

Personal Identity, Part IA: Metaphysics.

Lecture VI, *Further Facts or Identity Doesn't Matter?*, 9th November

Christopher J. Masterman (cm789@cam.ac.uk, *christophermasterman.com*)

1. Introduction

1.1. Have we made any progress in answering the questions we set out to answer—the identification and reidentification question? You might think not. Our discussion in these lectures has been guided by two fundamental assumptions. Can we make progress by challenging these assumptions?

1.2. The first assumption is a reductionism. In general, we are reductionist about some facts if we think those facts or statements about those facts are dispensable and determined by some others. We have assumed:

Reductionism: Facts about personal identity are to be reduced facts of some other kind.

Thus, we have so far looked at psychological answers to the reidentification question—facts about the psychological continuity of *A* and *B*—and physical answers—facts, e.g., about bodies or animals.

1.3. The second assumption connects what matters with whether you survive in a strict sense defined in terms of identity. For instance, we assumed that if we fail to be identical to someone after a procedure like the teletransporter, then 'this is 'as bad, or nearly as bad, as ordinary death' (Parfit, 1984: 261). That is:

Identity Matters: Your *survival* concerns whether or not there exists someone identical to you. We should *deeply care* about whether you survive in this sense. That is, identity matters.

2. Challenging Reductionism: Further Fact Views

2.1. If we challenge **Reductionism**, no facts about, e.g. psychology or physics, settle facts about identity. Facts about identity are *further facts*. What could the further fact be? We have already encountered some of these views in passing: your identity could consist of your having the same soul, or a special Cartesian ego. But the further fact does not have to be *non-physical*. We might think this further fact consists in the persistence of a first-personal perspective, e.g., (Baker, 2007).

2.2. What's in favour of these views? (1) They nicely capture the extent of our egoistic concerns. Recall, the argument in Williams's *The Self and the Future*. The conclusion there: we care about what happens to *ourselves* in the future even after extreme psychological changes. If we were convinced similarly by a version of this involving extreme physical change, it would seem that we care what happens to *ourselves* regardless of both physical and psychological changes. (2) They are well placed to explain why you were once a baby, will become old, might enter into a permanent vegetative state, and why you will never be your corpse, e.g., a soul is present in each case, except the last. (3) They don't generate reduplication cases.

2.3. However, we have already seen Locke's criticism of one example of a further fact view (Lecture II). If the further fact is non-physical, we might also have worries about getting the right interaction between the physical and non-physical. But a broader point is that further fact views heavily constrain the *epistemology* of persons. It's out of step with how we ordinarily justify judgements about personal identity.

3. Challenging Identity Matters: Parfit.

3.1. Recall the problem of reduplication. Generally, the idea was that some person *A* undergoes some procedure, e.g., teletransportation, and this results in two people, *B* and *C*. We stipulate that *B* and *C* are a perfect match physically and both are psychologically continuous with *A* to same degree. In answering the

question of *who* *A* is identical to, we have four options: (a) *A* is identical to *both B* and *C*; (b) *A* is identical to one of either *B* or *C*; (c) *A* is identical to neither *B* nor *C*; (d) there are no facts of the matter.

3.2. Derek Parfit accepted a no-branching requirement: identity is one-to-one, so we should chose (c). Thus, for Parfit, *A* does not *survive* such a procedure. However, this is not to say that what happens to *A* is as bad as ordinary death. Rather, Parfit claims that *what matters* is that psychological continuity has been preserved (Parfit, 1984: 262). In ordinary cases, identity and psychological continuity do not diverge; but when they do, we should care whether psychological continuity has been preserved.

3.3. For Parfit, in reduplication cases, you do not survive; but that doesn't matter. Why think this? One reason is nicely illustrated in (Kind, 2015). We are to imagine a woman, Margaret, who steps into the teletransporter to go and see her father in New York. Kind then writes:

Margaret's main priority ... is getting to see her father face to face ... And of course, this is exactly what the woman who steps off the transporter pad in New York is going to do. Moreover, this woman not only looks exactly like Margaret but she feels like Margaret from the inside ... She has the same memories, the same personality traits, the same interests as Margaret ... From ... [her father's] ... perspective, there is no doubt that his daughter has come to visit. When she returns to London, she will pursue all of Margaret's projects exactly as Margaret would have. Doesn't ... [this] give Margaret everything that she wants for the future—or if not quite everything, isn't it still pretty close to exactly what she wants? (Kind, 2015: 63)

The thought: identity shouldn't matter to *A* because *A*'s desires, aims, projects, and so on can be carried out by *B* and *C*—and, importantly, carried out in the way *A* would have carried them out.

3.4. We might even think that reduplication—or *division*, as Parfit calls it—leads to an outcome *better* than ordinary survival (Parfit, 1984: 264): there is a *doubling* of the years to be lived, the possibility of pursuing *two* careers, doubling the joy and happiness evoked by the achievements of our loved ones. Parfit claims that embracing the claim that identity doesn't matter is liberating, consoling, and has important moral consequences: one is no longer 'imprisoned' in oneself (Parfit, 1984: 284), the boundaries between ourselves and others are less defined, and survival is now always a matter of degree.

3.5. There are issues with this view. Some of these are not philosophically interesting: if Margaret is married, does she become a bigamist? keep her job? receive two salaries? These are largely legal questions. Other issues are more pressing. Think about future, career-related desires and distinguish:

- (1) I desire that I becomes a successful novelist.
- (2) I desire that *someone* becomes a successful novelist.

Of course, if (1) is true, (2) is true: if you desire that *you* becomes a successful novelist, then you also desire that *someone* becomes one, i.e., *you*. But if (2) is true, (1) is not automatically true. In a case of division or reduplication, we may be able to satisfy (2), but can we satisfy (1)? Can both *B* and *C* agree that they are pursuing *A*'s desire that *they* become a successful novelist?

References

- Baker, Lynne Rudder. 2007. "Persons and Other Things." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14: 17–36.
- Kind, Amy (2015). *Persons and Personal Identity*. Malden, MA: Polity
- Parfit, Derek (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford, GB: OUP