

**THE TRUTH ABOUT OURSELVES:
Advancing Parfit's Account of What Matters**

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I. Introduction

Suppose technological advances permit scientists to scan human brains and bodies, recording extensive detail about their physical arrangement. Further, imagine it becomes possible, by neurological intervention, to make precise changes to one's memories and personality. Consider the following scenarios:¹

Teletransportation – A scan is performed on your body while you are unconscious. Using the data from the scan, an identical copy of your body is created and awakened on a Martian colony. In *destructive teletransportation*, the scanning process destroys the original body. In *preservative teletransportation*, the process is harmless and identical bodies will wake up approximately simultaneously on Earth and Mars.

Lucky Teletransportation – Scientists attempt to destructively teletransport you to Mars, but something goes wrong. Instead of using the information from the scan on Earth to create a copy of your body, the teletransporter on Mars synthesizes a body completely at random. In an extraordinarily unlikely turn of events, this body still turns out to be an identical copy of your body that was scanned on Earth.

Whole Brain Emulation – A scan is performed on your body while you are unconscious. Using the data from the scan, your brain-state is emulated on a supercomputer, creating a functionally identical, if virtual, copy of your brain. As in the previous case, the scan may be *destructive* or *preservative*.

Exchange of Bodies – After being kidnapped, you are informed by your captor that you will shortly be tortured. Before that, however, you will have your memory erased and personality expunged. Further, you will be given a new set of memories and a new nature identical to those of another kidnapping victim in a different room. Finally, your memories and personality traits, which will be scanned before being replaced, will be copied into the other victim's brain, and he or she will receive \$100,000 and be freed while you are being tortured.

Fission – A non-destructive scan is performed of your body. Two replicas of it are made, missing only their cerebral cortices. Then, the left-hemisphere of your cerebral cortex is transplanted into one body, and the right-hemisphere into the other. From actual cases of hemispherectomy, wherein one hemisphere is surgically removed, we know that both of these bodies can survive.

How ought one regard such prospects? Is destructive teletransportation an expedient method of travel or of suicide? What about lucky teletransportation? Does whole brain emulation offer an opportunity for dramatic extension of one's lifespan? Should a person forced into an exchange of bodies anticipate torture or freedom and financial gain, and on which of the details about the process mentioned by the captor does that expectation hinge? If you

¹ *Teletransportation* and *Fission* are adapted from Parfit (1984), *Exchange of Bodies* from Williams (1973), and *Lucky Teletransportation* from Campbell (2005).

undergo fission, are one, both, or neither of the resulting persons you? Though these scenarios themselves are farfetched, what they reveal about what we judge to be important may have significant ramifications for immediate, pressing issues of morality and rationality.

Answers to questions of this sort—which I call Interesting Future-Regarding Questions (IFRQs)—are often thought to depend fundamentally on one’s convictions regarding personal identity, and, in particular, on one’s preferred answer to what Eric Olson calls the Persistence Question: “Under what possible circumstances is a person who exists at one time identical with something that exists at another time [...]?” (Olson, 2010) As Derek Parfit says, “When we are concerned about our future, it is our numerical identity that we are concerned about [...] However much I change, I shall still be alive if there will be some person living who will *be me*” (202).² In Part Three of his *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit discusses personal identity and the Persistence Question at length, and makes at least four significant, controversial claims: that we ought to be so-called Reductionists about personal identity, that personal identity consists in a certain type of psychological relationship, that personal identity is not what fundamentally matters in answering IFRQs, and that what does matter for answering IFRQs (in the way in which personal identity appears to matter) is something he calls ‘Relation R.’

In this paper, I evaluate what matters for answering IFRQs and suggest preliminary answers to these example questions based on a detailed examination of Parfit’s arguments in *Reasons and Persons*. I argue that, generally, Parfit’s case is persuasive, sound, and resilient to a variety of objections at most stages. I do, however, challenge it at three points. First, I propose that Parfit ought not defend a psychological criterion of personal identity, as the argument he does offer for one is inadequate, and the point is largely unnecessary in

² Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers in this paper refer to Parfit (1984).

advancing his larger case that what matters is Relation R. Later, I argue briefly that one might reasonably reject the claim that psychological continuity, a constitutive part of Parfit's Relation R, matters for answering IFRQs. Finally, and most significantly, I suggest that the Psychological Sequentialist category of objections pose a significant challenge to Parfit's position. These objections show that Parfit must assume either a significantly more radical or a significantly less radical position than he does, in order to be consistent. I argue that we, and Parfit, ought to assume the more radical position, rather than return to a more conventional position that Parfit had dismissed.

This paper proceeds in several parts. First, I offer a very brief overview of the structure of Parfit's argument and of the conclusions that he hopes to demonstrate. Next, in Section III, I explicate and attempt to demonstrate the force of the first of Parfit's contentious claims: that we ought to be Reductionists about persons and personal identity. Then, in Section IV, I present Parfit's claim about the criterion of personal identity and suggest, as mentioned, that this is an under-argued claim generally unnecessary to the larger project. In Section V, I explain Parfit's argument that we cannot rationally believe there is something deeply and fundamentally valuable about personal identity, and I defend this claim against a response offered by Sosa. In Section VI, I relay Parfit's argument that what we should believe is truly valuable, instead of personal identity, is the persistence of Relation R. In Sections VII and VIII, I consider a number of potential challenges to this claim, including my own and those of Johnston, Williams, Chappell, Ehring, and Campbell. I argue that many of these objections are ineffective, but also suggest that those of one type, the Psychological Sequentialist arguments, are compelling. In Section IX, I conclude by considering how we ought to answer the IFRQs in light of Parfit's generally persuasive argument and the three

amendments to it that I argue are necessary. Finally, in the Afterword, I briefly note that, although the three adjustments that I advocate are significant, adopting them does not challenge many of the moral implications that Parfit takes his original argument to have. In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit claims that most of us have fundamentally misguided beliefs about ourselves and, therefore, about what does and ought to matter to us about ourselves. In this paper, I suggest that the truth is more dramatic still.

II. Overview and What Matters

Parfit's discussion of personal identity in Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* can be subdivided into three subparts: a discussion of the nature and boundaries of persons, a discussion of which parts of persons are most pertinent to moral and rational decision-making, and a discussion of the potentially sweeping implications of acknowledging the highly unintuitive answers to the questions raised in the two preceding sections. I am concerned primarily with the first two of these. In subpart one, consisting of chapters 10 and 11, Parfit contests the legitimacy of many natural conceptions of personal identity and of the nature of persons. He instead defends Reductionism, the view that persons do not exist separately from the mental and physical events that comprise their lives. At this instant, my life consists of the biological processes taking place in my body and the associated set of mental phenomena, like the perception of a desk and a laptop. I am *not* the *product* of those biological processes or the *experiencer* of those mental phenomena.³ For Reductionists, who deny the existence of a separately existing entity that I can point to as *me*, my identity cannot be determined by whether any single, particular thing in the world is numerically identical with some past thing. My identity must consist merely in the truth of certain facts about my relationship to a past person. For the Reductionist conception of personal identity that Parfit backs, the relevant facts involve psychological relations like being the only person who remembers a past person's experiences, or who acts based on a past person's beliefs and desires. (Notably, he does not deem facts about physical relations, like having the same brain cells, to be relevant.)

³ Under some formulations of Reductionism, I *am* those biological processes and mental phenomena. Under others, I am something distinct from them, but not independent of them. I discuss this in more detail in the next section.

In subpart two, consisting of chapters 12 and 13, Parfit argues that, given a reasonable (Reductionist) conception of persons, it is clearly misguided to think that personal identity matters considerably in moral and rational decision-making. He demonstrates this with the thought experiment known as *My Division*, which shows that Reductionists who greatly value personal identity attach an unjustifiable importance to preventing “branching” in their identities. Then, Parfit contends that, once the possibility that personal identity is what matters is excluded, there is only one reasonable candidate for what matters among the options that remain: the extent of the psychological connectedness and continuity between a past and present person, regardless of the cause of that connectedness and continuity. He calls this ‘Relation R.’ Thus, though Parfit defends four significant claims, the first three are presented in service of demonstrating the fourth, in an argument that might be formulated:

(P1) We have strong reason to prefer Reductionism to Non-Reductionism concerning personal identity.

(P2) Reductionism about personal identity entails (a) that personal identity consists of the conjunction of Relation R and uniqueness, and (b) that personal identity is not what matters.

(P3) If personal identity is not what matters, Relation R is the best candidate for what matters.

(C) Therefore, Relation R is what matters.

Finally, as the phrase and concept is central to his thesis, it is also worth explicating more exactly what Parfit means by ‘what matters’ before continuing. In rejecting certain arguments of Thomas Nagel, Parfit says, “if we ask what is important about ourselves, and our lives, and our relations with each other, the continued existence of particular brains does not seem to be what matters” (292). ‘What matters’ refers to what we consider fundamentally important to answering IFRQs. In particular, ‘what matters’ refers to what is fundamentally important “*in the way in which* personal identity” is naïvely thought to be fundamentally important in these cases (282). When considering whether I ought to use a teletransporter to

journey to Mars (as opposed to a spacecraft), my immediate, unreflective concern is ‘Will it be *me* who steps out of the teletransporter on Mars or will it be a different person who is merely exactly like me?’ But, Parfit contends, this is the wrong question to be asking. As I explain later, it can be shown that there are cases in which knowing that a certain future person will exist—a person who cannot possibly be *me*—is as reassuring as knowing that *I* will exist. ‘What matters’ refers to this substitute for personal identity in the more appropriate question ‘Will what matters (like I normally think personal identity matters) be preserved in the person who steps out of the teletransporter on Mars?’ For the remainder of this paper, especially when it is necessary to distinguish this notion of what matters from what matters in other senses, I refer to this as ‘what matters LPI’ (like personal identity).

III. Reductionism

The first major claim in Parfit's argument is that we ought to be Reductionists about personal identity. Parfit first introduces the distinction between Reductionism and Non-Reductionism by noting that the only criteria of personal identity that he considers to be reasonable—whether they ascribe importance to physical and psychological phenomena—all claim “that the fact of a person's identity over time just consists in the holding of certain more particular facts” (210). For Reductionists, a “person's existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events” (211).⁴ Reductionism about persons and personal identity asserts that persons can be reduced completely to their biological and mental constitutive parts. Parfit provides a helpful analogy to nations (211).

Most of us are Reductionists about nations in that we recognize that a nation is merely citizens living together in certain ways on certain territory. Some will maintain that a nation *just is* these people on this land in these ways. On this view, Spain *is* some 50 million people inhabiting a certain geographic region, adhering to many domestic and international political arrangements. Others would assert that a nation is something distinct from its land, people, and the interactions thereof; but, they would not claim that the nation could exist separately from them. On this view, Spain is *the nation characterized by* certain borders, certain political architecture, and a certain populace. Both of these positions are Reductionist. They agree that nations are not entities that exist in any meaningful way separate from their parts. They agree that, to determine if a given nation were Spain, one would examine its geographic position, its populace, its laws, and its history. One would not attempt to

⁴ Parfit is including things like the persistence of a belief in the notion of 'events' here, because he wishes to avoid the language of “mental states.”

determine if the nation possessed any single, critical element of, or relation to, what we know as Spain. Analogously, to determine if a given person were *me*, Reductionists about persons would examine some combination of the person's body, history, memories, beliefs, desires and personality. They would not look for a single, critical element that demarcates Dillon Plunkett.

Non-Reductionists take the opposing view. Specifically, as concerns persons and personal identity, they deny either, or both, of the claims that (R1) a "person's existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events," and (R2) "that the fact of a person's identity over time just consists in the holding of certain more particular facts" (210-211). Parfit divides Non-Reductionists into two groups. Some Non-Reductionists believe that persons are "separately existing entities," things other than brains and bodies, and that identifying a person at one time with another person at another time involves reference to these entities. This is to deny (R1) and (R2). Alternatively, Non-Reductionists can subscribe to what Parfit calls the Further Fact View by conceding that persons are not entities that exist separately from their brains and bodies, but maintaining that personal identity consists in something more than some combination of the relations of psychological and physical continuity. This denies only (R2). As the presence or absence of a separately existing entity would be one example of a 'further fact' about identity (the truth of which does not reduce to facts about brains, bodies, and the relations thereof), believing that there are separately existing entities is a special case of the Further Fact View.⁵

⁵ Parfit does not offer any examples of Further Fact Views that do not posit separately existing entities.

