



**University of Konstanz  
Humanities Section  
Department of Philosophy**

## **Master's Thesis**

# **Personal Identity and Self as Narrative**

Formal Identity and Narrative Identity as  
Two Essential Building Blocks in the Constitution of Self

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***All the world's a stage,***

*And all the men and women merely players,  
They have their exits and entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
Then, the whining schoolboy with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice  
In fair round belly, with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws, and modern instances,  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide,  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,  
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

William Shakespeare, ca. 1600.

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## 0 Apologia and Acknowledgements

My personal approach to philosophy, expressed in vague terms, is as follows: *philosophy is about interpreting the world and our place in the world, in the context of our own age and culture.* In following that agenda, my idea is to take a holistic approach. As expressed by Quine: "Holism is a convergence of various hypotheses, theories, beliefs, truths: even when one focuses on any one of these, the others have to help."<sup>1</sup> Any system or organism is best understood as an "organized totality" rather than as the sum of its discrete parts – and the parts that make up the topic of personal identity are diverse indeed. My aim in this paper is for breadth of view, at times to the detriment of the kind of depth that some of my teachers might prefer. One cannot plausibly do both at the same time but there are at least some moments of deeper penetration involved. A further parameter of my work is given by the fact that in a treatment of personal identity we are discussing *persons*, and therefore necessarily involved in ethical issues.

Much has happened in the world of ideas in the past 200 years or so which has radically changed the nature of the debate on personal identity. It is essential for any student of philosophy to engage in dialogue with thinkers of the past, while realizing in this case the limitations involved in carrying over ideas from a time when belief in a deity was immanent and men and women were mostly seen as the embodiments of immortal souls. In philosophical discourse, Cartesian and other dualistic concepts of the kind ironically characterised by Gilbert Ryle as *the ghost in the machine* have largely been replaced in our time by monistic theories and monism will be a premise of my own contribution to the debate. I would add a caveat, however: in the face of many avowals to the contrary, I suspect that lingering latent paradigms of dualism are still virulent in some circles even within the academy and add to the confusions in the debate.

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<sup>1</sup> See Föllesdal Dagfin and Douglas B. Quine, (eds.). *Quine in Dialogue*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2008. 65.

Nor has the debate stopped with Ryle: in our own time, the scientific approach to psychology is demystifying many aspects of our conscious and cognitive selves – while at the same time creating new agendas for philosophers. The factors mentioned, and many more, necessitate a radical departure from the past in a discourse on personal identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Having come late to academic philosophy and not planning to make a lifetime career of it, my trajectory has been different from that of most of my fellow students. Age is nothing to be proud of but it is a fact that I can draw on a greater volume of personal experience and previous learning, both formal and informal, than those less than half my age. This gives me the courage – or the rashness – to rely on my own ideas, insights and judgements in certain contexts, rather than simply referring to other thinkers.

Nevertheless, one is always writing on palimpsests and it is my duty to acknowledge those who went before. All of the written sources listed in the bibliography – and more that escape my memory – have contributed to the formation of my ideas, although some of these sources are not explicitly referred to in the text. Furthermore, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2006 ed.* (hereafter *COED*) is never out of reach. This is a matter of principle as well as practice: the dictionary is both descriptive of and prescriptive for current usage of English and my position is that philosophical discourse should not drift too far from normal language use. Spurious problems may otherwise arise, as Wittgenstein puts it, "when language takes a holiday."

More personally, my first teacher of philosophy in a formal sense was Gottfried Seebaß. His introductory course in practical philosophy was an introduction to philosophy in general and it constituted a framework for all further studies. Gereon Wolters taught us the art of critical reading; under his tutorage grew a sensitivity for my own favourite point of attack in philosophical arguments: the roots of the matter, i.e. the premises. While understanding the fascination of some with the *validity* of complex arguments, my personal interest is focused on their *soundness*. Wolfgang Spohn provoked my positivistic-self into a more critical reflection of what I had been doing in the course of my former scientific career, Peter Stemmer sharpened my mind for what language can do and Tobias Rosefeldt introduced me to new aspects

of personal identity. In addition to the professors, Konstanz is blessed with a large number of assistants and Dozenten who give highly competent courses and I will mention just a few by name, while thanking all of them: Klaus Beisbart was a significant influence during my first semester, Maria-Sybille Lotter towards the end of my studies and that wonderful scholar Karlheinz Hülser throughout.

