



On "The Importance of Self-Identity"

Derek Parfit

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According to this concept of a person, there is no room for any problem about a so-called "self." All the persons there are, including this one, are objects.

Now Strawson says that the concept of a person is primitive and the concept of a mind or consciousness, derivative. By this, I take it, he means that it is derived from the concept of a person. We have the concept of a person, but we also have the concept of a mind, so he believes that the latter must be derived from the former. This would indeed be so, if to say that a person had a mind were simply to say that P-predicates were ascribable to him. But the concept of a mind as an immaterial entity, as it is in dualist theories, cannot be derived from the concept of a person: it is simply incompatible with it; for the concept of a person, like the concept of a dog, is such that the body is an entity but the mind is not. To suppose the mind were an entity would on this account be like supposing that a statue consisted of a shape in addition to the bit of stuff of which it is made, that the shape was another entity which might survive its melting down, that it was not merely distinguishable but separable from the bit of stuff. The dualist concept of a mind not only is not, but cannot be, derived from *this* concept of a person. The dualist concept of a person is that of two entities, a mind and a body.

FRASER COWLEY

New York University

ON "THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-IDENTITY" *

IN this paper I shall first sketch the connections between a certain state of mind and a certain way of thinking about our lives. I shall then discuss Professor Penelhum's doubts about this way of thinking.

I

The state of mind is a kind of indifference towards a part of our lives. We are in this state of mind when, for example, there is a part of our past that we do not regard with either pride or shame, either pleasure or regret.

The state of mind can have this effect. A man may despise a certain kind of behavior. Because he does, he would be appalled if

* To be presented in an APA symposium on The Concept of a Person, December 28, 1971, commenting on Terence Penelhum's lead paper, title as noted, this JOURNAL, this issue, pp. 667-678. Parenthetical page references are to this paper.

he had recently behaved in this way. But he may have no regrets at having once so behaved. He may have ceased to care about the period when he so behaved.

This man's attitude towards himself in the earlier period I shall call "nonidentification." It is quite different from the kind of "non-identification" that Penelhum describes. His kind produces inner conflict, for it involves deep regret. My kind prevents, or puts an end to, conflict. The man that I described is (in part) immune from such regret.

This man's attitude may have the following cause. The man may say "I admit that I behaved in that way. But the 'I' who so behaved seems to me a stranger. What I wanted, thought, and admired—how I lived, how I tried to live—all of these are now changed." Nonidentification does not always have this kind of cause; but it often does.

It is when it does have such a cause that it connects with a certain way of thinking about our lives. I shall sketch three connections. I must first subdivide the way of thinking. It involves a certain view about the nature of personal identity, and a certain way of talking. Both of these have a long history. I shall refer to them as "the Complex View" and "the proposed way of talking."

The connections that I mentioned are, I think, these. If we take the Complex View, nonidentification will at times seem defensible. It can be expressed on the proposed way of talking. And it may, to some extent, be reinforced.

II

The man that I described would have deep regrets if he had more recently behaved in a certain way, but has no regrets at having once so behaved. He has no regrets because of the ways in which he has since changed.

The man agrees that his behavior was contemptible. So his attitude does not involve either false belief or special pleading. But it might still be criticized. Someone might say, "How can the man cease to care about a period in his past? Even if he has changed, his behavior then is as much a part of his past."¹

There is a sense in which this claim is true. But, on the Complex View, it is a superficial truth. It is like the truth that all the parts of a nation's history are as much parts of its history.

To pursue Hume's analogy. What is important in the histories of nations are the continuities of peoples, cultures, and political sys-

¹ Cf. Penelhum: "That part of us from which we wish to dissociate ourselves is as much a part of us" (671).

tems. These vary in degree. So the identity of a nation over time is only in its logic all-or-nothing; in its nature, it is a matter of degree.

If we take the Complex View, we shall make similar claims about ourselves. What is most important in the survival of a person are a number of psychological relations. Most of these relations hold, over time, to varying degrees. So the identity of a person over time is only in its logic all-or-nothing; in its nature, it is a matter of degree.