A very important facet of Reductionism is the possibility of indeterminacy about identity (212). If identity is not, in itself, a fundamental (or further) fact, but is merely the holding of *other* facts, it is possible that identity might be indeterminate. Consider again nations. If a small part of Spain rebels, what remains is likely Spain and the part that rebelled is a new nation. But, if the Spanish government falls and three rival replacements emerge, one with control of about a fifth of the population and land, and the others with about two-fifths each, then it may be indeterminate whether any one of the resulting nations *is* Spain. Though any or all may claim the name “Spain,” it may be that the most that can faithfully be done is to describe which, and to what extent, elements of Spain are preserved in each resulting nation.

Parfit uses the example of clubs (212-213). Imagine a club stops meeting, but, after some time, a new group of people who heard about the club start to meet in the same location, at the same interval, doing the same thing, functioning under the same bylaws. In the absence of a club bylaw governing this circumstance, or a conviction of the current or former members, it may be indeterminate whether this club is the same club as the previous club. No amount of new information about the world would determine whether or not it is the same club. Accordingly, Parfit would call the question of whether it is the same club, ‘empty,’ because to answer it involves only different descriptions of the exact same situation in the world. Analogously, for a Reductionist who denies further facts about personal identity, it is not necessarily impossible that we could know everything that there is to know about the world at times t_0 and t_1 (including its arrangement and history, which will entail knowledge of all relations between all things) without knowing, definitively, whether Jones at t_1 is the same person as someone who existed at t_0 . Reductionism about persons allows for

potential indeterminacy in personal identity because Reductionism denies the existence of further facts, which would always determine identity. Thus, evidence for indeterminacy of personal identity would provide strong reason to adopt Reductionism about persons.

Parfit's primary case for Reductionism is two-fold. First, he attempts to demonstrate that certain intuitions that he believes most of us have, which incline us towards Non-Reductionism, are unfounded. He then presents his *Combined Spectrum* problem, which is trivially answered by Reductionism, but poses a significant, seemingly insurmountable challenge to Non-Reductionism.

Parfit takes his first example of a conviction that might (misleadingly) underlie an attachment to Non-Reductionism from Thomas Reid: "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" (223). Some Reductionists—Parfit among them (275)—condone these claims by acknowledging that persons are distinct from their constitutive parts and relations while still emphasizing that persons do not exist separately from them. But, this is a different position from the Non-Reductionism that Reid is insisting it is so natural to accept. Do we not have a direct feeling that we are something separately existing?

Consider the *Branch-Line Case*, in which a teletransporter makes a replica on Mars, Jones₂, of Jones₀, but also preserves Jones₀'s body and brain (who I rename Jones₁ for ease of reference). Immediately after being awakened, both Jones₁ and Jones₂ will have direct awareness of their own experiences at the present and will connect those experiences to the past experiences of Jones₀ in the same way. Each will feel, with equal conviction, that *he* is

the experiencer of what was happening to Jones₀ just before the branching occurred. As Parfit argues, this shows that awareness of a separately existing entity cannot be distinguished from awareness of strong psychological continuity and connectedness (223-224). If I am aware that my mental life has been continuous with that of a past person, and am aware that I am very strongly connected to him, then I will have as strong of a conviction that we are the same separately existing entity as if we actually were. I could not have any awareness of being a separately existing entity except by being aware of strong relations of psychological connectedness and continuity. Thus, our experiences do not give us direct awareness that we are persistent separately existing entities. They merely give direct awareness that we are psychological states that are connected and continuous with other, past psychological states.

Even if, as it appears, we are not directly aware of ourselves as separately existing entities, René Descartes's *Cogito* argument contends that we can at least deduce this truth. Parfit notes that Lichtenberg has already effectively undermined this claim (224). Descartes *could* doubt the claim "I think, therefore I am" for precisely the reason that it presumes a separately existing person. In the face of the *Branch-Line Case* and other examples that cast doubt on direct awareness of being a separately existing entity, the only indubitable claim is "This is a thought, therefore at least one thought is being thought." This could be restated as "It is thought: 'I think,'" but the presence of an 'I' is immaterial to the present discussion, as it is merely the content of the thought (225). These rephrasings offer no suggestion of separately existing entities. Given the lack of direct experiential evidence or reason to deduce the existence of separately existing entities from our direct experience (as well as the absence of what might constitute reasonable observational evidence in the world that separately

existing persons exist, Parfit's lengthy discussion of which I am omitting), Parfit contends that separately existing entities ought to be categorized with unicorns, perfectly plausible in principle, but something for which we have no evidence whatsoever.

After dismantling these Non-Reductionist intuitions, Parfit offers the case of the *Combined Spectrum* as a compelling reason to prefer Reductionism to Non-Reductionism (236-239). In the *Combined Spectrum*, Parfit imagines a process by which he might, piecewise and extremely gradually, have his brain and body replaced with a qualitative copy of the brain and body of Greta Garbo, with each exchange of one of his cells for a new Garbo cell controlled by a different switch. The set of all possible experiments, ranging from flipping a single switch to flipping all of them, comprises the spectrum. After a single switch activation, it is almost incontrovertible that the resulting person is still Parfit. After the simultaneous activation of all switches, the resulting person is certainly not Parfit. But, what ought we believe about cases solidly in the middle of the spectrum? Reductionism, which posits no further facts about identity, can explain the *Combined Spectrum* by insisting that a complete description of the physical and psychological states (and relations thereof) of the prior and resulting persons is the most that can be desired. For the Reductionist, it is an empty question whether the resulting person *is* Parfit after 49% of the switches have been flipped, or after 51% have been flipped. To answer it affirmatively or negatively would merely be to offer one of two different descriptions of the exact same outcome. Non-Reductionists of any form, however, are burdened with the seemingly impossible task of explaining when the further fact of Parfit's identity fails to hold for the resulting body and brain. The Non-Reductionist must identify when (after what number of switches) and how Parfit fails to survive the procedure.

In addition to the preceding arguments, which I consider his primary defense of Reductionism, Parfit offers at least two other pieces of evidence for the Reductionist view worth mentioning briefly. The first is derived from the case of split-brained patients (245-248). Parfit imagines the process (already possible for brain areas near the surface of the skin) of temporarily disabling the corpus callosum, inducing the splitting of consciousness that seems to be observed in callosotomy patients. Non-Reductionists must explain in which hemisphere the previously existing person survives (if any) and what happens to the two persons who exist when the temporary disruption wears off. Reductionists, as before, face no such difficulties. The same situation applies to Parfit's case of *My Division*, which I discuss shortly. The Reductionist position is a counterintuitive one, both in its immediate characterization of us and because of the truly unnatural views to which (it will be shown) it ultimately commits us. Nevertheless, as Parfit argues, to deny it is to make a substantive claim about the constitution of the world for which there does not ultimately appear to be evidence, and which struggles profoundly with the theoretical plausibility of the *Combined Spectrum* or the temporary division of the cerebral hemispheres.

IV. The Nature of Personal Identity

Reductionist criteria of personal identity, Parfit observes, can be divided into those concerned with physical relations (having the same body) and those concerned with psychological relations (being connected by memory, persisting beliefs and desires, etc.) (202-208). Two relations of particular importance are connectedness (direct connection, as when Jones_{now} remembers many of the experiences of a Jones_{past}) and continuity (connection by overlapping chains of significant connectedness, as when Jones_{now} remembers most of the experiences of Jones_{past}, who, in turn, remembers most of the experiences of Jones_{distant}, but Jones_{now} does not necessarily have direct memory of many of the experiences of Jones_{distant}) (206). Psychological criteria of personal identity can then be further subdivided according to what cause they require for the psychological connections. “Narrow” psychological criteria require normal cause, wherein Jones₂ has mostly the same psychological characteristics as Jones₁, some past person, because Jones₂ inhabits the same body Jones₁ inhabited. “Wide” criteria might allow for atypical cause, like teletransportation.

Parfit originally defended a wide psychological criterion of identity. He claims to have withdrawn that support in the first revision of *Reasons and Persons*, in deference to his belief that “we should not try to decide between the different criteria of personal identity” for reasons that include the claim that personal identity is not what matters (x, 204-207, 241). Nevertheless, Parfit seems to maintain and presuppose the view that Reductionism about personal identity entails that personal identity consists of the conjunction of Relation R (psychological connectedness and continuity) and uniqueness. First, in outlining the arguments of Part Three of *Reasons and Persons*, he says, “I shall also argue for the following [...] Our identity over time just involves (a) Relation R [...] provided (b) that this

relation does not take a ‘branching form’” (216). Later, in section 90, he says, “Call personal identity PI. When some relation holds uniquely, or in a one-one form, call this fact U. The view that I accept can be stated with this formula: $PI = R + U$ ” (263). Parfit then reasons, “the presence or absence of U makes no difference to the intrinsic nature of my relation to [some future person]. And what matters most must be the intrinsic nature of this relation. [...] adding U does not greatly increase the value of R [so] R must be fundamentally what matters, and PI mostly matters just because of the presence of R.” This suggests that Parfit’s ultimate argument takes the form:

(P1) We have strong reason to prefer Reductionism to Non-Reductionism concerning personal identity.

(P2*) Reductionism about personal identity entails that personal identity consists of the conjunction of Relation R and uniqueness.

(P3*) Uniqueness does not trace what matters.

(C*) Therefore, personal identity is not what matters, and what does matter is the non-uniqueness component of it: Relation R.

This would make the argument that ‘Relation R is what matters’ critically dependent on the fact that personal identity is measured by the psychological criterion, which is heretofore undefended in *Reasons and Persons*.

Granting the Reductionist claims Parfit makes as true, one must either demonstrate that physical criteria are irrelevant to personal identity or establish directly that personal identity is a psychological relation in order to defend a (purely) psychological criterion of personal identity. Parfit does not spend significant time on either claim. As to the first, Parfit insists that the best formulated physical criterion “ought not to require the continued existence of my whole body. If all of my brain continues both to exist and to be the brain of one living person, who is psychologically continuous with me, I continue to exist” (253). Changing all things about one’s body except enough of the brain to sustain a conscious

person is “just the limiting case of receiving a new heart,” which would not affect identity. Elaborating on this, Parfit says, “Why should the brain be singled out in this way? The answer must be: ‘Because the brain is the carrier of psychological continuity, or Relation R’. If this is why the brain is singled out, the continuity of the brain would not matter when it was *not* the carrier of Relation R” (284). This may be seen as begging the question, however. Parfit appeals to the privileged position of the brain in the physical criterion in order to malign it as inferior to the psychological criterion. But, he grounds the claim that the physical criterion ought to privilege the brain only by indirect appeal to the critical importance of the psychological relations that comprise the psychological criterion. Though Parfit argues at length that psychological relations alone must comprise what matters (284-285), he does not make a significant argument that personal identity must be defined in psychological relations alone.⁶

Parfit might be more successful by demonstrating in the explanation of a psychological criterion of personal identity that personal identity is inherently an exclusively psychological relation. Parfit claims (following John Locke), that the simplest answer to what it is to be a person is, “that, to be a person, a being must be self-conscious, aware of its identity and its continued existence over time” (202). Accordingly, personal identity is a relation of direct connections, like sharing consciousness via memory (described in a subtle, complex way admitting of exceptions to avoid certain immediate objections), and—for reasons Parfit does not explain, but which might be plausibly inferred—sharing persistent beliefs, desires, and intentions (205-207). Ultimately, just as he does little to justify the role of psychological factors other than memory, Parfit does very little to justify any positive

⁶ It is not open to him to say the former implies the latter, as he argues that what matters cannot be personal identity.

claim that personal identity is fundamentally, exclusively psychological. It is unclear how he would respond, for instance, to a position that identifies persons in the way in which Locke identifies plants and animals, by the participation of matter in an organized body in a continued life (Locke, 1979, 330-333).

