view, Parfit states:

It becomes more plausible, when thinking morally, to focus less upon the person, the subject of experiences, and instead focus more upon the experiences themselves. It becomes more plausible to claim that, just as we are right to ignore whether people come from the same or different nations, we are right to ignore whether experiences come from the same or different persons.²⁰

If, as Parfit indicates, it is right to ignore "who" is having experiences, then principles of distributive justice, which are concerned with how things are distributed among a group of persons (families, organizations, etc.), would be given less weight. We shall consider this view in more detail later.

B. Reductionism and Rationality

In discussing the ethical and rational implications of Reductionism, I will assume the following: if one holds the Reductionist view and if one accepts Parfit's psychological criterion for personal identity, then it is plausible to consider different stages of an "individual's" life as though they were "lived" by different "persons".

The holding of the Reductionist view may, in the first place, affect our views on rationality. In particular, the truth of the Reductionist view may undermine or require a change in the Self-interest Theory. According to Parfit, the central claim of the 'Self-interest Theory' of rationality is:

- (S1) For each person, there is one supremely rational ultimate: that his life go, for him, as well as possible. ²¹

A further requirement of the Self-interest theory is the Requirement of Equal Concern:

A rational person would be equally concerned about all the parts of his future.²²

If we hold the Reductionist view and accept Parfit's criterion for personal identity, however, those parts of one's future life that are psychologically distant will appear to some extent to be lived by some other person. In contrast, if we held that there is a metaphysical self, then a mere change in psychological characteristics would by no means indicate a change in "person". If we hold that it is rational to care less about others, on the Reductionist view it is rational to care less about psychologically distant parts of our life. Parfit offers an example: I might start smoking when I am a boy, full knowing that I am likely to impose upon myself a premature and painful death. While such an act would be irrational according to the Classical Self-interest theory, it may be rational on a revised theory which deems it rational to be less concerned about those parts of one's future to which one is distantly connected.²³

Along these lines, we may devise a revised Self-interest Theory which offers a discount rate with respect to the degree of psychological connectedness. Eva Bodansky following Parfit has recently offered the following revised theory:

I think we may suppose that, for any pair of selves, S_i and S_j , the extent to which they are connected can be represented by a number between 1 and 0, $C(S_i, S_j)$ Let ' $V(S_i)$ ' represent the extent to which things go well for S_i Each non-zero product $C(S_i, S_j) V(S_j)$ will then represent the extent to which things go well for one of S_i 's successive selves [S_j], weighted according to the connection between that self and S_i .

I suggest that one natural rendition of (S1) in this Reductionist way of talking is:

- (RS1) For each self, S , there is one supremely rational ultimate aim: that the sum over all S_i of $C(S, S_i) V(S_i)$ be maximal.²⁴

While Bodansky and Parfit agree that such a revised Self-interest Theory is required in light of Reductionism, they differ on the significance of the changes in the revised version. For Bodansky, the revised version is a mere translation of the Classical Self-interest Theory into the Reductionist language. Although she admits that in the revised version, the requirement of equal concern is dropped, she claims that the main point of the Self-interest theory (S) is not lost. The revised theory can still be contrasted with other theory of rationality in much the way the old one can. In particular, she claims that the revised S is still distinct from the Critical Present-aim Theory (CP). Parfit, whose principle aim in Reasons and Persons is to disprove S, claims that the revised S is much more like CP - implying that S (whether it is revised or not) does not survive the challenge of Reductionism. In my mind it is not clear that there is a substantive difference between Bodansky's and Parfit's positions. However, I tend to agree with Bodansky's view

that the revised S is still a distinct theory of rationality that should not be hidden under the umbrella of CP. On the Critical Present-aim Theory:

CP: What I have most reason to do is what would best fulfill those of my present desires that are not irrational.²⁵

For our purposes, the two most significant elements of CP are 1) that it is concerned with fulfilling present desires (aims or projects or intentions) and 2) that the desire(s) with which CP is concerned are left unspecified though they may not be subject to rational criticism. The desire could be that things go as well as possible in one's life or the desire could be to make things as good as possible for everyone.

Clearly, the revised S tends to approach CP. The fact that the revised S is no longer concerned with all parts of life equally but emphasizes the near future and discounts the far future is an indication that the revised S is closer to CP than the Classical S is. However, as Bodansky points out, the revised S still does count the far future and for that reason alone the revised S remains distinct from CP.