The man that I described has a divided attitude towards his past. The later part he regards with pride and shame, pleasure and regret; the earlier part he regards with indifference. The man's divided attitude has the following cause. Between him now and his recent self there are strong psychological connections; between him now and his earlier self there are only weak connections.

If we take the Complex View, it will be the strength of these connections that we think important. Where the strength differs, we may think it justified to have a different attitude.

To return to Hume's analogy. Take a Swede who is proud of his country's peaceful record. He might have a similar divided attitude. He may not be disturbed by the thought that Sweden once fought aggressive wars; but if she had recently fought such wars he would be greatly disturbed. Someone might say, "This man's attitude is indefensible. The wars of Gustavus, or of Karl XII, are as much part of Swedish history." This truth cannot, I think, support this criticism. Modern Sweden is indeed continuous with the aggressive Sweden of the Vasa kings. But the connections are weak enough to justify this man's attitude.

Nonidentification with an earlier self can, in the same way, be defensible. If it is only after some slight change that a man does not identify with his earlier self, such a change would not provide much defence. But if it is after some great change, then, I think, it would.²

I think this because I take the Complex View. Most of us would not, explicitly, reject this view. But we are inclined, in some of our reactions, to the opposing view. We are inclined to believe that our identity through time is, in its nature, all-or-nothing. Only this belief makes it seem deeply true that all of a man's life is as

² The nature and the cause of the change would also make a difference. There are many other complexities that I cannot here discuss. For instance: non-identification can have degrees, and it may hold for only some emotions. (In thinking about these issues I, like Penelhum, have been helped by Amelie Rorty and Harry Frankfurt.)

much his life. And only if this seems deeply true will it seem to show that nonidentification can never be defensible.

III

To turn, next, to the second connection. The proposed way of talking can express nonidentification.

The proposal is that a person's life can be divided into the lives of successive selves. This can be done where there is a marked change in character, or some other lessening in psychological connectedness. Where it is done is left to the choice of the speaker. It is done with remarks like, "That was only my past self." The point of these remarks is to assign to some event, like a change in character, particular importance. So the remarks can only be more or less defensible. They cannot be (literally) false.

These remarks could be used merely to emphasize the depth of some change. But they can have a more restricted, double use. They can have a use which not only implies that there has been some change, but also expresses nonidentification. It is this use which concerns us here.

To give an example. While he was thinking that he might in time lose those for whom he most cared, Proust remembered that, to this loss, "there will be added what seems . . . now . . . an even more cruel grief: not to feel it as a grief at all." With this thought, he writes, "my mind offered to my heart a promise of oblivion which succeeded only in sharpening the edge of its despair." He adds, "If that should occur . . . it would be in a real sense the death of ourself, a death followed, it is true, by a resurrection, but in a different self."³

IV

We can now turn to the third connection. It is true that all the parts of our lives are as much ours. But if we change to the Complex View, we shall think this not a deep but a trivial truth. This change in our beliefs might have some effects on our emotions. We might, say, become less concerned about our own more distant future. And the memory of our earlier past might be less likely to give us pride or shame.

That there might be some such effects seems to me plausible. But

³ *Within a Budding Grove*, I (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), S. Moncrieff, trans., p. 349 (I have slightly altered the translation). There were other features of the way of talking I proposed. Pronouns refer to present selves. So a man might say, "It was not *I* who did that, but only my past self." (This use of the words 'It was not I' does not deny that, on the old use, it was. It can be rephrased, "It was not my present self.") Further features, such as the treatment of 'being a past self of' as a matter of degree, and the talk about 'ancestral selves', we can here ignore.

they could only be produced by a change in our beliefs. They could not be produced by the mere adoption of the proposed way of talking.