Parfit appears to have withdrawn only his support specifically for the *wide* psychological criterion of identity over other psychological criteria, while maintaining a commitment to a psychological criterion of some kind. The preceding arguments offer at least some reason to question such a position, and, therefore, the soundness of the argument outlined just previously. However, I believe Parfit could have abstained from defending any criteria of identity at all without undermining his overall case. As I show in the next section, Parfit's arguments demonstrate that personal identity is not what matters under *any* Reductionist criteria of personal identity. More robustly construed, a formalization of Parfit's arguments takes the form I offered in the Overview:

(P1) We have strong reason to prefer Reductionism to Non-Reductionism concerning personal identity.

(P2) Reductionism about personal identity entails (a) that personal identity consists of the conjunction of Relation R and uniqueness, and (b) that personal identity is not what matters.

(P3) If personal identity is not what matters, Relation R is the best candidate for what matters.

(C) Therefore, Relation R is what matters.

Thus, though present in this argument, the claim that personal identity consists of Relation R and uniqueness is deductively inessential. Parfit can omit (a) and need only establish (b): that personal identity is not what matters in light of Reductionism (regardless of which Reductionist criteria of identity one adopts) in order to demonstrate his conclusion.

V. Personal Identity Is Not What Matters

Parfit contends that if Reductionism is correct, if it is true that we (persons) are not separately existing entities, then it follows directly (1) that personal identity is not always determinate, (2) that unities like the unity of consciousness cannot be explained by appeal to a single person who is the experiencer, (3) that personal identity is not what matters, and (4) that what matters is Relation R (216-218). His demonstration of consequence (3), with which I am concerned in this section, proceeds as follows.

We know from experience with real patients that a person can survive with significantly preserved mental life and mental abilities with half of the cerebral cortex surgically removed or catastrophically lesioned (246; McClelland & Maxwell, 2007). Further, though most people show significant lateralization of brain functions, there are people who show substantially less (246). Imagine Parfit is one of three identical triplets who all sustain fatal injuries in an accident. Parfit's siblings' brains are irreparably damaged, as is Parfit's body. His surgical team responds, bizarrely, by extracting his brain, bisecting it, and implanting one half into each of his siblings' bodies. Prior to the accident, he showed such dramatic lack of lateralization in his brain that his right and left hemispheres were identical, if reflected. Each hemisphere/body pairing, upon waking, is fully psychologically connected and continuous with Parfit, has a nearly identical body to the one he had before the accident, and has a brain physically continuous with his brain. Parfit refers to this case as *My Division* (and it is a more detailed version of the *Fission* example I offered at the outset) (254).

Had the right half of Parfit's brain merely been destroyed and only one transplant taken place, we—on any reasonable Reductionist criterion of personal identity—would say that Parfit survives as the man who awakes with a single-hemisphere, Parfit_{left}. Similarly, we

would say that Parfit_{before} ought to plan for and anticipate the life of Parfit_{left} about as much as he previously planned for and anticipated the life of the person who would wake up in his bed after he goes to sleep each night prior to the accident. By virtue of the relationship between Parfit_{before} and Parfit_{left}, both personal identity and *what matters* are preserved. The case initially described, in which both hemispheres are transplanted, is identical, except that Parfit_{before} will (nearly) bear an identical relation to two people, Parfit_{left} and Parfit_{right}. The only change in the relationship will be that it is no longer characterized by uniqueness or one-to-one character. As identity is necessarily a one-to-one relationship, it is no longer preserved.⁷ Thus, in order to equate personal identity with what matters LPI, one would have to argue that whether the operation to create Parfit_{right} succeeded can determine whether what matters is preserved in the relation between Parfit_{before} and Parfit_{left}.

Without invoking Non-Reductionist Cartesian egos or the like, the duplication of this relation cannot reasonably be thought to undermine the preservation of what matters. As Parfit says, “You will lose your identity. But there are different ways of doing this. Dying is one, dividing is another. To regard these as the same is to confuse two with zero. Double survival is not the same as ordinary survival. But this does not make it death. It is even less like death” (261-262).

This comprises Parfit’s case that personal identity is not what matters. By this scenario or other means, we can demonstrate to ourselves that, if we are Reductionists, the uniqueness that is definitionally central to personal identity is immaterial (except for trivial practicalities) to what matters. What matters LPI cannot be personal identity. The profundity

⁷ Insofar as Parfit’s survival consists in there being a future person who is identical with Parfit, Parfit does not survive. However, he would say we ought to merely offer the accurate description that neither of the resulting people will *be* him, as it would be just as accurate to attribute to him “double survival” for other conceptions of survival.

of this claim should be striking. As I stand inside the teletransporter debating whether to press the ‘Go’ button, it is the wrong question to be asking myself, ‘Will it be *me* who steps out on the other end?’ Perhaps more dramatically, this is also the wrong question to be asking when considering whether to anticipate reward or torture in *Exchange of Bodies*. It cannot be a reasonable necessary condition to impose on teletransportation that *I* exit the teletransporter. (This follows from *My Division*.) My concern can only be about relations between complete descriptions of the world that mention persons only as labels for certain clusters of co-conscious experiences and not as separately existing entities. (This follows from Reductionism.)

What matters LPI must be something less expansive that does not entail uniqueness. Parfit immediately claims, and later defends his opinion, that Relation R is that something. This move opens many avenues for objection. However, challenging the more basic view that personal identity is not what matters without abandoning Reductionism seems to require one of two claims: that identity does not entail uniqueness, or that uniqueness matters. The first position is immediately incomprehensible. The second position is intelligible, but arguments for its truth seem tenuous.

* * *

Some of the only considerable discussion about the step from Reductionism to the view that personal identity is not what matters comes in Ernest Sosa’s “Surviving Matters.” Sosa argues that we may take issue with Parfit’s positive claims about the unimportance of identity. Parfit affirms, “If I will be R-related to some future person, the presence or absence of U makes no difference to the nature of my relation to this person. And what matters most must be the intrinsic nature of this relation” (263). Sosa observes that there are many

examples of relationships where what matters about them includes, to a very significant degree, extrinsic features of them (Sosa, 1990, 319-320). In particular, he focuses on the case of exclusive ownership. Exclusive ownership bestows upon one privileges, benefits, and freedoms that non-exclusive ownership does not. Yet, Sosa contends, exclusivity of ownership is governed by extrinsic factors, just as uniqueness of R-relation is.

I believe this is a strong reply, but I do not believe that it alone undermines the claim that personal identity is not what matters, even if it is successful. One cannot deny that there are relationships where a significant part of what is valued or what matters about the relationship is an extrinsic detail, so Parfit cannot be invoking a general principle. Nevertheless, it is open to Parfit to claim that what matters *LPI* must, in fact, be the intrinsic nature of the relation between the persons being evaluated. More importantly, however, Parfit's argument does not depend on his claim that "what matters most must be the intrinsic nature of this relation." It depends only on the claim that, given Reductionism, the duplication of this particular relation cannot cause it to matter less, and the point made by *My Division* still holds. Reductionists who believe that personal identity is what matters must explain how what matters could be lost when the surgeon transplants both of Parfit's hemispheres successfully (removing uniqueness and, thereby, identity), given that what matters is preserved if the surgeon accidentally destroys one of his hemispheres.

Sosa provides something like an argument for the importance of uniqueness as well, but I do not think it is a successful one. He asks that we imagine the case of a person who desires a cube, but professes to no opinion on the number of faces or edges of the object, so long as he receives a cube. Rationally, however, this person must either come to care less about cubicity or more about side and edge count, though Sosa says logic alone cannot favor

one solution (Sosa, 307). Sosa thinks our survival concerns are similar.⁸ When we express our concern for survival (which entails personal identity and, therefore, uniqueness), while also expressing relatively minimal concern for whether or not there is branching (and a resulting loss of uniqueness), an analogous situation to the cubicity problem prevails. Sosa believes we have to provide, and may lack, good reason not to increase our concern for non-branching, just as cube desirers perhaps ought to increase their concern for a six-faced, twelve-edged object (Sosa, 321).

The response to this that I believe we should offer is as follows. When one desires a cube, either one ought to desire a six-faced, twelve-edged object, and fails to do so due to lack of understanding, or one ought not to desire a cube due to a similar lack of understanding. Which of these holds depends on the details of the desire, including the reasons that motivate it. For example, imagine Richard wants an object to use as a die and knows that the shape of a die is called ‘cube,’ but he lacks the spatial reasoning abilities to realize how many edges or faces a cube has. He ought to desire a six-faced, 12-edged object by desiring a cube, but he fails to do so. Alternatively, suppose Gary desires a *12-faced* polyhedron, but believes that he desires a cube because he lacks an accurate understanding of what ‘cube’ means. He ought not desire a cube.

In the case of survival, the lack of understanding occurs in the desire for survival, not in the failure to desire uniqueness. As Parfit says, “When we see *why* neither resulting person [in *My Division*] will be me, I believe that, on reflection, we can also see that this does not matter, or matters only a little” (263). Non-Reductionist intuitions guide us to the belief that survival of *ourselves* is what matters. We also attach no inherent importance to non-

⁸ For the purposes of his discussion, ‘what matters’ is referred to as survival (as in the teletransporter case when we might say that what matters to us about the outcome is that we survive the process).

branching. In accepting the truth of Reductionism, we come to understand that survival entails non-branching. Sosa thinks that it is unclear whether we were wrong to value survival or to neglect non-branching. But, notice that our predicament is analogous to Gary's. Gary desires what he called a cube, and understands certain features of what he desires. Upon learning that 'cube' refers to a 12-*edged* object, not a 12-faced one, Gary should, of course, rescind his desire for something called a cube, not rescind his desire for the features of the object he has in mind. Similarly, most of us intuitively desire survival and think that branching is irrelevant to survival. When we learn that part of what it *means* to survive is to not branch, we should rescind our desire for survival, not our lack of concern for non-branching. We have learned something new about what survival is, just as Gary learned something new about what a cube is, and we recognize that term as imperfectly identifying the object of our concern. But, we still maintain our disinterest in branching, just as Gary maintains his interest in a 12-faced object, because our understanding of branching is unchanged and accurate, just like Gary's understanding of face counts.

VI. The Case That Relation R Is What Matters

Though its primary purpose is to demonstrate that personal identity is *not* what matters, Parfit's most important thought experiment, *My Division*, is also central to his discussion of what *does* matter. This case preserves, in both resulting individuals, everything one could reasonably value about personal identity except the uniqueness of the relation (the fact that one person at time t_1 is never identical to more than one person at any time t_2). As discussed previously, if either hemisphere were merely destroyed rather than transplanted, then we would (or should, at least) say that the subject survived and did not lose what matters. Accordingly, we cannot claim that personal identity is what matters unless we place monumental significance on uniqueness, which Parfit argues persuasively that we cannot (263). Instead, Parfit initially reasons, what matters LPI is whatever comprises personal identity, other than uniqueness. He asserts that what does remain is Relation R and, thus, Relation R is what matters (262-263). I have contended that Parfit's arguments that personal identity consists in Relation R plus uniqueness are less than conclusive. Though I have argued that this does not undermine Parfit's claim that personal identity is not what matters, it certainly negates this preliminary argument that Relation R is what matters. Thus, it remains to establish what *does* matter LPI.

Parfit's full treatment of the question of what does matter begins in section 96, where he offers the four "simplest answers: (1) Physical continuity, (2) Relation R with its normal cause, (3) R with any reliable cause, (4) R with any cause" (283). Physical continuity alone, option (1), certainly cannot be what matters.⁹ Consider a modified version of the *Combined Spectrum*, wherein all of my psychological characteristics and memories have been expunged

⁹ Though I present the point somewhat differently and expand on it, what follows still shares the core challenge to (1) that Parfit makes, beginning on 283. (All of the examples in the next few paragraphs are mine, not Parfit's.)

and approximately half of the physical composition of my brain (along with the rest of my body) has been replaced with artificial cells. Under Reductionism, we acknowledge that identity admits of degrees and that there is nothing more to the relationship between me before the procedure and me after except a complete description of the extent and nature of the physical and mental connections (that is, there is no all-or-nothing unifying relation identifiable as present or absent). Accordingly, if only physical continuity of some kind is what matters, then my egoistic concern (before the procedure) for the person who emerges from the ordeal is entirely independent of the extent to which my psychological life is disrupted, and entirely proportional to the extent to which my brain cells have been replaced by functionally identical new cells (organic or silicon).