S remains distinct from CP in another way as well. On S the supremely rational aim is that one's life go as well as possible. On CP, however, what one has most reason to do is that which would best fulfill one's present desires (whatever they be) as long as they are not subject to rational criticism. The fact that on S the

supremely rational aim is specified whereas on CP it is not is another significant distinction between the two. Of course CP could be amended by the stipulation that the only desire that is not irrational is the desire that one's life go as well as possible. However, this stipulation would eliminate one of the significant features of CP and would amount to a dismantling of CP.

One of the significant implications of the Reductionist view is that a given person stage's relationship to future or past stages becomes more like his relationship to contemporary others. Therefore, in our moral thinking, future and past stages ought to be considered as though they are different persons. In particular, Parfit points out that imprudent acts which have bad consequences for our future "selves" should not only be considered irrational (to the extent that we are psychologically connected to that future person) but also immoral (to the extent that that future person is different). As Parfit says: "we ought not to do to our future selves what it would be wrong to do to other people."²⁶ One flaw in Parfit's argument is that he implies that on the Non-reductionist view, in contrast, actions that have harmful effects on one's future are irrational but not immoral. This is not at all certain. It is plausible that a Non-reductionist would regard such harmful actions as being both irrational and immoral.

Regarding a related area of moral thought, Parfit indicates that holding the Reductionist view will also affect our views on paternalism - the practice of forcing someone to act in their own interests. The argument is based on the above argument in which he concludes that imprudence is immoral and not just irrational. While it would seem an infringement on a person's autonomy to prevent someone from acting irrationally, we may be just in preventing them from acting immorally or wrongly. Parfit concludes: "we ought to prevent anyone from doing to his future self what it would be wrong to do to other people."²⁷

C. Reductionism and Desert

On the question of desert (e.g. punishment for wrong deeds committed), the Reductionist view tends to support our natural inclination. For instance, it is commonly thought that the extent to which a person should be punished for a crime committed in the past is a function of the time that has elapsed since the crime. For a crime committed in the distant past, the extent to which the person deserves to be punished is relatively small. The provision in United States law which gives individuals immunity from prosecution for crimes committed many years earlier is a reflection of this common notion.

The Reductionist outlook on desert coincides with the common outlook. According to Reductionism, desert for a

past crime follows from the degree of psychological connectedness that the current "self" has with the criminal who committed the deed. In cases where a crime was committed many years previous and where there is little psychological connectedness, there will be relatively little desert. Parfit's approach to this issue is to consider the criminal's later self to be an accomplice to the crime. Just as the accomplice's desert will depend on the degree of his complicity in the crime, so will the desert of the criminal's later self be determined by his psychological connectedness with the criminal. Another approach is to claim that desert for a past deed follows from one's personal identity with the perpetrator of the deed. Since personal identity is a matter of degree, being determined by psychological continuity on the basis of psychological connectedness, so is desert. Where there is little psychological continuity, there is only a small degree of personal identity and, therefore, a small degree of desert. A deed committed by a psychologically distant person stage can only be partly attributed to the current stage so his desert is relatively small.

This view though in popular favor is in striking contrast to the view of Madell, a Non-reductionist. For Madell, desert is not on the basis of psychological connectedness, but is on the basis of the "further fact" beyond psychological connectedness and continuity (i.e. the metaphysical self). By this assumption and

recognising that personal identity is an all or nothing thing if based on a metaphysical self, a person is as deserving of punishment for a crime committed in the distant past as he is of a recently committed crime. Of course, Non-reductionism is not bound to such a view. It is possible to believe in a metaphysical self but to think that desert is a matter of degree, being a function of the psychological connectedness existing between perpetrator and the current self.

D. Reductionism and Commitment

With respect to commitments, Parfit offers the following argument: If we assume that a further fact beyond psychological or physical continuity is required to justify keeping promises, then we get two extreme claims. The Non-reductionist, who believes that a commitment must be kept because of one's ultimate identity with the person who made it, will say that we ought to honor our commitments because we are the same person when we make the commitment as we are when we are supposed to fulfill our obligation. Thus, even though I commit myself now to doing something (e.g. fighting in a war) which I later find utterly objectionable (when I become a complete pacifist), I am still required to fulfill my obligation. The Reductionist, if he were to assume that full personal identity over time determines one's obligation to keep promises, would claim that since there is no permanent

self, then our future selves are not bound by any promises made by our present self. According to Parfit, the extremity of the positions that follow from the assumption make it very untenable. One is led to seek another.