Michael Kühler belongs to that highly praised set of assistants and my respect for his knowledge and skills led to a request that he be my tutor. He incorporates the rare gift of being supportive and encouraging to his students, while at the same time giving acutely critical feedback on what they produce. I always listened carefully to his suggestions, but did not always follow them.

Leaving now the world of the philosophical department, the name of Aleida Assmann stands for all of those who opened up my mind for ideas from elsewhere in the academy. I must also thank my fellow students for insights gained in dialogue or in plenary, most importantly my wife Christine, currently an M.Sc. student of psychology but previously with many years of experience as a therapist. She had to listen to the first version of most of my arguments and fulfilled the odious task of proof-reading this paper. Her impulses from a psychological standpoint are a pillar of my studies in general and she puts in an occasional appearance here in the role of my "in-house psychologist".

But the most significant of all my teachers was my uncle Isaac Pimley. From my early teens onwards, he provoked me with his truly Socratic approach, seldom giving answers, always urging me never to take things at face value. A carpet-fitter by trade, he spent all of his life in making up for the educational deficits of his youth and had become quite a scholar by the time he was as old as I am now. His avuncular tutelage was the contingency which influenced the course of my own narrative history and ultimately led me to become a student of philosophy. This work is dedicated to him.

His was probably the strongest single influence in the shaping of my own personal narrative identity.

# 1 Introduction and Thematic Review

## 1.1 Quintessence, Structure and Aims

*Who is Helen of Troy?* She is Helen, wife of King Menelaus and lover of Paris. Given the standards of antiquity, this serves as a perfectly adequate, *formal* and *numerical* identification of the figure. There is only one person who fulfils all of these identity criteria. In his play *Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlow takes a different approach to identity and asks:

*Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?*

This too, is Helen of Troy. The poet's phrases bring closer to us the *qualitative* and *narrative* sides of identity. Helen is a creature of narrative, existing solely in the legendary poems of Homer, himself a fictional narrative projection. We are already *in medias res*, having anticipated the complexities and confusions surrounding the issue of personal identity and having seen how even a fictional self can be created by narrative means.

*Who is she? Who am I? And what qualities do we implement?* These are the questions posed in this paper on the topic of personal identity and self as narrative.<sup>2</sup> Writing about personal identity requires an inclusive attitude which incorporates the lives of persons of all nationalities and cultures, encompassing a time span over all *seven ages of man* from the newborn child onwards and leaves no walk of life out of its considerations: butchers, bakers, hairdressers, car mechanics, hedonous millionaires and ascetic nuns are all of equal significance. This point is made because much of the discussion on this issue – as well as on related topics – tends to be dominated by those who are most erudite: they occasionally fall into the trap of extrapolating from men and women of their own kind to all of humanity, with the result that mentalistic aspects of identity tend to be over-emphasised at the expense of somatic sides.

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<sup>2</sup> In a lecture in Konstanz on February 05 2009, Martine Nida-Rümelin expressed the issues more precisely in the following terms: "Was macht das Individuum X zu dem Individuum X? ... Was macht das Individuum X zu einem Individuum der Kategorie K?"

This paper is intended to contribute towards re-establishing a reasonable balance.

As a subject of study, personal identity is a fragmented matter: we find resources in practically every discipline of the human and social sciences, as well as some related issues which are studied in the life sciences. Within this vast field of study, the aim is to create a topographic map rather than examining the terrain in detail. Mine will be a philosophical overview of the territory, albeit with some cross references to other relevant aspects. Maps are not the terrain itself of course, but maps present their own specific advantages, giving an overview not always available when standing in the forest and showing up features best visible from a high altitude. The aim is to give such an overview, leaving a more intimate exploration for a further occasion.