This seems absurd for many reasons. First, consider a teletransportation alternative wherein my torso is transported, intact, through space to Mars, where it is united with a transporter-synthesized, qualitatively identical pair of legs, which could not be transported intact for logistical reasons. Surely, any revulsion we have to this process is for sentimental or irrational reasons, not deep concerns about what matters LPI (as in total teletransportation). I could not possibly feel justified in having even marginally reduced concern for the well-being of the torso-legs pair that arrives on Mars than I would if I made the trip by spacecraft remaining fully intact. It is clear that, even when speaking about the possibility that only physical continuity is what matters, we privilege the brain. As Parfit asks, “Why should the brain be singled out in this way,” except that the brain is the bearer of Relation R (284)? More generally, any conception of what matters that is limited to physical relations must specify and justify *of what* in the world physical continuity matters and do so without appeal to psychological relations. But, what is intrinsically valuable about the

persistence of the brain? Is it not only instrumentally valuable to the end of underwriting the persistence of mind?

Consider a form of space travel that transports one's brain and body intact to Mars, but, during the journey, renders one a philosophical zombie. Though the physical constitution of the brain (and therefore its physical continuity) is unaffected and the externally observed behavior of the body is unchanged, there is no longer any conscious, qualitative experience produced or associated with the activity of the brain. I doubt many of us would be willing to volunteer to travel this way or to say that what matters is preserved in the person who steps off of the ship for the person who steps onto the ship. Less dualistically, one can imagine instead that we discover a consciousness module in the brain, and that this form of transportation irreparably damages it, causing a loss of conscious experience but minimal other impairments. In this instance, perfect physical continuity of the brain is not preserved, but the vast majority of it is. Yet, no matter how small or isolated this module were in the brain (though, if it were to exist it would be unlikely to be either), no one would say that its disruption constituted a proportionally insignificant disruption of what matters.

Further, if only physical continuity matters, having part of my brain replaced by synthetic cortex—which actually interrupts what matters under a purely physical account of what matters—would be *deeply* catastrophic, approximating death in its severity. This follows from (1), even though, by premise, the substituted artificial cortex is functionally identical to the original cortex and, therefore, could cause no change in my behavior. But, the complete eradication of one's memories, personality, beliefs, desires and other facets of psychological continuity, though exceptionally unfortunate, would not be similarly catastrophic. Finally, suppose the cells of a brain are replaced by functionally *and*

qualitatively identical cells, gradually and one-by-one. In order to avoid suggesting that what matters is gradually being lost in this case (which seems farfetched), a Reductionist who believes physical relations alone are what matters will need to suggest that physical continuity, and not merely physical connectedness, matters. I suggest later that one might reasonably believe that only relations of psychological connectedness—and not psychological continuity alone—matter. It is straightforward to reason analogously about physical relations, though I will not do so explicitly here. I merely note that one who believes that physical relations are what matters likely must maintain that physical continuity alone (without connectedness) can preserve a significant part of what matters, which may be an implausible or untenable position under scrutiny. By contrast, Relation R with any cause involves no appeals to numerical identity, only qualitative identity, so it is not subject to such objections. To gradually replace psychological features with functionally and qualitatively identical ones would not interrupt psychological connectedness.

Thus, physical continuity alone cannot be what matters. The remaining three alternatives that Parfit outlines all incorporate the claim that Relation R is what matters, but differ in their concern for the physical underpinnings that give rise to Relation R. Against (2), the claim that only Relation R with its normal cause (the persistence of a brain) preserves what matters, Parfit argues:

What we value, in ourselves and others, is not the continued existence of the same particular brains and bodies. What we value are the various relations between ourselves and others, whom and what we love, our ambitions, achievements, commitments, emotions, memories, and several other psychological features (284).

He believes that a qualitatively (but not numerically) identical body could fulfill any significant (i.e. non-sentimental) attachment anyone has to his or her own body (284, 286).

As a justificatory analogy, Parfit offers the example of artificial sight (208, 285). If blindness

caused by damage to one's eyes was cured with artificial eyes that simulate the behavior of organic eyes and cause the same phenomenological experience for a given environment and viewpoint, those so healed cannot be said to *see*, insofar as seeing consists of a certain biological process involving the eyes in addition to the brain. But, what these individuals do would be *just as good as* seeing. In the same way, Parfit would argue that anyone who primarily values Relation R ought to have no qualms about using a teletransporter, as the reasons that suggest Relation R is what matters also suggest that what matters about it is not critically couched in its biological causal history. Definitionally, one might not survive teletransportation; but the result of teletransportation would be just as good as survival. By similar reasoning, Parfit rejects (3). He asserts that what matters LPI, what we (rationally ought to) value, is an effect or circumstance, not its cause (287). In defense of this claim, he offers another analogy: "Suppose that there is an unreliable treatment for some disease. In most cases the treatment achieves nothing. But in a few cases, it provides a complete cure. In these cases, only the effect matters. This effect is just as good, even though its cause was unreliable. We should claim the same about Relation R" (287). What matters LPI, Parfit believes, is an outcome. No fact about the causal process that produces Relation R (including its reliability) can *itself* be said to be what matters.

Rejecting (2) and (3) thus, Parfit endorses (4) (287). So long as Relation R obtains in the world, any manner of cause will do. What matters LPI is simply Relation R (with any cause). When considering whether to travel to Mars by teletransporter, I ought to be evaluating the extent to which the person who arrives on Mars will be R-related to me. In *Exchange of Bodies*, given that the exchange process will cause me to be R-Related to the fortunate body and brain, I ought to anticipate financial windfall. Considering *My Division*, I

ought to anticipate and have egoistic concern for the lives of *both* resulting people, because I will be R-Related to both of them. Or so Parfit claims.

VII. Challenges to Relation R

Parfit claims that, given Reductionism and that personal identity is not what matters, what matters LPI must be Relation R with any cause. In evaluating this claim, I first wish to consider three objections that merely reject this view (rather than contest it by way of endorsing an alternative). The first is that of Mark Johnston, who claims that “there is a false apparatus of generalization at the heart of Parfit’s argument against identity-based concern” (Johnston, 1992, 612). Johnston argues that, even if we are persuaded that Relation R traces what matters in the case of fission (*My Division*), this does not imply that Relation R always traces what matters. Fission, he reasons, represents a significant departure from our normal reasoning about what matters. Accordingly, it is “reasonable to try to find a natural extension” of our normal beliefs about what matters in fission cases by looking for a “significant core of the relations that constitute identity” in normal cases (Johnston, 610). What we find is Relation R. Nevertheless, we should only consider Relation R to be what matters in these unusual cases, and continue to maintain that personal identity “is still almost always what matters” (Johnston, 613).

As a reply to this view, consider first the following case. Imagine that anti-magnetism and luster are characteristics of objects. Anti-magnetism is all-or-nothing. Luster is measured in degrees. Anti-magnetism and luster have always been found in conjunction in ‘ingots’. All objects that are anti-magnetic are always very lustrous and objects that are more than trivially lustrous are always anti-magnetic. Upon discovering a rare class of objects that are very lustrous but not anti-magnetic, it is observed that these “only-lustrous” objects seem to be just as useful (and thus, just as valuable) as ingots. The jewelry we craft from them is just as beautiful, the knives we fashion out of them are just as durable, and the medicines we refine

from them are just as effective in fighting disease. Only-lustrous objects simply do not trigger anti-magnetism detectors, though this offers no practical problem because we also have luster detectors. “Only-anti-magnetic” objects have never been observed and are believed to be incoherent in principle, as our current understanding of anti-magnetism suggests that luster is a necessary consequence of it.

Reapplied to this parallel case (in which anti-magnetism stands in for identity and luster for Relation R), Johnston’s response to Parfit would dictate that the appropriate reaction to the discovery of only-lustrous objects is to maintain that it is the conjunction of luster and anti-magnetism that is valuable and useful, and that the lustrous-only objects are an unusual case from which we should not generalize. We certainly should not, according to Johnston, consider whether it is in fact luster alone that is valuable and useful. If it later turns out to be possible, we should not sacrifice anti-magnetism in order to refine ingots that are maximally lustrous going forward. This is true, according to Johnston’s line of reasoning, even if we discover no applications of anti-magnetism except triggering anti-magnetism detectors. Though this example is an imperfect analogy, in that it leaves open the possibility of new empirical findings about luster and anti-magnetism, I think it demonstrates that Johnston’s claim is unconvincing. We have found a counterexample to the theory that anti-magnetism is what is inherently valuable about ingots. Moreover, in the absence of further discoveries, we have every reason to think that luster *is* what is inherently valuable, and to let this belief guide us in, for example, determining the best practices of ingot refining. Our lives—in which brains and consciousnesses never divide or combine, and generally undergo only gradual change—comprise an exceptionally specific class of persons. A real false generalization would be to infer what matters only on the basis of these cases.

Next, Bernard Williams also challenges the idea that Relation R is what matters by claiming that our intuitions about the importance of Relation R can be manipulated in ways that suggest that they might be irrational or misleading to begin with. This argument comes in “The Self and the Future,” and depends on what I briefly presented as *Exchange of Bodies*. Williams contends that “there are two presentations of the [exact same] imagined experiment and the choice associated with it, each of which carries conviction, and which lead to contrary conclusions” (Williams, 1973, 61). In the first presentation, two persons, A and B, will involuntarily have their bodies “exchanged”. After the exchange, the A-body will exhibit the mannerisms, knowledge, memory, and personality of B before the operations and vice versa. Further, one of the resulting bodies will be tortured and the other financially rewarded, and one of the subjects’ requests for which body will receive which treatment will be honored. Williams notes that, if A chooses the B-body to receive the money and his request is honored, the B-body will be observed to congratulate itself on having made the appropriate choice while the A-body will be displeased that B’s request was not honored (Williams, 47-49).

In the second presentation, one subject is informed of his fate in six steps (Williams, 55-66). A, already aware that he will soon be tortured, is told that all of his memories will be erased before the torture will take place. A is then told that his personality, disposition, core beliefs, desires, and intentions will be fundamentally altered during the pre-torture procedure. Next, A’s captors clarify that, rather than simply erasing A’s memories and psychological character, they will replace them with illusory memories and different characteristics. Further, A is told, those facets of mental life will actually correspond to those of another real person, B. Indeed, A is informed, those memories and characteristics will come to his brain

by direct copying from B. Finally, A learns that B will endure the reverse procedure, gaining all of A's memories and all the facets of his personality and mental life, and that B will receive a large sum of money.

Williams expects readers will find it natural for A to continue to dread upcoming torture, not eagerly anticipate financial windfall. This he believes is particularly natural given that there is no point in the six step progression at which it would be obvious for A to cease to anticipate the torture (Williams, 56-57). Yet, Williams contends, this is merely the same scenario as body exchange, described in different terms and from a single perspective. On these grounds, he indicts the use of thought experiments used to privilege physical relations or psychological relations.

There are two differences between the presentations of the experiments that I believe may help explain the disparity in the intuitions most people have about the two scenarios. First, Williams uses question-begging language in describing the latter experiment. In particular, he says: "My selfish concern [putting himself in A's position] is to be told what is going to happen to *me* and now I know: torture, preceded by changes of character, brain operations, changes in impressions of the past" (Williams, 55, emphasis added). This does not worry Williams, who believes there is no reason to avoid such language. The principle upon which he would be reasoning is that "my undergoing physical pain in the future is not excluded by any psychological state *I may be in* at the time [...] In particular, what impressions I have about the past will not have any effect on whether I undergo the pain or not," a principle that he considers "sound enough" and that is not introduced by the first-person language (Williams, 53, emphasis added). Note, however, that using such language implicitly precludes the possibility that changes in the psychological state that a brain is in

could cause the person associated with it to cease to exist. Assuming this or any other reason constitutes reason enough to wish to avoid this first-person language, this sentence might be restated (in a way that is also more Reductionist) as, “what is going to happen [is] torture, preceded by changes of character, brain operations, changes in impressions of the past.”

Further, personality, memories, and the other facets of one’s mental life are consequences of the structure and organization of the brain. Accordingly, a step essential to body exchange that is not explained to A in the alternative presentation of the experiment is that, even if the actual brain matter is preserved, the structure of his brain will necessarily be scrambled to facilitate the operation.