Someone who does not believe that a further fact about persons beyond psychological continuity is required in order to justify commitments will perhaps claim that the degree to which I am bound to an earlier commitment is a function of the degree to which I am psychologically connected to this earlier person. This claim, though it is moderate, may be somewhat disturbing. We may think that our commitments ought to be more binding than this claim indicates. We may think that our personal integrity would require us to honor our obligations though our personality and our thoughts may change in time. These kinds of feelings tend to support a claim that we are not released from our commitments by a mere reduction in psychological connectedness. Indeed, we might be tempted to adopt the view that personal identity involves a further fact beyond psychological connectedness in order to justify our feelings about commitments. An alternative explanation is that our feelings about commitments are an indication of an unconscious belief in a metaphysical self. There are other situations which may lead us to take a different stand. We can also imagine a situation in which we are considering a previous commitment which seems as though it were made by a different person. In this case, we may resent having to honor that commitment.

One way out of this dilemma would be to cushion our commitments with conditions. We might say: "I promise to do that for you provided I maintain some of my original motivation and provided fulfilling my promise does not require that I perform an alien act." Since it is not likely that a person will attempt to change themselves in order to get out of their commitments, this kind of commitment may be acceptable in some circumstances.

Parfit provides a case which allows us to further consider commitments in light of the views on personal identity that we are investigating. Consider the case of the "Nineteenth Century Russian":

In several years, a young Russian will inherit vast estates. Because he has socialist ideals, he intends, now, to give the land to the peasants. But he knows that in time his ideals may fade. To guard against this possibility, he does two things. He first signs a legal document, which will automatically give away the land, and which can be revoked only with his wife's consent. He then says to his wife, 'Promise me that, if I ever change my mind, and ask you to revoke this document, you will not consent.' He adds, 'I regard my ideals as essential to me. If I lose these ideals, I want you to regard your husband then, not as me, the man who asks you for this promise, but only as his corrupted later self. Promise me that you would not do what he asks.'

The sequel is that the young man matures, becomes less idealistic, and requests that his wife break her promise and allow him to keep his land.

Now, the first thing to note is that the language of successive selves is most appropriate in this case. There definitely appears to be two distinct persons. There is

both the young idealistic husband and the older, cynical husband. This fact is relevant as we ask to whom does the wife owe her loyalty. On the one hand, it could be said that she made her commitment to the young man and not to her current husband who can justifiably be considered to be some other person. This position would be consistent with the Reductionist point of view. On the other hand, one could claim that the young, idealistic man and the old, cynical man are still the same person. When she speaks to her current husband she is speaking to the person to whom she made her promise. From this Non-reductionist perspective, we may feel that the wife could justifiably break her promise upon consulting with the person to whom she made her promise. On the Reductionist view, the young, idealistic man to whom she promised no longer exists and, therefore, cannot be consulted. She is obligated to keep her promise.

In this instance, holding the Reductionist view as opposed to the Non-reductionist view affects our moral judgment about what the wife ought to do. It might seem that it is a very contrived case and very unlikely to be met in reality. Yet, a similar situation is presented by the practice of marriage. Consider the case where one of the partners changes drastically in time. Is the other still bound by the commitment? If we adopt the Reductionist view, then perhaps the original person no longer exists (i.e. they have, in a sense, died) and perhaps the other is released from the commitment.

E. The Scope of Distributive Justice

Let us now consider the implications of the Reductionist view on the scope and weight of principles of distributive justice. I will continue to assume that, if one holds the Reductionist view and accepts Parfit's psychological criterion for personal identity, then, in many cases, a lifetime can be said to consist of person stages which can be considered as though they were lived by different persons. I will also assume principles of distributive justice to be moral principles concerned with the just distribution of goods (such as food, shelter, and education) among person stages (either from a single lifetime or from separate ones) or among sets of person stages (a set containing those person stages that are conventionally considered to comprise a human life). Note the choice of the unit over which the distributive principles apply is very much related to the "scope" of the principles. Having principles that distribute between individual person stages as opposed to among sets of stages indicates a change in scope. Here I will be concerned with the principle: equally deserving entities ought to receive equal shares of goods.

Parfit claims that holding the Reductionist view as opposed to the Non-Reductionist view has the effect of increasing the scope of principles of distributive justice and of reducing their weight. To demonstrate this, Parfit

considers "The Child's Burden".