The work is structured as follows. After this **introduction**, which defines the scope of the paper and clarifies some of the issues involved, there will be three core sections dealing in turn with the following: section two encompasses the **reductionist theories** of Parfit and Williams, which also stand for other reductionist approaches in the literature. My own position is that such reductionist theories fail, but in doing so, they highlight aspects of identity which will be useful in the further discussion. This is followed by section three on **formal, or numerical identity**. This section will open with reflections on issues related to psychology and body which are central to my line of argumentation and have some claim to originality in the clear commitment I make to the role of the body in formal identity. Given a monistic premise, the issue of formal and numerical identity is not overly complex. The penultimate section four will concentrate on the issue of **narrative identity**, a vast field of research which can only be touched on in this paper. Within that section, a more highly developed theory of continuity than that generally found will play a central role. The paper will close with a section on **identity and self as narrative**, which will bring together the strands of the debate and establish the point that both formal identity and narrative identity are essential building blocks in the constitution of self.



For matters of practicality, some issues will be excluded. There is no historical treatment, except where the history is of direct relevance today.<sup>3</sup> The matter of pre-natal identity will be avoided, as there is a huge and controversial independent discussion on the issue. Apart from an interesting treatment on post-mortem somatic identity, there will be no discussion on the continuation of conscious life-after-death, a matter which I see as one of personal credo and better treated within the religious realm. For reasons of simplicity, the debate will focus on human persons only, excluding all other sentient or non-sentient beings, although a case could be made for a certain limited 'personhood' for at least some kinds of animals.<sup>4</sup>

Given the diversity of the agenda involved and the scope of any discussion on personal identity, it is infeasible to devise a unitary theory of personal identity in a philosophical sense. Bearing in mind that caveat, the following interrelated main theses will be argued: firstly, personal identity is a holistic matter, and reductionist approaches fail. Secondly, in a strong sense, formal and numerical personal identity is nothing but the identification of the body with itself – in so far as such a statement is not paradoxical. Thirdly, it will be argued that there is no plausible alternative to narrative in our qualitative personal identity: a person's narrative is both constitutive of, and indicative of his or her qualitative personal identity. Within that argument, continuity, seen holistically, plays a central role. And finally, all these strands will be brought together under the mantle of narrative: in talking of the identity of human persons, it makes little sense to talk about numerical identity independently of the debate on qualitative identity – and vice versa. Our numerical identity is attached to the body and our qualitative identity finds its expression in that body. Helen, wife of Menelaus, is one and the same person as *the face that launched a thousand ships* and her self is revealed in Homer's narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent historical account see: Martin, Raymond and John Barresi. *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self. An Intellectual History of Personal Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press 2006. This account was at the back of my mind throughout.

<sup>4</sup> Although I only visit him rarely, my donkey Barney clearly recognizes me just as I recognize him. There is a reciprocal bond of companionship or affection between us, exemplified in the fact that Barney will stay close to me even when I do not have an apple in my pocket. And Barney also shows personality traits such as a strong liking for children, and anger and irritation on foggy days.

Next, some thematic aspects of the topic will be discussed.

## 1.2 Five Dimensions of Personal Identity

According to Michael Quante, it would be preferable to speak of 'the personal identity of human beings' rather than 'personal identity'.<sup>5</sup> While agreeing with Quante, the convention of using the term 'personal identity' will be maintained for reasons of shorthand. Of the five dimensions differentiated here, the first four are taken from a relevant paper by Quante.

- Dimension (A) is what Quante calls "*the Conditions-of-Personhood-Problem (CPP)*: Which properties or capacities must an entity have in order to belong to the class of persons?"<sup>6</sup>

This issue raises possibilities for further discussion but the point will only be briefly addressed in this paper: my general stipulation, one that has an ethical background, is that all human-born entities, or more precisely bodies, belong to the class of persons, independently of possible anomalies such as severe mental or physical handicap, loss of memory etc. This definition applies from the moment of birth (at the latest) to the moment of death (at least).

- Dimension (B) is defined by Quante as "*The Unity-of-Person-Problem (UPP)*: What are the conditions that must hold so that it is the case that an entity A is exactly one person at one point in time?"<sup>7</sup>

There will be some reference to this problem but it is not a central issue in this paper. Quante continues with:

- Dimension (C), "*The Persistence-of-Person-Problem (PPP)*: What are the conditions that must hold so that it is the case that A at  $t_1$  is the same person as B at  $t_2$ ?"<sup>8</sup>

This dimension will be a central one, especially in the treatise on formal or numerical identity, of equal weight with the following issue:

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<sup>5</sup> Quante, Michael. The Social Nature of Personal Identity, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, **14**, No-5-6 2007, pp 56-76. 57.