Consider the following refinement of Williams’s second presentation. A will be rendered unconscious. Then, the brain in his body—by virtue of the structure of which he had the memories, personality, dispositions, beliefs, desires, and intentions that he had—will be broken down into constituent parts and rearranged. The resultant brain and body will be awakened and tortured. Presented as such, it seems more difficult to explain why A would reasonably or otherwise, fear the torture the new brain would endure. Further, if a brain with all of his personality, memories, dispositions, beliefs, and desires were synthesized nearby, his connection to that brain could reasonably be thought to be significant.

The previous few paragraphs comprise my attempt to explain some of the causes of the inconsistencies in our intuitions that Williams highlights. But, these inconsistencies do not need to be explained away in order to defend Parfit’s position. Williams hopes to show by this case that we ought to be skeptical of what fantastic thought experiments lead us to believe about what matters, particularly insofar as they cause us to devalue bodily continuity. When considering whether or not I should use a teletransporter, the naïve question I ask

myself is, “Will it be *me* that steps out of the other end?” The view that personal identity is not what matters is not challenged by Williams’s objection, for there is no rewording or change of perspective that prevents *My Division* from demonstrating that we do not deeply value uniqueness. The question emerges as to what we actually value, if not personal identity. Though we draw on teletransportation to help specify the beliefs with which we are concerned, Parfit can advance his position on what matters *in spite of*, not by appeal to, our intuitions. Reason tells us that physical continuity alone cannot be what matters, since any attachment we have to physical continuity is only for the physical continuity of certain matter, the brain, and the reason that we value the brain is its role in psychological continuity. There is no role for partial importance of physical continuity, given that effects are what matters, not their causes. Williams’s challenge is that we may be misled into rejecting the importance of physical relations by relying on our intuitive responses to highly extraordinary hypothetical situations. However, the process I have explicated excludes the critical importance of bodily continuity without appeal to our intuitions about implausible scenarios. These intuitions are only invoked in establishing the particulars of what does matter, after bodily continuity is rejected. In some way, Williams’s argument may bolster Parfit’s argument, as I have formulated it. Given that our intuitions appear so fallible and trivially manipulated, there is further reason to suppress our ungrounded, but powerful, intuition that physical continuity matters, and to instead defer to rational argument for a psychologically-focused alternative, like Relation R.

Parfit’s response to Williams, rather than responding to the challenge that the two presentations evoke opposing intuitions, focuses on the challenge that nowhere in the six steps is it obvious that A should cease to fear torture (229-243). Parfit counters with a

Physical Spectrum that poses the same question of any physical criterion of personal identity. In combination, he observes, the Physical and Psychological Spectra offer strong support for Reductionism, which can dismiss the spectrum challenge by noting that personal identity is not determinate.

The third argument is that of Tim Chappell, offered in “Personal Identity, ‘R-Relatedness’ and the Empty Question Argument.” Chappell attributes to Parfit an argument of the following form, which he calls the Empty Question Argument (EQA):

1. If the holding or not holding of personal identity is a ‘deep fact’ about humans’ psychological phenomena, there will be no cases where questions about the rightness or wrongness of ascriptions of personal identity are unanswerable (or ‘empty’) questions.
2. But there are such cases (see the thought-experiments).
3. Therefore the holding or not holding of personal identity is not a ‘deep fact’ about humans’ psychological phenomena (Chappell, 1995, 89).

But, Chappell argues, we can substitute ‘R-relations’ for each instance of ‘personal identity’ in this deduction without compromising its soundness, suggesting that shifting our focus from personal identity to Relation R was misguided (Chappell, 89).

Chappell believes that Relation R is subject to its own form of the EQA based on the hypothetical case of Jane. Jane alternates between periods of normal life and complete cessation of brain activity. Let “*n* Jane” be the person who exists during Jane’s *n*th bout of normal life and “*n-1* Jane” be the person who existed during the previous bout of consciousness. Chappell believes that it is an empty question if *n* Jane is genuinely R-related to *n-1* Jane, or whether *n* Jane is merely qualitatively identical to how she *would* be if she were R-related to *n-1* Jane (without being R-related to her). He does not think that Parfit can provide a non-circular, non-stipulative way to say whether *n* Jane is actually R-related to *n-1* Jane. Accordingly, Chappell reasons in his EQA2:

1. If the holding or not holding of Relation R is a ‘deep fact’ about humans’ psychological phenomena, there will be no cases where questions about the rightness or wrongness of ascriptions of Relation R are empty questions.

2. But there are such cases [see the case of Jane].
3. Therefore the holding or not holding of Relation R is not a ‘deep fact’ about humans’ psychological phenomena [and cannot be what matters] (Chappell, 89).

Imagine another person, Jane*, who is qualitatively identical with *n* Jane. R-relatedness requires continuity and connectedness, which are “direct” psychological connections (205). A defender of Relation R might reply to Chappell that what matters is preserved in *n* Jane because of the details of the nature of the connection between them, a relation of more than mere similarity. The connections between *n* Jane and *n-1* Jane are appropriately direct. To determine whether Jane* contains what matters about *n-1*, we would again examine the details of the relation between both persons, and Jane* might or might not also bear Relation R to *n-1* Jane based the role *n-1* Jane’s mental life played in the emergence of Jane*’s mental life.

But, Chappell’s point can be made into a compelling challenge if its presentation is modified as follows. Since we certainly believe (one might say) that *n* Jane contains what matters about *n-1* Jane, we cannot require that Relation R be what matters. The mental states of *n-1* Jane simply cease, and they cannot be said to be *directly* connected to any future mental states. They do not cause *n* Jane’s mental states, and the only thing that makes them more connected to *n* Jane’s mental states than they are to any possible Jane* is that they are physically underwritten by the same brain. But, Parfit has argued that having a particular physical cause cannot be a part of what matters. Thus, unless Parfit is willing to deny that *n* Jane preserves what matters for *n-1* Jane, his notion of direct connection either must be so broad that it begins to resemble mere psychological similarity, or he must backtrack and claim that the details of the physical cause of Relation R do matter. Objections like this are formidable and I consider them shortly, in the Psychological Sequentialism section.

* * *

In addition to the difficulty posed by Chappell's response (which hints at the presence of inconsistency in Parfit's argument to which I turn next), there are other reasonable concerns one might have about Parfit's step to the position that what matters is Relation R with any cause. Parfit arrives at this view by rejecting three others. What reasons are there to believe, however, that Parfit's (1) through (4) are the only plausible accounts of what matters LPI? Reductionism dictates that a "person's existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events" (211). By turning Parfit's four candidates for what matters into categories, we can encompass all possible Reductionist theories: (1*) mental relations are irrelevant to what matters, (2*) what matters is some kind(s) of mental relation due to, or associated with, very particular physical relations, (3*) what matters is some kind(s) of mental relation associated with some broad set of physical relations, (4*) what matters is some kind(s) of mental relation, regardless of what gives rise to it. Parfit's arguments against (1) are equally strong grounds for rejecting any conception of what matters of the form (1*). But, this categorization highlights in particular the possibility that those mental relations that comprise what matters could be relations other than Relation R. Insofar as Parfit's dismissal of (2) and (3) is successful, it also holds against (2*) and (3*). But, there remain alternatives of type (4*) to Parfit's Relation R with any cause. The reasons offered thus far to believe that what matters consists of, and only of, mental relations do not dictate that Parfit has picked out the appropriate ones.

Parfit makes so few definitive claims about the nature of Relation R that only a few theories of type (4*) could be considered definitely contrary to his. One might maintain that the continuity and connectedness of a narrower set of psychological factors (than those that Parfit lists) are what matters. Locke observed that a person is "a thinking intelligent being,

that has reason and reflection, and considers itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking [and] as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person” (Locke, 335). Even if we are persuaded that personal identity is not what matters, given that *My Division* demonstrates the unimportance of uniqueness, ought we follow Locke in recognizing that the extent of a consciousness is dictated by memory, and argue that what is rational to care about is the extent of memory alone? Ultimately, I believe not. The compelling force of Locke’s argument was that, as personhood consisted in reflective consciousness, consciousness of consciousness was highly intuitive as a criterion of identity. But, in light of Parfit’s arguments that personal identity is not what matters, we are free to consider what is actually, fundamentally important in the way we intuitively believe survival (persistence of identity) to be, and the characteristics of our consciousness, even other than memory, seem natural to count among them.

Relation R consists of both psychological connectedness and psychological continuity. One could hold that continuity alone is what matters. Parfit counters this claim by observing that I would regard it as a catastrophic prospect if were I told that, in two days time, I will forfeit all of my memories except those that I make tomorrow (301). I would say that something that matters greatly has been lost in this process. In this case, however, psychological continuity would be unimpaired between my present self and the amnesiac who would reside in my body in two days. Only my connectedness to this person would be reduced to zero. Analogous reasoning can be made about desires, intentions, and character

traits. Thus, degree of connectedness, and not merely continuity, appears to be a part of what matters.

Alternatively, could connectedness alone be what matters? Might one believe that continuity without connectedness is of negligible value? Consider again the previous case, in which I will, in two days, forfeit all of my memories except those I make tomorrow. In order to ensure a true loss of connectedness, stipulate also that I will also lose all of my personality characteristics, as well as all beliefs, desires, intentions, ambitions, and sentiments that I currently have. Only those beliefs, desires, intentions, ambitions, and sentiments that I form tomorrow will persist. In two days, I will remember being the person that I will be tomorrow, but this will neither enable me to remember anything I can presently remember, nor endow me with any of the features of my present mental life listed above. Is what matters better preserved in this circumstance than when continuity and connectedness are both lost (as if I simply lost all of my memories and personality characteristics)? In both instances the mental life—including memories and beliefs—of the person in my body in two days will, by premise, be *wholly disconnected* from my present mental life. I could also preserve continuity without connectedness by having my mental life expunged in two steps, losing half my personality, memories, beliefs and the like in one instant, then losing the remaining half shortly thereafter. Ought I have a strong preference for these scenarios that preserve continuity over the loss of both connectedness and continuity?

Parfit believes so, and is even unwilling to say that connectedness matters more than continuity (300). Although he explains why he believes that connectedness, and not merely continuity, matters, Parfit does not explicate his support for the inverse position. But, it may stem from his belief that what matters LPI is personal identity without a uniqueness

requirement, and that this is Relation R. As Parfit observes, connectedness (plus uniqueness) cannot be the sole criterion of personal identity because it is not a transitive property (206). Even if Jones_{present} is strongly connected to Jones_{past} (he remembers most of his experiences, shares most of his beliefs, etc.) and Jones_{past} is strongly connected to Jones_{distant}, Jones_{present} is not necessarily strongly connected to Jones_{distant}. Jones_{present} may only remember a very small number of the experiences of Jones_{distant} and share very few of his beliefs or desires. Identity, however, must be a transitive relation. Since, for Parfit, what matters is personal identity stripped of its uniqueness component and this, he asserts, is Relation R, what matters cannot be connectedness alone. Yet, this depends on Parfit's claim that personal identity consists of the conjunction of Relation R and uniqueness (Parfit's formula $PI = R + U$). Previously, I have suggested that Parfit does not conclusively substantiate this claim, as he offers inadequate defense of it and does not conclusively exclude alternatives. Accordingly, based on the example of the previous paragraph, I suggest that there may be no reason to value psychological continuity itself (beyond the continuity inherent in connectedness).