To expand this last point. When we think about an earlier part of our lives, we can reflect upon the weakening, over time, in psychological connectedness. Such reflections may produce in us a kind of detachment. We can then say, "That was only my past self." This remark has, we have seen, a double meaning. It implies that there has been some lessening in connectedness, and it expresses the attitude of nonidentification which we therefore have. It is obvious that the remark cannot itself produce what it implies (the lessening in connectedness) or what it expresses (the attitude of nonidentification). To think that it could produce either of these is a clear mistake.

Penelhum fears that I had made this mistake.⁴ I may seem to have done so.⁵ But I agree that it is a mistake.

v

I shall next turn to Penelhum's other doubts. And I shall use his phrase 'scheme of thought' to cover both the Complex View and the proposed way of talking.

Penelhum suggests that the scheme of thought may not satisfy two requirements. These concern what it would include within a person's life. These requirements can be read in two ways; for the concept of a person has, on the proposed scheme, two partial equivalents.

One is the concept of a series of selves. This we might call 'the descriptive equivalent', for a person's life would, on the proposal, be described as the history of a series of selves.

Penelhum says that the scheme of thought must not allow a person to decide what is to count as part of his past (675). On the present reading: it must not allow a speaker to decide what is to count as the history of his series of selves. This requirement is satisfied, for what so counts is what now counts as the speaker's past.

Penelhum also says that the scheme of thought must allow a person's life to include marked changes in character (675). On the present reading: it must allow for the inclusion of such changes within the history of a series of selves. It does allow for their inclu-

⁴ 674/5; sec. II, whole of first paragraph.

⁵ Though I did write: "What matters in the continued existence of a person are, for the most part, relations of degree . . . I have proposed a way of thinking in which this would be recognised. . . . [Certain emotions are] strengthened by the beliefs . . . which I have been attacking. If we give up these beliefs, they should be weakened" ["Personal Identity," *Philosophical Review*, LXXX, 1 (January 1971): 3-28, p. 26/7].

sion. It even demands them, for "they constitute the passage from one self to another" (675). So it also satisfies this requirement.

We can next turn to the other (more probable) reading. We can substitute, for 'person', 'single self'. (This we might call "the moral and emotional equivalent."⁶)

Penelhum's first requirement now becomes: the scheme of thought must not allow a speaker to decide what is to count as the history of his present self.

What so counts, for the speaker, is the part of his past with which he identifies. So the scheme of thought must not allow a speaker to decide what this part is to be. It must not allow him to decide what are to be his attitudes towards his life.

The scheme of thought does, to some extent, allow this. But the ways in which it does seem to me no ground for criticism.

Most of the ways of changing our attitudes, such as taking drugs or treatment, are here irrelevant. They are as much allowed, and as effective, on alternative schemes of thought.

There is only one way of changing our attitudes which, on the proposed scheme, may be more effective. The man who feels remorse can reflect upon the lessening in psychological connectedness. If this weakens his remorse, he is to some extent deciding what is to be the part of his past with which he identifies. He is, to this extent, deciding what is to count, for him, as the history of his present self. But his way of doing so—reflecting upon the facts—seems to me unobjectionable.

A simpler method may seem to be provided. The proposed way of talking does allow a speaker to decide what to call the history of his present self. And in deciding what to *call* part of this history he may seem to be deciding what *is to count as* part.

He is not. Suppose that he continues to feel remorse, and to believe himself to be responsible for what he did. And suppose that he, and others, know what the psychological connections are. He can still *say*, "It was only my past self." But all that this can do is to produce in others the false belief that he does not feel remorse. (The remark can be insincere, and thus deceive.) The remark cannot make it true that he does not feel remorse. So it cannot change what counts, for him, as the history of his present self.⁷

To turn to the remaining requirement. The scheme of thought must allow for the inclusion, within the history of a single self, of

⁶ This is a very rough equivalence. A few of the many issues that are involved here I discuss in "Later Selves," in *Philosophy and Personal Relations*, edited by Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; forthcoming).

⁷ Nor can it change what so counts for other people. For this depends upon

marked changes in character. This is also satisfied, for the part of our past with which we identify can include such changes.⁸

VI

In the space that I have left I shall discuss the attractiveness of resurrection. I agree with Penelhum that, in resurrection, our identity is not unambiguously preserved. We do not have to say, "It will be I who wakes up." We could say, "It will be only a replica, another person who is like me."