<sup>6</sup> Quante (2007). 59.

<sup>7</sup> Quante (2007). 59.

<sup>8</sup> Quante (2007). 61.

- Dimension (D) is: "*The Structure-of-Personality-Problem (SPP)*: What is the basic structure of leading the life of a person?"<sup>9</sup>

Following Quante, this covers what is frequently called "narrative or biographical identity" and fits in with the theme of narrative identity. In short, the focus will largely be on (C) and (D).

There is a further dimension of the issue of personal identity, not specifically highlighted by Quante but one which pervades the debate:

- Dimension (E), the *First-Person-versus-Third-Person Aspect (FPTP)*.

On occasion, there can be substantial differences between the two aspects.

Quante makes the general point that a tendency to compound dimensions best kept separate have contributed to confusion in the debate and I will try to keep them separately in view, in as far as is feasible, just as in creating maps we must not confuse *contours of altitude* with *city boundaries*, although such features of the terrain may at times overlap. City boundaries might partially follow contours of altitude and, an analogous way, these various dimensions of the identity discussion are so intimately entwined that it is not always possible to maintain the separation.

The distinction between *likeness* and *sameness* is not always made with sufficient clarity, especially in the English language which lacks the straightforward distinction between *das gleiche* und *dasselbe* in German and it therefore merits a sub-section of its own.

### 1.3 Likeness versus Self-Sameness

On renting a car some time ago, the girl at the rental desk told me to look out for a red Volvo, parked in area D. A few minutes later I discovered seven red Volvos parked in alignment, all pristine from the factory and as *identical* in their properties as quality control procedures can assure. That is the kind of identity that I call 'likeness' or 'look-alikeness', unhappy word constructions but less ambiguous than 'similarity'. Homo Faber can solve the problem posed by the seemingly identical cars, using sophisticated instruments to detect the slightest

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<sup>9</sup> Quante (2007). 62.

inconsistency between one Volvo and another. I solved the problem by pressing the key, which led to the appropriate car identifying itself by flashing. The seemingly identical cars were not in fact the same, being distinguished by their key-coding and by their registration plates. Paul Ricoeur speaks of *ipse-identity*, which indicates true sameness, or self-sameness; and *idem-identity*, which indicates identity in the sense of being alike.<sup>10</sup> In the case at hand, I was choosing from among a number of *look-alike* Volvos to find my own one, the *self-same* Volvo which had been assigned to me.

Relating *ipse* and *idem* identity to cars is not that difficult, as is shown in my example. Even after 10 years of use, one will have little difficulty in 'identifying' the self-same Volvo again, by its worn but otherwise unchanged appearance and by its registration plate. But what about persons? In that case, *ipse-identity* takes on a greater complexity, as Ricoeur points out. The problem arises from the fact that, according to Ricoeur, no part of the core of a human person escapes change over time. So we are faced with an insoluble antinomy, which I would express in the following example: Martha at age 50 might be the selfsame *ipse*-person as Martha at age five, but there will be very little *idem*-similarity between the two figures. Changes both in body and in mind argue against an 'identity' of Martha aged five and Martha aged fifty. Much has been made of this point in the philosophical literature on the matter, see for instance Hume and many more.<sup>11</sup> Ricoeur traces out one resolution of the problem, that of *narrative identity*: Taking the identity of the relevant life-story as a starting point which knots together the individual life-events, one can move on to the identity of the protagonists involved and from there to the identity of the self which reveals itself in the act of reading the narrative.<sup>12</sup> This is the philosophically most promising route to take and it will be taken in section four of this paper, although another route will be sketched out in section three, that on formal identity. If there are aspects of the body which do escape change, as will be argued, then there is a simpler, philosophically unpromising

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<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. Narrative Identität, in: *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 3. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Hume, David. *Treatise of Human Nature. Book I.*

<sup>12</sup> This is a paraphrase of the following text, available to me in German only: "Ausgehend von der Identität der *Erzählung*, wie sie sich aus der Handlungsverknüpfung ergibt, werden wir zu der Identität der *Figuren* der erzählten Geschichte übergehen und von dort zu der Identität des *Selbst*, wie sie sich im Akt des Lesens abzeichnet." Ricoeur (57). 58.

but nonetheless important *formal or conventional* solution to *ipse*-identity which should not be overlooked.