We must decide whether to impose on some child some hardship. If we do, this will either

(i) be for this child's own greater benefit in adult life or

(ii) be for the similar benefit of someone else - such as this child's younger brother.³⁰

Does it matter morally whether (i) or (ii) is true? Most people would say that it does matter. They would think that it is right to impose a burden on a child if that same person will benefit later in life. However, we would not be justified in placing a burden on one person and then giving the benefit to someone else. These people might feel this way because they are Non-Reductionists (i.e. they believe in a metaphysical self) and because they believe in the principle of distributive justice. According to Parfit, a Non-reductionist believes that the child and the adult are essentially the same person. Therefore, an inequitable distribution of burdens/benefits within one life (i) is permissible because the same person is receiving the benefits and burdens. Conversely, an inequitable distribution between different lives is not permissible. For the Non-reductionist the units between which distributive principles apply are human lifetimes. The scope of the distributive principles for these Non-reductionist does not include distribution between stages of a given lifetime.

According to Parfit, a Reductionist who believed in the distributive principle, would say that it does not matter morally whether (i) or (ii) is true. Since there is very little psychological connectedness between the child and the adult, they can be considered to be separate people just as a given person is separate from contemporary others. Since different periods of a person's life can be considered as if they were lived by different persons, the scope of the principle of distributive justice should be enlarged to include just distribution among the person stages within an individual's life. Thus, both options (i) and (ii) above represent unjust distributions.

So far we have given some support to Parfit's contention that holding the Reductionist view as opposed to the Non-Reductionist view will lead to an extension of the scope of principles of distributive justice. This extension of the scope of principles of distributive justice to include just distribution among the person stages within a lifetime is based on the Reductionist claim that these persons stages can be considered to be separate persons.

However, there are other points of view that tend to undercut the significance that Parfit gives to the Reductionist view. For instance, it may be held that, even if Non-reductionism is true, person stages exist within a lifetime and distributive principles apply to

them. According to this view, the existence of the metaphysical self is compatible with the existence of person stages within a lifetime. Further, holding that there is such a self does not prevent one from claiming that distributive principles apply to the personstages within a lifetime. The significance of Reductionism is lessened on this view.

A second point of view that undermines the significance of Reductionism is the following. One can accept Reductionism and still hold that distributive principles apply only to sets of continuous person stages, that is, lifetimes. For instance, one might hold that harms and benefits ought to be distributed equally to equally deserving sets of continuous person stages. The Reductionist is not required to apply distributive principles to the person stages within a lifetime.

By these objections, it appears that both Reductionism and Non-reductionism are compatible with the view that the principle of distributive justice applies within a lifetime. In addition, both Reductionism and Non-reductionism can be compatible with the view that the distributive principle does not apply within a lifetime. Nevertheless, Parfit's claim is still plausible if presented in the following form: it is more plausible on the Reductionist view than on the Non-reductionist view that the distributive principle applies within a lifetime. The plausibility of this claim is heightened if 1) the distributive principle is primarily concerned with the

distribution between separate persons (not between mere person stages) and if 2) on the Reductionist view, it is more plausible that a lifetime contains person stages that can be considered as separate persons.

F. The Weight of Distributive Principles

Let us now turn to Parfit's claim that holding the Reductionist view will lead to a reduction of the weight of the principles of distributive justice. In developing this point, I will make use of the following distributive principle: equally deserving persons should get equal shares of burdens/benefits. Parfit's argument supporting the claim is based on the premise: it is right to impose on some child some hardship for this child's greater benefit in adult life (Step 1). Next we can say that in some cases it is right to give an individual as a child and that individual as an adult unequal shares of burdens/benefits (Step 2). Next, we make use of Parfit's Reductionist claim that an individual as a child and that individual as an adult are, to a large extent, different persons because of the limited degree of psychological continuity/connectedness existing between them. They are different, distinct person stages which can be considered to be different persons (Step 3). Further, if they are different persons, independent of one another, then they are equally deserving (Step 4). Therefore, the child and the adult are equally deserving persons (step 5). From

here we can show that the principle of distributive justice does not have weight. If it did have weight, then, because they are equally deserving persons, the child and the adult should get an equal share of benefits and burdens (Steps 7-10). It follows that it would be wrong to give the child and the adult unequal shares (11). But we have already stated that in some cases it is right to give the child and adult unequal shares. Since our assumption that distributive principles have weight lead to this contradiction, we have shown that they have no weight. We can represent this argument in the following way:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1) It is right to impose on some child some hardship for their greater benefit later on when they are an adult. | Premise |
| 2) It is right to give an individual as a child and that individual as an adult unequal shares of burdens/benefits.
(if the sum of burdens/benefits is maximized) | 1 |
| 3) An individual as a child and that individual as an adult are separate person stages and can be considered to be separate persons. | Reductionism |
| 4) Different, distinct persons are equally deserving persons. | |
| 5) An individual as a child and that individual as an adult are equally deserving persons. | Reductionism |
| 6) SHOW: distributive principles have no weight. | |
| 7) Distributive principles have weight. | Assumption |
| 8) If distributive principles have weight, Then it is obligatory that equally deserving persons get an equal share. | Def. of distributive principles |