Does this matter? If we take the Complex View, we may think that it does not. On that view, it is not identity that is thought important. What is thought important are the various relations that are involved in 'psychological continuity.' These relations do not presuppose identity.⁹ They can therefore hold when identity is not preserved.

Do they hold in a case of resurrection? I shall simplify this case. I shall assume that, after I die, God will create a perfect replica of me. (What I mean by "perfect" is "completely accurate." If my replica were of Penelhum's kind, if it were morally perfect, it would be in my sense flawed.)

Between me and the replica what relation holds? The answer is: psychological continuity with a special cause. The normal cause is (we believe) the continuity of the brain. The cause, in resurrection, is the mind of God.

How should I assess my "resurrection"? The relevant facts are: (1) The replica will not be, unambiguously, me. (2) There is between us psychological continuity, but without its normal cause.

My reaction might be "'Resurrection' is as good as (or as bad as) survival. (1) is unimportant. Nor does it matter in the slightest that the psychological continuity will lack its normal cause. All that is needed is a reliable cause.¹⁰ This is, here, amply provided." This reaction seems to me wholly reasonable.

A second man might say, "I am going to die. The prospect of 'resurrection' leaves me unconsolated. I agree that (1) is unimportant.

their attitudes (upon, say, their beliefs about the amount of his past for which he is still responsible). I can insert, here, a variant of Penelhum's first requirement. The scheme of thought must preserve the distinction between describing and misdescribing the history of one's present self (673). This history is the part of one's past with which one identifies. One can clearly misdescribe this part.

⁸ We can even identify more strongly with the person that we were before such a change. This would need to be expressed in a different way. (One possible use of the proposed way of talking, which did not express nonidentification but recorded every change in character, would not satisfy the above requirement. But I do not see why it should.)

⁹ *Philosophical Review*, pp. 14-18.

¹⁰ A remark of Strawson's.

It is (2) that leaves me unconsolated. Why be interested in psychological continuity, if it lacks its normal cause?" This reaction is surprising. But it may perhaps be free from false belief.

Someone else might say, "I am also unconsolated. But it is (1), not (2), that in my view is important. I do not insist upon the normal cause. What concerns me is that the replica won't be unambiguously ME."

This third reaction does, I think, involve a mistake. I hesitate to describe the mistake, for I suspect that I should misdescribe it.¹¹ I shall instead sketch a similar mistake.

A man might say, of an exactly reconstructed building, "That it doesn't have the same stones doesn't upset me. What upsets me is that it's not unambiguously the same building."

To vary the example. Suppose that scientists perfect an artificial substitute for damaged lungs. People with this substitute would not be unambiguously breathing. (We could call it breathing, but we could insist "That requires normal lungs.")

One of the people might say, "I am unconsolated. I want normal lungs." This is like the second reaction to "resurrection." Another person might say, "I am also unconsolated. But this is not because I don't have normal lungs. This seems to me trivial. What concerns me is that I'm not unambiguously BREATHING." This is like the third reaction to "resurrection." That it involves a mistake is, I hope, clear.

DEREK PARFIT

All Souls College, Oxford

We walked to Weston one evening last week, and liked it very much. Liked *what* very much? Weston? No, *walking* to Weston. I have not expressed myself properly, but I hope you will understand me.

Jane to Cassandra Austen

SOME LOGICAL ROLES OF ADVERBS *

IN order to explore logical roles of adverbs we need a logical grammar, a theory that tells how shorter sentences and clauses may be embedded in longer ones and thus tells what logical roles there are. The logical grammar Frege uses in "On Sense and

¹¹ If I had thought more about the criteria for the identity of facts, I might have ventured this remark: the man fails to realize that (in one sense) the fact (1) that it won't be unambiguously him, and the fact (2) that the psychological continuity won't have its normal cause, are, *here*, the *same*. A different mistake