VIII. Psychological Sequentialism

By far the most significant alternatives of type (4*) are Psychological Sequentialist views, which suggest that what matters is something significantly less restricted than Relation R. In “Survival and Trivial Facts,” Douglas Ehring offers one formulation of this view, which proceeds as follows. According to Parfit, a teletransportation-like process that destructively scans Jones’s brain and replicates it in a new body preserves what matters for Jones (Relation R) (Ehring, 1987, 52). In a slightly modified scenario, we might imagine that a technician accidentally drops a data storage device, destroying the information gathered from the scan. However, in falling to the ground, the device triggers a malfunction in a second teletransporter, which just happens to synthesize a brain exactly like Jones’s brain in a new body. According to Ehring, Parfit would maintain that this also preserves what matters for Jones (Ehring, 52-53). Suppose, in a third scenario, that the technician drops the storage device and it shatters on the ground without incident, but, unrelatedly, another teletransporter in the facility synthesizes a brain exactly like Jones’s in a new body (due to a malfunction in no way caused by the technician dropping the storage device). In this case, Ehring believes, Parfit must say that what matters is not preserved (Ehring, 52-53). To see why, consider memory, which constitutes one of the central components of psychological connectedness and continuity (and, therefore, Relation R). Someone can be said to remember Jones’s experiences, according to Parfit, if they have memories of those experiences that are “causally dependent, in the right kind of way” on the experiences (220). According to Parfit, “any cause” is good enough. Even though this requirement is broad, it still suggests that *some* causal component is required. If someone is to be said to be strongly R-related to Jones, the formation of that person’s memories cannot be completely causally independent of what

experiences Jones had. Yet, in Ehring's third scenario, this is the case. Thus, Relation R holds in the first two scenarios, but not in the third.

Ehring's contention is that Parfit's position is implausible on the criteria that Parfit himself sets for identifying what matters (Ehring, 50). Parfit rejects the assertion, which he attributes to Williams, that "since personal identity has great significance, whether identity holds cannot depend on a trivial fact" (267) because personal identity itself does not have great significance. However, he maintains an "analogue" of this belief: what matters cannot depend on a trivial fact; where there is a difference in the presence or absence of what matters, there must be a "deep difference in the facts" (271). Ehring challenges that the difference between his second and third scenarios is a change in trivial facts. Thus, given that Relation R is present in the second scenario and absent in the third, Relation R cannot be what matters (Ehring, 53-54).¹⁰

By similar means, Scott Campbell espouses a position he calls "psychological sequentialism" (Campbell, 2005, 375).^{11,12} It holds that if one believes (as Parfit does) that we must adopt a Reductionist and psychologically-focused criteria of personal identity, then it must be that what matters LPI in the relation between two persons, Jones₀ and Jones₁, is that they bear at least one of the following relations to each other: 1. Jones₀ and Jones₁ are

¹⁰ An objection one may have at this point is that Relation R does not hold between the two versions of Jones in Ehring's second scenario because there is a very significant sense in which Jones's psychological life does not cause the psychological characteristics of the generated person. The dropped data storage device would almost certainly have caused the same accidental generation of the new Jones whether or not the specific information stored on it was Jones's psychological profile or not. Thus, Relation R drops out between scenarios one and two, where it is much easier to suggest that there is a deep difference in the facts. However, examples can be more carefully crafted such that Relation R fails to hold in cases where there does seem to be a truly unimportant difference in the facts. The example of Replica and Random given by Campbell, which I will present shortly, is one such case.

¹¹ Note that Campbell does not endorse Psychological Sequentialism outright, as he does not endorse Reductionism or a psychological criterion of personal identity. He argues only that, if one believes in both, one ought to accept Psychological Sequentialism.

¹² Though Campbell does not, I capitalize the position name hereafter to match Parfit's treatment of Reductionism and Non-Reductionism.

directly psychologically connected; 2. Jones₀ and Jones₁ are psychologically continuous (there are overlapping chains of direct psychological connection between them); 3. Jones₀ and Jones₁ are “quasi-connected,” meaning they have psychological states identical to those that they *would* have *if* they were directly psychologically connected; 4. Jones₀ and Jones₁ are quasi-continuous¹³ (there are overlapping chains of quasi-connection between them) (Campbell, 381). Psychological Sequentialism dictates that what matters in a psychological relation is *independent of any cause*. For the Psychological Sequentialist, what I ought to care about when making egoistic future-directed decisions, like whether or not to use a teletransporter, is only the extent to which the process will generate a person with a psychology like what I would have had if I had survived normally. I ought not care at all whether (or in what way) this person’s psychological state is causally related to, or dependent on, my present one (except insofar as it ensures that the former relation holds). Hereafter, I refer to the Psychological Sequentialist conception of what matters as Relation Ψ .

The primary argument that Campbell takes to motivate this position is as follows (Campbell, 381-382). Imagine a teletransporter capable both of regular transportation and of generating random human bodies. After Jones’s body and brain is scanned and destroyed, a random body is generated at the output location, rather than a standard replica of Jones’s body, due to a glitch in the transporter. However, in an exceedingly unlikely turn of events, the body (which we might call Random) that is generated by the random body generating circuit of the teletransporter is qualitatively identical to what Jones’s body and the body that the teletransporter would have produced, had it performed its function normally (a body we might call Replica). Any Reductionist who believes that mental relations alone are what matters would believe that what matters for Jones is preserved in Replica. But, he thinks the

¹³ This term is mine, not Campbell’s, but fits naturally and aids in comprehension of the notion.

explicit commitments of many such Reductionists, including Parfit, might dictate that what matters is *not* preserved in Random, even as this example seems to demonstrate the implausibility of this notion within such a framework.

In a second example, Campbell offers an adapted form of Parfit's appeal to Reductionism about clubs (Campbell, 384-385). Imagine Jones forms a club, C_2 , because he is inspired by a description of a previous club, C , that he read about on a classroom computer. Meanwhile, imagine that Jones's counterpart in an alternative universe, $Jones_a$ similarly forms a club, C_a based on an identical account of C , except that this account was not actually a report written about C , but was created randomly by an improbable sequence of computer glitches (though C did exist in the past). As C_a and C_2 are identical clubs in their constitution, Campbell thinks it eminently reasonable that we should take C_a to contain what matters about C as fully as C_2 .

Ehring's and Campbell's challenges to Parfit are unified by the following observation. Relation R consists of psychological connectedness and continuity, which are fundamentally causal relations. For psychological state X to be connected (in the sense Parfit has in mind) to later state Y , X has to be causally involved in the formation of Y . To allow Relation R to have "any cause" is to allow anything (even an extremely unreliable teletransporter) to be the cause of a causal relation between two person's minds. It is not, however, to allow that the relations between the two minds need not be a causal one. To require Relation R between two persons is, by the definition of Relation R , to require that there be a causal relation between them. Yet, Ehring and Campbell observe, it seems Parfit ought to believe what matters LPI for him is preserved in a number of cases in which there is no causal relation between him and the resulting person.

If Parfit cannot answer Ehring's and Campbell's challenges without abandoning one of his central claims, the only remaining option is, as Ehring puts it, "to abandon the requirement that for survival psychological connectedness and/or continuity must involve some causal dependence" (Ehring, 54). He must discard Relation R and instead recognize that Relation Ψ is what matters. To do so, when considering what matters LPI, is to abandon *directly* connected psychological states (or some variant thereof, like continuity, that entails causal relation) in favor of non-causal connectedness, which amounts to little more than similitude. Ehring finds this to be a completely untenable position, as evidenced by the following case. Imagine that a car accident resulted in the death of my body (Ehring, 54). But, just as it dies, another person has a psychotic breakdown and comes to have exactly my personality and memories. Psychological Sequentialism would dictate that I had not died at all (or, at least, that what matters about me had been preserved), which Ehring believes it is "clear" is erroneous.

To answer his challenge and avoid being compelled to adopt Psychological Sequentialism, Ehring believes that Parfit must assert that the difference between his second and third scenarios is not trivial (Ehring, 53). But, Parfit cannot simply assume that differences in facts are non-trivial if they affect Relation R in order to say there is a non-trivial difference between the scenarios, as this is immediately question begging. Thus, he must explain why it makes a profound difference for what matters whether the Jones-brain replica's synthesis was caused accidentally by the scanning process or caused accidentally by any process. Similarly, to meet Campbell's challenge, Parfit must offer some explanation for why what matters is preserved in Replica and is lacking from Random. Moreover, if such an explanation did not offer a solution, a further explanation would be needed to justify why our

Reductionism about clubs, which leads us so strongly to say that C_a preserves what matters about C just as adequately as C_2 , does not apply to persons. I think there is reason to believe that Parfit's commitments preclude him from answering any of these objections.

Recall that, in arguing that what matters is Relation R with any cause (not just its normal cause), Parfit offers the example of artificial sight (208, 285). If I become blind and am given artificial eyes that simulate the behavior of organic eyes and provide to me all the same phenomenological experiences I would have if I had normal eyes, I still cannot be said to *see*, insofar as seeing consists of a certain biological process involving the eyes in addition to the brain. But, what I would be doing would be *just as good as* seeing. Thus, what matters is preserved, and this shows that it is not necessary for what matters that normal causal forces are at work. Yet, imagine the scenario in which my artificial eyes have no capacity to process light in the world. Instead, unbeknownst to me, they randomly transmit signals to my optic nerve, and these signals have, so far, corresponded exactly to what normal eyes (or normal artificial eyes) would have produced. This, too, has been just as good as seeing. Insofar as one believes the normal artificial eyes preserve what matters, these eyes have, so far, preserved what matters about sight. If I knew what was happening, these eyes might not preserve what matters, because having confidence that one's sight is reliable matters. But, so long as I am oblivious, until the random eyes cease to be (by chance) perfect functional substitutes for eyes, what I am doing is still just as good as seeing, suggesting that it contains what matters for sight.

Parfit would endorse this argument. In defending his belief that Relation R could have any cause, and need not have a reliable cause, he says, "Suppose that there is an unreliable treatment for some disease. In most cases the treatment achieves nothing. But in a few cases

it provides a complete cure. In these cases, *only the effect matters*. This effect is just as good, even though its cause was unreliable. We should claim the same about Relation R” (287, emphasis added). By this, Parfit means only that anything that brings about the effect Relation R preserves what matters. But, I take the previous example to show that, in the absence of a precise argument to the contrary that I cannot make, one ought to further believe that anything that brings about the effects of Relation R preserves what matters. Relation Ψ to a new person, with any cause, is also just as good as personal identity.

Campbell highlights another strong reason to believe that Parfit ought to endorse Psychological Sequentialism (Campbell, 387). Parfit defends the claim that after a botched, preservative teletransportation—wherein Jones₀ branches into a fatally-injured Jones₁ (the person who remains alive in the teletransporter scanner) and Jones₂ (on Mars)—what matters for Jones₁ is generally preserved after his death, even if there is a short, but significant, interval between the branching and his death. Yet, this is inconsistent with the notion that what matters is some variant of psychological connectedness alone, as Jones₁ is not psychologically connected to Jones₂ in the typical way. Jones₁’s psychological state at his death will play no causal role in the psychological states of Jones₂. If what matters for Jones₁ is preserved in Jones₂, Relation R (which requires a causal connection) cannot be what matters.

* * *

Anthony Brueckner and Christopher Buford believe they can undermine the argument that a consistent Reductionist must actually endorse Psychological Sequentialism and not the view that Relation R is what matters. To do so, they first divide the notion of triviality into normative and descriptive triviality (Brueckner & Buford, 2013, 3-4). Normative trivialities

are things that are trivial to judgments about the presence or persistence of what matters. If teletransporters caused temporary colorblindness, this would be normatively trivial.

Descriptive trivialities are facts whose truth bear only extremely negligibly on actual, eventual qualitative outcomes. If I press the 'Q' button on my keyboard to revive it from a sleep state, but a glitch in my keyboard causes a 'W' signal to be sent, which still reactivates the computer, this is a descriptive triviality, because the ultimate result is exactly the same.

It seems question begging, Brueckner and Buford claim, to assess the normative triviality of facts in order to determine whether a relation that depends on them could be what matters (Brueckner & Buford, 4). One may claim that the cases of Replica and Random are normatively trivial (the differences are irrelevant to judgments about what matters). But, one cannot expect this mere assertion to be a persuasive argument that Relation R is not what matters if Relation R judges the difference between the scenarios normatively *nontrivial*. They believe that a more persuasive way to form the Psychological Sequentialist argument is:

1. What matters can never depend on normatively trivial facts.
2. Relation R sometimes depends on descriptively trivial facts.
3. Descriptively trivial facts are, necessarily, normatively trivial facts.
4. Therefore, Relation R cannot be what matters.

But, they claim, (3) is false, so the argument fails (Brueckner & Buford, 4).