Before moving on, there is one final aspect relevant to the theme of the paper. Car designers go to great trouble to ensure that all Volvos models, however different they might be in their individual qualities, share in a common 'brand identity' and that aspect of identity is relevant to the next sub-section.

#### 1.4 Identity: Fragmented or Holistic?

One can scarcely open a newspaper nowadays without finding some reference to issues of identity: to gender identity, or sexual identity, or racial or ethnic identity, or perhaps national or supranational identity, political identity, post-colonial identity, religious identity and so on. This particular usage of the term 'identity' is en vogue. But the issues thereby discussed, interesting though they might be, are only indirectly connected with the topic of identity per se. In speaking of his male identity, Joe does not mean that he is 'identical' with other males, but generally one of two things: for the first part, Joe may be taking note of the fact that there are things he specifically has in common with most other males. On the other hand, there are things that Joe does *not* share with others of his own gender. For the second part, Joe may be using other males as prototypes to shape himself in a way which is typical for 'maleness.'

What is the relationship between *roles* and *identity*? In a kind of gestalt switch, the Frankonian satirical comedian Frank-Markus Barwasser oscillates on-stage with bewildering rapidity between the contrastive roles of Hartmut, Erwin Pelzig and Dr. Gödel, keeping up a fictitious conversation between the three 'persons'. Some might be tempted to say that 'Erwin Pelzig' possesses 'three identities' (or even four, if we include the author himself) but they would be victims of a conjuring trick. In common with the rest of us, Barwasser possesses only one true *identity* but he is capable of playing many *roles*. This example shows how uncertainties in the debate are caused by confusions between the terms 'identity' and 'role'. There is talk of one's identity as a father, or as a brother, as a student, as a Manchester United fan and so on. But such usages of the term are again only indirectly related to the subject matter of this paper. Seen critically, what we are referring to here are *roles*, frequently derived from *role models*, rather than to identity per se. Barwasser switches deliberately,

but most ordinary people slip willy nilly into various roles in the course of the day: in the morning they are able employees, at dinnertime loving fathers and at night passionate lovers. The number and variety of roles that a person plays are constituent features of his qualitative identity but they alone do not *determine* his identity.<sup>13</sup> Why are such usages mentioned at all in this context? This is a matter of dimension (B), *The Unity-of-Person-Problem (UPP)*. In one sense it is a justifiable debate, as it is not unequivocally clear what we mean when talking of a *self*. There will be no fundamental discussion on the matter here, which would merit a paper of its own. Instead, it is postulated that there is some kind of unitary self we are referring to when speaking of persons.<sup>14</sup>

There is another kind of fragmentation debate whose conclusions are doubtful, however, the 'Humpty-Dumpty' problem of identity.<sup>15</sup> That problem reflects the confusion which arises from the tendency to look at various bits and pieces of the problem rather than seeing the issue as an "organized totality."<sup>16</sup> The child who takes a clock apart and then studies the cogwheels is a long way from learning anything about the function of 'measuring time' and therefore gaining further understanding of what it is to be a timepiece. While an analytical approach to any problem can be useful, some kinds of theoretical fragmentation don't get us far in a discussion on personal identity. We can discuss all sorts of bits and pieces individually without contributing much to our understanding of the whole. That is why an integrated and holistic approach is pursued here.

Having said that, the next main section will be about fragmented or reductionist approaches to the topic. Their usefulness lies not in the doubtful claims which arise from the debate but more in the fact that they highlight certain features or aspects of the identity of human persons which are then fruitful in the further discussion.

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<sup>13</sup> The theory of roles in the construction of personal identity as developed by George Herbert Mead is discussed in: Tugendhat, Ernst. *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1979. 12. Vorlesung, S. 264-282.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Dennett sidesteps the issue the issue of a unitary self, speaking of the self as a "center of narrative gravity". His relevant paper will be referred to later.