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|
| 9) | It is obligatory that equally deserving persons get an equal share. | 7,8 |
| 10) | It is obl. that the child and adult get equal shares. | 5,9 |
| 11) | It is wrong to not give the child and the adult equal shares. | Def.
of obl. |
| 12) | It is right to give the adult and the child unequal shares and it is wrong to give them unequal shares. | 2,11 |

This argument, in the first place, hinges on the acceptance of the premise: "It is right to burden a child for this child's own greater benefit in adult life." Many people will accept it because they think that it is right that an individual endure difficult times if, on the whole, utility (usually the utility within that individual's life) is maximized. Parfit points out that this is common practice in medicine:

[Doctors] would be right to choose some operation which would give their patients a smaller total sum of suffering, even though this suffering would all come within one period. We do not think that this would be unfair to this person during this period.³¹

The second step is basically a restatement of the first premise, with the exception that the condition of maximizing utility a parenthetical element. In this argument we are really only concerned with cases where the sum of benefits/burdens is maximized. If this utility were not maximized there would be no reason to distribute inequitably between the adult and the child. Therefore, I leave out this condition in the remainder of the argument.

The third step - that an individual as a child and that individual as an adult can be considered to separate "persons" - even though it is one of the major claims of Reductionism is still problematic. Clearly, an individual as a child and that individual as an adult are not entirely separate persons even on Parfit's definition. There is usually some degree of psychological continuity between the stages of childhood and adulthood so we cannot say that the child and the adult are entirely distinct "persons". Along the same lines, it cannot be said that the child and the adult are equally deserving because the desert of the adult must in at least a small measure be a function of the behaviour of the child. However, we can always imagine an extreme case where there is such a small amount of continuity between the child and adult that we can justifiably consider them to be separate persons.

This objection is similar to the previously discussed objection to Parfit's argument that Reductionism implies the enlargement of the distributive principles' scope. Recall the previous objection: even after denying the self it is conceivable that a Reductioist would think that complete chains of person stages, that is, lifetimes, not individual stages are the appropriate unit among which benefits/burdens should be distributed. It is plausible that people hold this point of view because they deny that the child and adult are separate persons in the sense that contemporary others, for example, are separate persons.

If this is the case, then it can be claimed that the same objection applies to both arguments.

Even if we are not convinced by Parfit's argument, it gets us thinking. If 1) we thought of the person stages of a lifetime more as separate persons than as parts of a single person's life, and 2) if we thought that distributive principles might apply to the person stages as there is no ultimate connection between them and as they can be quite independent of one another and 3) if we still thought that it is right to burden a child for that child's later benefit as an adult, then to achieve logical consistency in one's thinking one will be required to give less emphasis to distributive principles.

Another objection to this argument is to claim that the reason why it is right to burden a child for that child's later benefit as an adult is that any other distribution of burdens/benefits (such as pampering the child) would result in a significant overall decrease in utility or happiness. Hence, even if we hold the Reductionist view and consider the person stages in a lifetime to be separate persons (among whom we should distribute justly), the fact that we choose to maximize utility in that lifetime taken as a whole does not mean that the principles of distributive justice are generally weak. Rather, in this particular case, the principle of maximizing utility predominates because alternative practices would have significantly lower utility. On this view, there are two principles that together determine

what is right and wrong: the principle of maximizing utility and the principle of distributive justice. The principle of maximizing utility is predominant because the amount of total utility to be gained by burdening the child is great relative to the small loss in equity.

On the other hand, it can be objected that, at most, this argument only proves that the strength of distributive principles as they are applied within a single lifetime is not so great. The argument does not concern distributive principles as they are applied to contemporary persons. However, this objection is really a denial that there are separate "persons" in a lifetime. One might hold that because there is continuity between "person stages" in a lifetime, they are not different "persons" to the extent that contemporary "persons" are different. This much seems justifiable. Consistent with this objection we might hold that the weight of distributive principles is a function of the degree of separation or difference between "persons". Hence, showing that distributive principles within a lifetime are not so weighty does not mean that, in general, distributive principles are less weighty.