Brueckner and Buford undermine premise (3) by counterexample, noting that what matters in determining the appropriate response to various events *can* depend significantly on the causes of the events and not just on their outcomes (Brueckner & Buford, 5). They offer the case of a vending machine that, due to two unrelated programming errors, regularly fails to dispense purchased sodas and also frequently dispenses free sodas. Consider a man who pays for a soda, fails to receive it, and then sees the same type of soda come out of the

machine as he is walking away dejectedly. If he does not know about the oddities of this machine, he may think that that soda is *his*, and feel wronged if a woman walks by and collects the soda. If he knows the machine's tendencies, however, he will understand that the soda she picked up is not *his* in the way that it would have been if the vending machine were instead a machine that was merely slow in dispensing purchases. Thus, details about cause, and not merely outcome, can matter. Therefore, descriptive triviality does not, in all cases, entail normative triviality.

Parfit seems to mean normative triviality when he refers to triviality. For example, he thinks that it cannot be what matters that a future person have more than half of my brain, because the difference between less than half and more than half of a brain is only a handful of cells, and there is no plausible reason that these few cells can make "an important difference" to what matters; "the difference between these cases must be trivial" (269-271). He certainly is not concerned with establishing a precise conception of triviality, and based on his example of an unreliable treatment, one must assume that he would defend something like (3). Although Brueckner and Buford have successfully demonstrated that descriptively trivial facts are not necessarily normatively trivial facts in all cases, Parfit would likely counter that descriptively trivial facts *are* necessarily normatively trivial facts as concerns what matters LPI. In the case of what matters in this way, he takes it as obvious that we are concerned with effects (286). Though we may have concerns of other types about the process by which what matters about ourselves is preserved (like whether another person is harmed), Parfit believes our egoistic concern is for outcomes.

Proceeding from this, Ehring's contention is that, just as there is no important difference between half of a brain and slightly less than half of a brain, there is nothing

important about the step from a haphazard, accidental causal chain between Jones's old and new brains in his second scenario and the absence of a causal chain in his third scenario. If one believes psychological states *causing* other psychological states is important for what matters, it would seem that the differences between scenario one and scenario two are much greater than the differences between scenarios two and three. Yet, Parfit seems to see no difference between the two. Accordingly, he ought not define what matters in terms of Relation R, which entails causal psychological relations. Brueckner and Buford do not succeed in defending Parfit against Psychological Sequentialist challenges because Parfit himself dismisses the crux of their reasoning outright with his insistence that outcomes are what is important for what matters in the case of what matters LPI.

* * *

Parfit's commitments require him to go beyond the belief that Relation R is what matters and to instead endorse Psychological Sequentialism. Rather than adopting Psychological Sequentialism, however, ought Parfit instead abandon his commitment that what matters LPI can only be outcomes? (This would require him, for example, to suggest that what matters is lost for the person left dying on Earth in the *Branch-Line Case*.) Parfit merely presents the case of the unreliable medical treatment and declares that effect is also all that matters LPI. One might doubt this claim. When I consider treatment for a fatal illness, the question I am evaluating is: 'Will I be cured?' What matters for this question depends only on effects. What I care about is whether I will walk out of the treatment room disease-free. In the case of the soda machine offered by Brueckner and Buford, the question is: 'Is that soda *mine*?' What I care about is more than whether the soda that emerges from the machine is of the correct type. Details about process are essential for determining whether I

bear the appropriate relationship to the soda that emerges out of the machine. In the case of the teletransporter, it is not immediately clear to which of these cases my concern is analogous. The naïve question (‘Will it be *me* who steps out of the teletransporter?’) appears to clearly resemble the latter case. But, the reformulated question (‘Will teletransportation preserve what matters?’), which is mindful of the fact that personal identity cannot be what matters, does not immediately parallel either.

I believe the correct move, for Parfit and for us, is to maintain that only outcomes can comprise what matters LPI, and, therefore, to accept Psychological Sequentialism. When debating whether or not I should step into the teletransporter, my concern for the persistence of my identity (which has been shown to be irrational) ought to be supplanted by concern only for the characteristics of the person who will soon be alive on Mars, and not the details of how he came to be alive there. When I believed that personal identity was what mattered, what I cared about was that there be a future person who would be *me*. I desired that it be true of the person who stepped out of the Mars teletransporter that he would be Dillon Plunkett, just as I was when I stepped into the teletransporter on Earth. My concerns about the mechanisms of the teletransporter (the process which would cause the person on Mars) were a means to assessing the possibility that this would be true. Even if there were a very precise causal relation that needed to obtain in order for this to be true of the person on Mars, it would not have been the causal process *in itself* that was what mattered to me. What mattered to me was that it would be true that Dillon Plunkett would be on Mars. As Parfit observes, for any Reductionist, a “person's existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events” (211). To accept Reductionism is precisely to accept that we are the conjunction of mental and physical

parts, and nothing more, and that our lives are the temporally extended conjunction of many such states, and nothing more. Moving from Non-Reductionism to Reductionism ought to prevent us looking for a separately existing entity, or expecting our identity to always be determinate. But, nothing about this move gives reason to shift our concern from the characteristics of the persons under consideration to the causal origins of those characteristics *for their own sake*.

Imagine Campbell's teletransporter (capable of producing normal output or random output) generates the characteristics of the next random body it will make when called upon, ahead of time, and displays that information on a screen. After a preservative scan on my body (in which it is not yet broken down), the technician informs me that he has just learned that the teletransporter on Mars is broken and is producing only random patterns at the moment. But, he has also just noticed that the next random pattern in its queue happens to be identical to the pattern obtained by scanning me. This is fortunate, he continues, because it is too late to stop the process. If I am a Reductionist resolutely comfortable with normal teletransportation, could I have any good reason to panic? I have abandoned my hope that a separately existing entity will arrive on Mars. For this hope, I substitute a concern that the parts and characteristics of myself that I care about will arrive on Mars. In this case, they will, even though they will not cause it to be true that they will.

The case just described is constructed to dissociate our potential concern for causal relations in what matters LPI from our epistemological concerns about causal relations that stem from the fact that knowledge about cause allows us to better ensure outcomes. When making a egoistic future-directed decision under any circumstances other than extremely contrived ones such as these, it could not be that I could reasonably anticipate that a future

person would be significantly psychologically sequential with me except based on the knowledge that there would be a causal relation between him and me. Any circumstance in which another person will come into being psychologically sequential with me, but not causally related to me, will already be an unlikely and bizarre one. Nevertheless, those cases in which there will be such a person *and* in which I can confidently foreknow that there will be such a person are more incredible still. Almost all intuitive convictions that a causal relation is part of what matters are likely the result of failing to fully embrace Reductionism and retaining some attachment to a separately existing entity. But, I suggest that any other such convictions are artifacts of the normal realities of making prospective judgments about what matters. Believing with any confidence that there will be a person psychologically sequential with me requires, in all but the most artificial cases, knowing that there is a means by which my psychological life will possibly cause a future person similar to me. But, when we consider one of these manufactured cases, we can realize that it is not causal connection itself that matters.

Consider another of Parfit's thought experiments, which represents a variation of the *Branch-Line Case*. Imagine a sleeping pill that causes Parfit to fall asleep in an hour and, upon waking up the next morning, to have no memory of the last half hour before he fell asleep (as some sleeping pills approximately do) (287-288).¹⁴ Once in the last 30 minutes before sleep after having taken such a pill (and assuming he is prevented from leaving any notes), Parfit is causally independent of the person who will wake up in his bed the next morning. It is the intentions, beliefs, memories, and desires that he had a few minutes

¹⁴ Though it is slightly more abstract to consider, it may make this example more precise to imagine, instead, a pill which causes not only the loss of memory, but also reverts all changes to one's mental life. So, for example, if a traumatizing event occurred during the last 30 minutes before sleep, assume that it would not only be explicitly forgotten, but also that any impact it had on one's dispositions would be extinguished.

previously that will cause their counterparts in the person who wakes up in the morning. If cause were an essential part of what matters, in the last minutes before sleep, Parfit ought to behave as if he were in the last minutes before death. But, he, or anyone else, would likely experience (at most) only mild distress at the fact that any particular thoughts he has right now will not affect the person who wakes up the next morning. For Parfit, or any other Reductionist, there appears to be no reason to believe that causal relations *themselves* are (or are part of) what matters LPI. Once we accept Reductionism and recognize that personal identity is not what matters, we ought to assert that Relation Ψ , and not Relation R, is what matters LPI.¹⁵ Under Campbell's Psychological Sequentialist conception of what matters, which I labeled Relation Ψ , what matters for me LPI is that a future person have the *characteristics* he would have, if he were R-related to me (and *actual* connection or continuity is not a part of what matters). But, Relation R consists of both continuity and connectedness, and I argued previously that we do not have good reason to value continuity (except insofar as it always accompanies connectedness). Accordingly, in claiming that Relation Ψ is what matters LPI, we also ought to redefine Relation Ψ more narrowly. What

¹⁵ A lingering concern one might have at this point is about the role of cause in agential self-determination, which we might value. By accepting Reductionism, I acknowledge that there is no further fact of identity between me and the person who will wake up in my bed tomorrow. A possible reaction to this might be to attempt to maximize what matters LPI in that person, namely Relation Ψ , at all costs. Assuming I do not take this position, I may believe that there are reasons either to sacrifice or to avoid maximizing Relation Ψ . If I have an undesirable tendency, like being irrational when I am hungry, I might elect to undergo a procedure that would eliminate this tendency, even though the person who emerges from the procedure will be slightly less Ψ -Related to me than he would have been otherwise. Christine Korsgaard, in presenting a Kantian conception of personal identity, notes that I might be much less troubled by such a procedure if I elected to have it, rather than if it happened to me involuntarily (Korsgaard, 1989, 123). In the elective case, I caused these changes to my psychological profile, whereas, in the other cases, I did not. Korsgaard suggests that it matters whether psychological changes are caused by my will. I would counter, however, that though this may matter to us, (and it certainly does matter for her conception of personal identity) it does not matter LPI. Consider the case in which I am sitting at home, having just made an error because I was hungry. Just as I conclude that I should have a procedure to remove this tendency, my ceiling collapses, causing brain damage that has just the same effect that the procedure would have had. My will to undergo this change, though I possessed it, played no causal role whatsoever in bringing about the results. Nevertheless, I take it that, in this case, after waking up, I would consider no more of what matters LPI to have been lost than if I had opted for surgery with the same results. Korsgaard's Kantian conception of personal identity would distinguish these cases. But I, considering the change in what matters for me LPI, ought not see a difference in them.

matters for me LPI—the relation I egoistically hope to bear to a future person if I know their life will go well, and the relation I egoistically hope to avoid bearing to a future person if I know their life will go very poorly—is Relation Ψ , the relation I bear to a person who is identical to how he would be if he were psychologically connected (not R-related) to me.

* * *

I have argued that the Psychological Sequentialist argument demonstrates persuasively that, if we follow Parfit in accepting Reductionism and acknowledging that personal identity is not what matters, we ought to recognize that what matters LPI is little more than great psychological similarity. As part of a different discussion, Donald Davidson describes The Swampman, who is created when lightning simultaneously and coincidentally destroys Davidson's body and synthesizes a copy of it out of the atoms of a nearby tree (Davidson, 1987, 443). A Psychological Sequentialist reformulation of Parfit's arguments seem to show that The Swampman preserves everything that matters for Davidson, and he should be no more averse to this manner of surviving than any other period of brief unconsciousness. The badness of the death of the body that has lived his life thus far is entirely mitigated by the generation of The Swampman. Similarly, as Ehring observes, Psychological Sequentialism dictates that it is roughly no worse for your body to be fatally injured than for it to *not* be fatally injured, so long as someone nearby happens to undergo a dramatic restructuring of their brain that causes memories, beliefs, characteristics, and desires just like your own (Ehring, 54).

In reaction to this fact, one might (as Ehring seems to) take these apparently remarkable consequences of Psychological Sequentialism to ground a *modus tollens* refutation of one of Parfit's premises. If Parfit's premises are true, then nothing that matters

is lost in traditional death, so long as certain precise changes occur in the brain of another person (regardless of the cause of those changes). But, Ehring (and likely many others) consider it to be “clear” that this case does not preserve what matters LPI in the same way that not dying (in any sense) preserves what matters. Therefore, one of Parfit’s premises must be false. Modifying (P3) and the conclusion to account for the strength of the Psychological Sequentialist case, the argument is:

(P1) We have strong reason to prefer Reductionism to Non-Reductionism concerning personal identity.