<sup>15</sup> Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall, / Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall, / All the King's horses and all the King's men / couldn't put Humpty-Dumpty together again.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on this issue, see: Martin and Barresi (2006.) 296 ff.

## 2 Reductionist Approaches

### 2.1 'Psychological Continuity' as the Criterion

The reductionist debate occurs within the realm of numerical identity, although it is not without significance for qualitative or narrative identity. In speaking of reductionist approaches, I am referring to the kind of theory that 'reduces' personal identity to a single criterion or a set of criteria which are sufficient to define identity, in contrast to a holistic or naturalistic approach. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke formulated such a theory, relating personal identity to identity of consciousness:

§19. This may shew us wherein *personal Identity* consists, not in the Identity of Substance, but, as I have said, in the Identity of consciousness, wherein, if *Socrates* and the present Mayor of *Quinborough* agree, they are the same Person: If the same *Socrates* waking and sleeping do not partake of the same *consciousness*, *Socrates* waking and sleeping is not the same Person. And to punish *Socrates* waking, for what sleeping *Socrates* thought, and waking *Socrates* was never conscious of, would be no more of Right, than to punish one Twin for what his Brother-Twin did, whereof he knew nothing, because their outsides were so like, that they could not be distinguished; for such Twins have been seen.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of *identity of consciousness* has since taken on a life of its own and has led to a whole tradition of debate. Rather than dealing with Locke directly, the focus will be on the theories of the neo-Lockean Derek Parfit, who in his much cited work *Reasons and Persons* further develops the ideas of Locke and makes an attempt to remove some of the possible objections.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, Parfit uses science fiction-like thought experiments in order to explore our intuitions in relation to personal identity. The central question raised by Parfit is as follows: given the choice between maintaining your 'personal identity' or your 'psychological continuity' – which of the two would you choose? Locke proposed that only if there are direct memory connections between X today and what Y did twenty years ago are X and Y one and the same person. In line with Locke, Parfit takes a reductionist position and argues that identity can be reduced to a single criterion but he takes the Lockean theory further. What Parfit terms *Relation R* is a matter of psychological connectedness, largely

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<sup>17</sup> Locke, John. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II.

<sup>18</sup> Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: OUP 1984.

connectedness of conscious memory. Jane might not be able to remember what happened ten years ago but she remembers what happened last month; and last month Jane remembered what happened a month previously and so on, in a memory chain extending back to the moment when her conscious existence commenced. In Parfit's revised version of Locke, X is the same person as Y if there is such a continuity in the memory chain. More precisely, Relation R holds between X and Y:

Our identity over time just involves (a) Relation R – psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity – with the right kind of cause, provided (b) that this relation does not take a 'branching' form, holding between one person and two different future people.<sup>19</sup>

One remark before moving on in the discussion: in section four it will be argued that the concept of 'psychological continuity' referred to here is far from complete and therefore in need of substantial revision. But for the moment, when making use of the term, Parfit's version is referred to.

The thought experiment which plays an essential role in the argumentation is briefly described as follows. At some future time, the concept of a Teletransporter as an alternative to long distance space travel has been realized. The subject enters a Teletransporter which records all the data of his cells. After destroying his body and brain on Earth, the Teletransporter "beams" the data to Mars where they are reconstituted by a Replicator into a body and brain exactly like his former body and brain. The subject has a feeling of being briefly unconscious and then finds himself on Mars. Objectively speaking, the journey has taken about one hour. After reconstitution, the subject feels exactly the same as in his previous state on Earth.

Parfit also describes a second version of this thought experiment: the conditions are similar to before, except that the Teletransporter does not immediately destroy the former body and brain. The subject is offered the opportunity of speaking to himself on Earth after he has reached Mars. He is told beforehand that the scanner will damage his cardiac system on earth, so that the earthly body will die in a week or so. His existence on Mars should however be healthy.

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<sup>19</sup> Parfit. 216.