Parfit offers another approach in his effort to demonstrate the significance of the Reductionist view. He claims we can judge the moral significance of the Reductionist view on the basis of its support of Utilitarianism, an ethical theory. Consider the following

argument. First, we assert the premise that it is right to maximize the total sum of burdens/benefits within a lifetime (here we should consider burdens to be negative benefits). Next consider Parfit's claim that there are two propositions which give reasons why it is right to maximize over a lifetime:

a) It is right to maximize over a lifetime because ultimately there is a single entity living that lifetime.

OR

b) It is right to maximize over a lifetime only because it is right to maximize.

The next step is to note that on the Reductionist view, a lifetime is not lived by a single entity. Therefore, the proposition, a, and its reason for maximizing over a lifetime is invalid. We are left with proposition b. By this argument Parfit claims that Reductionism supports utilitarianism. Parfit's argument is flawed by not admitting the other possibility:

c) It is right to maximize over a lifetime because of the particular combination of physical and psychological continuity and connectivity that exists over a lifetime.

On this option while we may admit the existence of person stages and deny the self, we still hold that the set of person stages that make up a human lifetime is the appropriate unit over which to maximize.

Parfit claims the Reductionist view may support the utilitarian principle of maximization in other ways as

well. Recall Parfit's claim: the fact that personal identity (or the unity of life) is "less deep" leads to the view that the difference between lives (the non-identity of different persons) is in its nature "less deep". If this is the case, then it is right to treat benefits and burdens as if it made less moral difference where they came. This argument shows how the Reductionist view supports giving distributive principles less weight. If distributive principles are given less weight on the Reductionist view, then Utilitarianism which advocates giving them no weight is more plausible on the Reductionist view. This argument can be represented as follows:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Personal identity is less deep | Reductionism |
| 2. If personal identity is less deep, the difference between persons is less deep. | Premise |
| 3. The difference between persons is less deep. | 1,2 |
| 4. If the difference between persons is less deep, then it is right to treat benefits and burdens as if it made less moral difference where they came. | Premise |
| 5. It is right to treat benefits and burdens as if it made no moral difference where they came. | 3,4 |

The first premise follows directly from the Reductionist view. If personal identity does not include the existence of a permanent self or subject of experience which is separate from the body and brain and mental and physical events, then it is "less deep". Note that this is a

metaphysical claim. It amounts to nothing more than the denial of the metaphysical self.

The second premise which was discussed earlier is perhaps more controversial. One might claim that the Reductionist statements about personal identity do not affect the relationship between individuals. On this view, while the Reductionist claims that the parts of a lifetime are less deeply unified, he is not saying anything about the unity or disunity that exists between separate persons. The question of whether there is a metaphysical self has no effect on the relations between persons. However, as I pointed out earlier, if implicitly we are concerned with the "depth" of the separateness of persons relative to what is involved in personal identity, then it is more plausible to claim that the separateness of persons is less deep. If the depth of the relations between contemporaries is relative to the depth of the relation between person stages (i.e. the depth of personal identity) and if this depth is less on the Reductionist view, then the relations or connections between people will be stronger and their separation less deep.

As we discussed earlier Parfit justifies this premise by asserting that there is just one fact, personal identity (i.e. sameness of person) and its denial. In doing so, he relativizes the depth of the separateness or non-identity of different persons to the depth of personal identity. On this basis, he concludes that personal identity is "less deep". If this interpretation is

correct, then, in order to determine the significance of Parfit's claim concerning the weight of distributive principles, we must determine whether the weight of distributive principles is a function of the relative depth of the separateness of persons or of the absolute depth. It is plausible to hold that knowing the depth of the separateness of persons without reference to the depth of personal identity leaves one without a basis for determining the importance of distributing between them justly. Surely, if the "depth" of personal identity was less (while, the separateness was in an absolute sense the same) it would seem less important to distribute between them justly. For example, if being a person was like being an ant, then there would be less of a concern to distribute justly between them. Parfit's argument is plausible. If we accept that the separateness or non-identity of different people is less on the Reductionist view, and if we accept that the strength of distributive principles should be a function of the distinctness or separateness of the entities among which they distribute, then it is plausible that distributive principles should be given less weight on the Reductionist view. This conclusion, however, falls short of proving Utilitarianism. At most we can say that on Reductionism as opposed to Non-reductionism Utilitarianism is more plausible.