(P2) Reductionism about personal identity entails that personal identity is not what matters.

(P3) If personal identity is not what matters, Psychological Sequentialism is the best candidate for what matters.

(C) Therefore, Psychological Sequentialism is what matters.

(P2) is the premise underscored by the case of *My Division*, which I take to show nigh-incontrovertibly that personal identity cannot be what matters, given Reductionism about personal identity. (P3) is the premise upon which Ehring himself expands, and which I have attempted at length to show is an inescapable consequence of Reductionism. Thus, if the implications of Psychological Sequentialism are to be taken as a *modus tollens* against one of Parfit’s premises, they must be taken as disproof of the first, that we ought to be Reductionists about personal identity.

It is simply obvious, this line of reasoning proceeds, that it is not just as good for me to ‘survive’ via the spontaneous psychological overhaul of a passerby at the instant my body is destroyed as it is for me to survive normally, via not avoiding the destruction of my body. Thus, Parfit’s entire line of reasoning amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* dismissal of Reductionism and proof of Non-Reductionism, because we must cast aside the only dubitable

premise in the argument that leads to the preposterous implications.¹⁶ To dismiss Reductionism in this way is to claim that the Psychological Sequentialist implications of Reductionism are more immediately and obviously untenable than the implications of Non-Reductionism. Recall, however, a highly implausible consequence of Non-Reductionism: that identity must be determinate. If Non-Reductionism obtains and there is a further fact about identity (perhaps a separately existing entity), then it must be that in cases of temporarily induced division of the cerebral hemispheres, *I* persist in (at most) one of them. If one of the hemispheres' consciousnesses is *me*, the other is not. The other is someone new who will, presumably, cease to exist when the hemispheres are reunited. (Alternatively, it may suddenly be that neither of the consciousness are *me*, though this is no more palatable.) Moreover, if Non-Reductionism about personal identity is true, then it must be that one step along the *Combined Spectrum* is the step at which Parfit ceases to exist. Regardless of whether or not we could ever know where this point is, it must be true that, for some *n*, the *n*th switch flipped will cause the death of Parfit, whereas flipping *n*-1 switches would not have killed Parfit.

To treat Parfit's arguments as a *reductio* argument against Reductionism requires believing that the case of The Swampman is more implausible than the possibility that there is a single switch in the *Combined Spectrum* that is the one that causes Parfit's death. But, Psychological Sequentialism is merely an unintuitive claim about what ought to matter to us, whereas Non-Reductionism is a substantive claim about the composition of the world for which there could be evidence,¹⁷ but there is none. Endorsing this *reductio* argument requires

¹⁶ One could respond similarly to Parfit's original case, even without adopting the Psychological Sequentialist reasoning, if the (still fairly extreme) implications Relation R being what matters are believed to be obviously false.

¹⁷ Parfit discusses what form this evidence might take in some detail beginning on 227.

believing that the existence of a critical n^{th} switch is so much more plausible than the notion that The Swampman preserves what matters for Davidson that the apparent dearth of evidence for a further fact of identity is outweighed. Such a belief, I contend, is unreasonable.

IX. Conclusions

Parfit's argument in Part III of *Reasons and Persons* is largely sound. As I have suggested, it could be strengthened by omitting any claims about the nature of personal identity except the claim that we ought to be Reductionists about it, and, therefore, that it cannot be what matters. This would avoid a large class of possible objections without undermining the force of the argument. Further, as I discussed briefly, Parfit must offer significantly more justification for the claim that continuity is as important a component of what matters as connectedness, given that there is considerable reason to doubt this claim. Even the greatest fault in the argument is merely that Parfit ultimately endorses Relation R rather than Psychological Sequentialism, despite suggesting through several examples that the latter is what matters LPI. Parfit observes that the broad implications of his argument are substantial. In the Afterword, I suggest that none of what he takes to be the broader consequences (for ethics, in particular) of his discussion of what matters LPI are undermined by these concerns.

Given the force of Parfit's argument, once adjusted in light of these three concerns, we are in a position to answer the Interesting Future-Regarding Questions with which I began. We ought to be Reductionists about persons and about personal identity. Personal identity, therefore, cannot matter in the way in which we naïvely believe it matters. The best discernable measure of what matters in this way is Relation Ψ , the relation between you and a future person who is psychologically constituted just as he or she would be if he or she were psychologically connected to you (which can be roughly approximated by psychological similarity). Thus, destructive teletransportation produces on Mars a person that contains everything that matters about you. Preservative teletransportation preserves what

matters equally in *both* the person on Mars and the person who remains on Earth. (We may choose to say that both or neither are *you*, but both accounts would describe the same state of the world in which there are two sets of experiences related in a certain way to one past set of experiences.) We ought to believe the same about *Whole Brain Emulation*, unless some reason emerges to believe that it would not produce a mind Ψ -Related to you. Before an exchange of bodies, you ought to be unconcerned (except altruistically) about the torture your old body will endure, and ought only anticipate financial windfall just as you would if told that you would be given \$100,000 upon waking up tomorrow morning. *Lucky Teletransportation* presents a case where our evaluation is affected by recognizing that Relation Ψ , and not Relation R, is what matters. The person on Mars contains what matters for you just as much in this case as in normal teletransportation. Finally, in *Fission*, like preservative teletransportation, you ought to believe that both bodies preserve what is important, at least to the extent that each separated hemisphere will preserve Relation Ψ .¹⁸ We find many of these conclusions unintuitive because we are implicitly Non-Reductionist. But, if we adopt Reductionism and reject the idea that there is a further fact of identity, we can accept them.¹⁹

“When I believed that my existence was a such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others. When I believed the Non-Reductionist View, I also cared more about my inevitable death. After my death, there will no one living who will be me. I can

¹⁸ In a non-idealized case (as opposed to the identically capable hemispheres of *My Division*), it might be an empirical finding that one hemisphere will preserve significantly less than the other.

¹⁹ For their helpful comments on this paper and enormous support, I am very grateful to Cheryl Chen, Dan and Ellen Plunkett, and Rachel Ithen.

now redescribe this fact. [...] Instead of saying, 'I shall be dead', I should say, 'There will be no future experiences that will be related, in certain ways, to these present experiences'" (281).

Afterword – Parfit’s Additional Conclusions

I have challenged Parfit’s discussion of, and conclusions about, personal identity and what matters LPI at three points. I have suggested that his case that personal identity consists of Relation R plus uniqueness may be insufficient. I have argued that, even if we believe that connectedness is a part of what matters LPI, we may lack good reason to believe the same about continuity. Finally, I have argued that what matters LPI is not Relation R, but what I have called Relation Ψ , the relation between you and a future person who is psychologically constituted just as he or she would be if he or she were psychologically connected to you. In this Afterword, I briefly examine the implications of these three challenges for some of the more general conclusions that Parfit takes his discussion of what matters LPI to underwrite. As I will explain, Parfit’s more general conclusions prove to be unaffected. Though they all depend on the truth of Reductionism and the claim that personal identity is not what matters, none depend critically on a particular conception of personal identity or on the claim that continuity is a part of what matters. Only one of Parfit’s more general conclusions is taken to be a consequence of the belief that Relation R is what matters LPI, and it is equally a consequence of the belief that Relation Ψ is what matters.

The first of these conclusions is that what Parfit calls “the Self-interest Theory” is false (312-314). The Self-interest Theory makes a person’s ultimate goal be that all things go as well for him as possible, and that all outcomes under his control be whatever would be best for him (3). Parfit takes the Self-interest Theory to entail the Requirement of Equal Concern, “A rational person should be equally concerned about all the parts of his future” (313). But, if Relation R is what matters LPI, what we care about in our own futures is a relation that admits of degrees and that consists, at least in part, of psychological

connectedness. In the course of a normal human life, however, there is more psychological connectedness between most points a few hours apart than most points several years apart. Accordingly, it can be rational to have less concern for points in one's own life that are in the much more distant future.

This claim refers only to what matters LPI, and not to an actual criterion of personal identity. Further, it depends fundamentally on the claim that connectedness is part of what matters, but not on the claim that continuity also matters. Finally, though psychological connectedness is not necessary for Relation Ψ (only sufficient), it is still the case that Relation Ψ is generally much weaker between more distant points in human lives. Thus, insofar as Parfit's case against Self-interest Theory is successful on his original terms, none of the three substantive concerns I raise about the primary argument of Part III do anything to undermine it.

Next, as examples of the significant implications of revising our conception of personal identity and of what matters, Parfit discusses the morality of abortion and of euthanasia (321-323). Non-Reductionism dictates that the identity of a person and the fact of their existence must always be determinate. Under Non-Reductionism, at any given instant it either must be true that I exist or that I do not exist. Reductionism denies this. If we are Non-Reductionists, we must believe that there is some point in the development of a human being between adulthood and the fertilization of an ovum that a person begins to exist and, therefore, some point at which (if it would be wrong to kill a person in these circumstances) it is wrong to kill that human being (322). Similarly, for a Non-Reductionist, there is some point between full health and decomposition during the failing of a human body in which a person ceases to inhabit the body. Reductionism, however, asserts that there is only the

progressive loss of a person, which has no precise ending (323). Accordingly, although these issues still require a theory of when it is permissible to kill a person to adjudicate, accepting Reductionism will necessarily change the debates, which may not appropriately acknowledge the extent to which personhood admits of degrees. None of the concerns I have raised about Parfit's case that Relation R is what matters LPI affect this claim, as Parfit makes no use of a particular conception of personal identity, and employs only the fact that what matters about persons and their identities must be a Reductionism-compatible relation, which Relation Ψ is.

Later, Parfit claims that, given that we ought to be Reductionists about personal identity, it is at least defensible to claim that no one *deserves* to be punished (though this would not affect the other two grounds for punishment: preventing further crimes by the same offender and deterrence) (325). Though he does not endorse this position, Parfit does claim that, at minimum, desert ought to be somehow proportional to the strength of psychological connectedness. As the Non-Reductionist view fails, there can be no deep, further fact that a 90-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner is identical with a debaucherous teenager who committed a crime decades ago (326). There can only be strong psychological continuity and (minimal) connectedness between these two persons. Thus, Parfit observes that any reasonable conception of desert must punish a present person approximately as it would punish an accomplice: proportional to his connection to the crime. The 90-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner seems to clearly deserve less punishment than the man who committed the crime last week.²⁰ Again, this point depends primarily on Reductionism, and it is not undermined, even if one is persuaded by all three of my criticisms of Parfit's primary argument.

²⁰ Note again that Parfit is referring here only to desert of punishment (if one acknowledges the concept at all), and not what punishment is appropriate for the purposes of deterrence and (much less relevantly in this case) preventing recidivism.

Finally, Parfit argues that accepting Reductionism ought to affect how we regard the tension between utilitarian principles and a commitment to distributive justice (329-347). He suggests that Reductionism about personal identity ought to increase the scope of our principles of distributive justice, so that they apply *within* individual lives and not just between them (333-334).²¹ But, he also argues that Reductionism gives us good reason to give less weight to distributive principles because they depend significantly for their force on a deep difference between different persons (334-342). Parfit contends that, after denying the existence of separately existing entities and further facts about identity, we have less reason to diminish the positivity of experiences solely to alter the distribution of positivity between persons.

Once again, however, the force of this claim is unaffected even in the absence of a claim about what personal identity consists in (beyond that we ought to be Reductionists about it). Nor is it called into question if continuity is not part of what matters, or what matters LPI is actually a form of Relation Ψ , not Relation R. Though it is also important to see that personal identity is not what matters, and that what matters is Relation Ψ , the truth of Reductionism is the most morally impactful of Parfit's claims, particularly as, at present, personal identity is so closely correlated with what matters LPI. I have not challenged this claim, only defended it.

²¹ By this, Parfit means that it is, for example, more difficult to justify forcing me to suffer for the well-being of my future self because Reductionism leads us to see that my connection to him is much less strong than Non-Reductionism suggests. Thus, forcing me to suffer for him is significantly like making me suffer for the well-being of any other future person. (In the opposite direction, Parfit observes, one could also make an agent-relative argument that I have an increased obligation to my future self because I am in a unique position to protect his interests where he cannot [319].)

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