According to Parfit, the first case of 'simple Teletransportation' is seen by many readers of science fiction to be simply the fastest way of travel.<sup>20</sup> *My replica* is to all intents and purposes *me* and if it returned to Earth, everyone would think it is me. That is one interpretation, what Parfit calls the main line case. The second case supports a different interpretation, i.e. that I will eventually die and that the replica is someone else. Because I can exist parallel to my replica, Parfit calls this the branch line case. Using these experiments, Parfit discusses the following issue: if I assume that the replica is not me, then my death (as the damaged original on earth) is almost as bad as ordinary death. But if – as Parfit believes to be the case – my replica is me, then being destroyed and replicated is about as good as ordinary survival.

Given the vastness of the Parfit discussion, it is worth devoting some space to the ideas he claims to have substantiated. Before getting down to specific problems, there are some general points to be discussed.

### ***Problems with Parfit***

There is an air of circularity in the whole Parfit debate which confuses the issues involved. Having set up imaginary conditions to guarantee the unequivocal identity of Eddy and an imaginary Eddy<sub>replica</sub>, in each and every attribute of mind and body, it is true but trivial to point out that, in relation to their likeness at least, they are identical. The experiment is doing exactly what it was designed to do. If we accept the conditions of the experiment, we can have no doubts about their *idem-identity*. (It is not always clear from the context whether Parfit has *idem* or *ipse* in mind, although he does in his introduction refer to *numerical* identity). On the road to *ipse-identity*, there is the problem in the second experiment that we have *two* Eddys; they exist simultaneously in divergent time-space coordinates and cannot be numerically identical.

Parfit suggests as a solution that if we destroy the original Eddy, then Eddy<sub>replica</sub> now becomes Eddy. Parfit appeals to our *intuitions*, appealing no doubt a latent premise that millions of *Star Trek* viewers cannot err – they have no conceptual

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<sup>20</sup> Parfit no doubt has the legendary *Star Trek* TV and film series in mind, which has a huge following world-wide. *Beaming* is the standard method of transport in the series.

or identity problems with Teletransportation or beaming, which they experience weekly on TV as a matter of routine.<sup>21</sup>

Not being a regular *Star Trek* fan, my own intuitions don't cooperate at all. Can we accept such an *ad-hoc* resolution of the issue, destroying the original in order to ensure numerical identity? Both intuition and logic tell me not: self-sameness continuation of Eddy cannot plausibly depend on whether we wilfully destroy the original or not. Killing Eddy-on-Earth would influence the state of affairs in one possible world, that of Earth; killing Eddy-on-Mars would influence the state of affairs in another possible world, that of Mars. But killing Eddy-on-Earth would have no influence on the state of affairs on Mars, and vice versa.<sup>22</sup> Eddy-on-Mars maintains his identity and his continuity, independently of what happens on Earth. The *ad-hoc* route to establishing numerical identity between Eddy and Eddy's replica is logically flawed.

If the reader is not yet convinced, my suggestion is to test one's intuition by imagining the following situation, in which the two Eddys are brought together in the *same* world: you go home to your partner and find your replica seated at your table and eating your dinner. It follows from Parfit's theory that, were you now to be killed, then your death would not matter much to you, because you would survive in the form of the replica seated at your dining table. That sounds like cold comfort indeed and offends against my own intuitions. Knowing that my replica will survive would be of no consolation to me at the moment of my death.

In spite of these reservations, let me play along with the theory for the moment and discuss some of the issues raised in an *as if* mode: i.e. as if his experiment were a feasible way to test theories of numerical identity. There are at least four major problems which remain to be addressed.

**Problem number 1:** Parfit claims that, by reproducing an entity on Mars which shares 'psychological continuity' with the original entity on Earth, he has created a duplicate 'person' on Mars. But, with reference to dimension (A), *the*

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<sup>21</sup> My tutor Michael Kühler tells me that there is some experimentation with the notion of teletransportation in the series, including cases of identity duplication and identity confusion. Alas, they cannot be discussed here.

<sup>22</sup> The paradigm of 'other worlds' is use here in the simplest possible way.

*conditions-of-personhood-problem* (CPP), the entity that Parfit's experiment has created on Mars is arguably not a person at all. Epistemically, that entity might have close similarities to a person, but ontologically it is an artefact, a man-made thing, an android robot made out of organic material.