This argument makes the same point as the analogy about nations discussed earlier. Since a nation is nothing other than the existence of its citizens, it is right to focus upon the citizens and emphasize their personhood rather than their nationality. Similarly, since there is no person or self existing separate from a body and brain and a stream of experiences, it is right to focus on their experiences rather than on "who" is having the experiences. By this analogy it is right to give less weight to principles of distributive justice.

G. Other Views

Thomas Nagel, while agreeing that Parfit's view of personal identity may lead to an extension of the scope of principles of distributive justice to include the "persons" within a given lifetime, feels that the Reductionist view does not affect the weight of distributive principles as they apply to a group of people at a given moment.³³ Nagel gives an example to demonstrate his point. A man has two sons, the first is very happy while the second is handicapped and is very unhappy. The man has the possibility of moving his family to the city which has better services for handicapped people though it is otherwise an undesirable location. The effect of the move would be to relieve some of the distress of the handicapped son while the other son will suffer a loss in happiness somewhat greater than the gain

that the handicapped son experiences. The man recognises that it is right to relieve the handicapped son, out of respect for the principle of equality, even though the total utility would decrease. Nagel points out:

these thoughts do not depend on any idea of personal identity over time, though they can employ such an idea. All that is needed to evoke them is a distinction between persons at a time. The impulse to distributive equality arises so long as we can distinguish between two experiences being had by two persons and their being had by one person. The criteria of personal identity over time merely determine the size of the units over which a distributive principle operates.³⁴

Nagel's point of view is as follows. First, he states that "the impulse to distributive equality" arises from the distinction of one person from another. Second, he implies that the Reductionist view of personal identity only pertains to changes in persons thru time and has nothing to do with the significance of distributive justice at a given time. Nagel must have either 1) denied that the differences or boundaries between people are any less significant on the Reductionist view or 2) he assumed that distributive equality is based on an "impulse" independent on the "depth" of the separateness of persons though dependent on there being a distinction between persons. These are two ways in which one may arrive at a conclusion different from Parfit.

If we accept Parfit's argument that the separation or non-identity of persons is less deep on the Reductionist view, then we can evaluate Nagel's view by determining whether the weight of distributive principles is affected

by the "depth" of the distinction (or separation) of persons or whether distributive principles are fully weighted as long as there is a distinction - regardless of its status. Let us suppose that the weight of distributive principles was independent of the nature of the distinction between persons. This would mean that distributive principles would have the same weight whether "different persons" are ultimately different (that is, they are separate, non-identical souls) or whether they are conventionally different. For example, it may be that our culture has decided to think of "different persons" as being separate and distinct, but another culture which emphasizes group living does not distinguish or see barriers between "individuals" but only sees a continuum. (Some materialists might have the same view.) Alternatively, that other culture might distinguish between families but not between individuals. It is plausible that, if distinctions between "different persons" was seen as conventional and even arbitrary, then less weight would be given to distributive principles. Moral principles, if they aspire to universality, cannot be based on mere conventions. Therefore, the ontological status or the nature of the distinctions between persons will indeed affect the weight of distributive principles. Nagel's view is made implausible by these considerations. If the nature of the distinction between (or the separateness of) "different persons" is affected by the

nature of personal identity as Parfit claims, then the weight of distributive principles will also be affected.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The denial of the metaphysical self has some ethical implications, but the overall ethical significance of the self's denial is less than Parfit claims. Two claims are central to attempts to demonstrate the significance of the self's denial. First, there is Parfit's claim that, on the Reductionist view, a lifetime consists of multiple "person stages" which can be considered to be separate persons. A number of ethically significant statements follow from this claim. They include: 1) actions, that would be considered immoral for the harm they do to others should also be considered immoral if they harm future "selves" and 2) principles of distributive justice apply within one lifetime and they ought to be given less weight. The latter claim - that distributive principles apply within a lifetime - can be denied by someone who, though accepting Reductionism, feels that distributive principles can only be applied to sets of continuous person stages (i.e. lifetimes). I have suggested that people who hold this view probably do so because they deny person stages can truly be considered separate persons.

Most peoples' views on desert and commitment would not be significantly affected by the claim that a lifetime consists of multiple "persons". For example, most people already think that one may be less deserving of punishment for deeds done in the distant past when one was a quite

different person. Similarly, even Non-Reductionists may already feel that, in some cases, one is not bound to commitments made in the past when one was quite different. However, the Reductionist view may affect our ordinary views on commitments in some cases. For instance, if in the past I made a commitment to someone and that "person" no longer exists in the Reductionist sense, then I am now unable to release myself from the commitment by conversing with that "person's" later "self".

Parfit's second significant claim is that the separateness of different persons (relative to the sameness of a "person" throughout their life) may be less on the Reductionist view. If one holds that the weight of distributive principles is a function of the degree of separateness of different persons, then, by this second claim, these principles would be given less weight. If, on the other hand, one holds that distributive principles are fully weighted as long as there is a distinction between persons, regardless of the depth or status of that distinction, then one would deny that the weight of distributive principles is affected by the Reductionist view. I have argued that the weight of distributive principles is affected by the status of the distinction between persons. If the distinction happened to be conventional - based perhaps on an assumption made by our particular culture - then a moral principle which presupposes the distinction will itself be conventional.

Such a principle would lack universality and would, in general, be less significant and weighty than a principle founded on ultimate truth. The nature or status of the distinction between persons may well affect the significance of a principle which presupposes it.

Of course, if one held that moral principles were, in the first place, based on conventions, then holding the Reductionist view will not affect their weight for certainly the Reductionist view does not deny that persons are conventionally distinct and separate.

One interesting question that deserves some consideration is whether there can be a basis for our sense of moral responsibility if there is no self. Parfit states that psychological continuity is a sufficient basis for assigning moral responsibility for a past deed. Similarly Buddhism implies that the causal connection between our present deeds and future suffering is a sufficient basis for assigning moral responsibility (see the appendix). However, in both cases, the more basic question - why be moral? - is skirted. A simple answer is that we should be moral because there are moral principles. But on what basis are moral principles significant? Are they significant and valuable only because people, for whatever reason, have interest in them or do they have inherent value whether or not there is a person to appreciate them?

Regardless of the basis for our principles of distributive justice, the Reductionist view may lead to a

reduction in their significance. If we believe that moral principles have intrinsic worth, and if the weight of distributive principles is a function of the nature and status of the distinction between persons, then the weight of distributive principles will be affected by Reductionism. On the other hand, if we believe that the worth of distributive principles is determined only by the interest that people take in them, then the truth of Reductionism alone will not affect the weight of these principles.

ENDNOTES

1. J. Perry. p.102.
2. Steven Collins in Selfless persons has pointed out how the Buddhism practiced in the rural villages in South-East Asia differs from the "purer" forms of philosophical Buddhism studied in intellectual centers and practiced by "virtuoso" meditators.
3. Hume, David. p. 254.
4. Parit, Derek p. 223.
5. Parfit, Derek. p. 223.
6. Parfit, Derek. p. 200.
7. Parfit, Derek. p. 223.
8. Parfit, Derek. p. 207. Parfit's view is that personal identity is established by psychological continuity. We might compare his view with Locke's. Locke emphasized the importance of memories of previous events. This kind of connection was, for Locke, the basis for assigning personal identity. Parfit, on the other hand emphasizes continuity on the basis of overlapping connections. On Parfit's view, one does not need to have memories of experiences had twenty years previous in order to be the same person. In establishing personal identity, it is sufficient that there be overlapping of memories and other kinds of psychological connection.
9. Parfit, Derek. p. 246.
10. Nagel, Thomas. p. 147.
11. McGinn, Colin. p. 110.
12. Madell, Geoffrey. p. 18.
13. Parfit, Derek. p. 325.
14. Parfit, Derek. p. 320.
15. Parfit, Derek. p. 339.
16. Note that the belief that there is no metaphysical self may strengthen relations of interest between contemporaries.
17. Parfit, Derek. p. 319,337.

18. I am in debt to Fred Feldman for bringing this argument to my attention.
19. I am in debt to Fred Feldman for bringing this argument to my attention.
20. Parfit, Derek. p. 340.
21. Parfit, Derek. p. 4.
22. Parfit, Derek. p. 313.
23. Parfit, Derek. p. 317.
24. Bodanszky, Eva. p. 49.
25. Parfit, Derek. p. 119.
26. Parfit, Derek. pp. 319-320.
27. Parfit, Derek. p. 321.
28. Parfit, Derek. p. 326.
29. Parfit, Derek. p. 327.
30. Parfit, Derek. p. 333.
31. Parfit, Derek. p. 334.
32. Parfit, Derek. p. 340.
33. Nagel, Thomas. p. 124.
34. Nagel, Thomas. p. 124.

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