Those who disagree with my stipulation (sub-section 1.2) concerning the conditions of personhood might disagree with me here and suggest that, given a broader definition of personhood – which might include such artefacts as robots as persons – the experiment should work. In conceding that point, I would however refer them to the following two problems which pose further difficulties.

**Problem number 2:** If it is truly psychological continuity that matters, then why go to the trouble of total body replication on Mars? That only confuses the issue, indeed, Parfit appears to compromise his own experiment because his replication procedure is not a reductionist one at all. Surely there are simpler alternatives. Given the central role of Relation R, one could download the sum of all memories and experiences constituting the continuity of Eddy-on-Earth and transmit these data to a standard android robot we might call Mike-on-Mars. Mike-on-Mars would now be psychologically continuous with Eddy-on-Earth. Mike would not be *identical* with Eddy, but Parfit, appealing to our intuition, tells us that identity is not what matters. What matters is 'psychological continuity', and Mike and Eddy share a common psychological continuity. So far so good, if you are prepared to go with Parfit but the problem can be developed further:

**Problem number 3:** This is specifically aimed at those who argue in favour of a broader scope of personhood, as it involves issues related to dimension (A) *conditions-of-personhood* and dimension (D) *structure-of-personality*. If psychological continuity is all that counts and personhood is taken as a very general concept not necessarily related to body, then there is no plausible reason why there should be any outward physical similarity between Eddy-on-Earth and Mike-on-Mars at all. Indeed, there is no need for their *internal* makeup be similar, as long as the 'psychological continuity' is guaranteed. That could just as well be implemented on a complex machine. As a discrete thing, Eddy would then no

longer exist, but his psychological continuity could still function in the form of an *emulation* in the computer center. Is this a plausible idea?

It might not be too bad if Eddy were a philosopher – after all, he could now play the role of oracle, his virtual visage radiating wisdom to all questioners by means of his voice synthesiser and he might live happily ever after. Unfortunately, in our case Eddy happens to be a car mechanic who likes to spend his weekends playing rugby and chasing girls (he is a good looking guy). Under these circumstances, he is unlikely to accept the assertion that "... psychological continuity is not as bad as death." He will be unwilling indeed to part from his body. Now seeing himself as a very incomplete person (dimension A) and unable to continue his narrative in the practised way (dimension D), Eddy might prefer to be dead, rather than being condemned to total physical inactivity for the rest of his 'life'. This is a counter-example to the claim that it is Parfit's version of 'psychological continuity' which matters and it wouldn't be difficult to devise many more such counter-examples.

Before summing up, there is one more telling argument against Parfit's concept:

**Problem number 4:** This problem is again relevant to the dimension (C), *the persistence-of-person problem*. Does Parfit's concept of 'psychological continuity' guarantee *retrospective* continuity? In addressing this point, use will be made of an experiment from Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, set in the year 2540 AD in our Gregorian calendar.<sup>23</sup> In a conceptually plausible thought experiment, Huxley postulates a society composed largely of clones, produced in series for specific tasks. These clones are cultivated in "decanting bottles" and acquire all their knowledge of the world by means of "sleep learning". Sticking to the principle of Huxley's ideas rather than the details, we can imagine the following: two biologically identical clones are cultivated in identical incubators and fed with knowledge by means of identical sleep-learning programmes. The sleep-learning programmes inculcate not only theoretical knowledge but virtual practical experience in everyday situations. Eighteen years after commencement of the procedure, growth is completed,

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<sup>23</sup> Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World. A Novel*. London: Penguin 1969.

consciousness, which has up to now been suppressed by drugs, is initiated in both clones and they emerge from their incubators in the form of fully developed human persons. In order to make the conditions of the experiment clearer, we can assume that Clone-V is incubated on the planet Venus and Clone-M on the planet Mars ten years later, having been in a frozen state for that length of time.

At the instant before emergence, each individual possesses an exactly identical biological makeup, as well as exactly identical quasi-memories as postulated by Parfit. In other words, *his* conditions of psychological continuity are fulfilled. But does this now mean that Clone-V and Clone-M are identical? In a *idem*-sense, it seems that they must be. But as Clone-V is animated on Venus in the year 2540 AD and Clone-M ten years later on Mars, it would defy all definitions to suggest that Clone-M and Clone-V are 'identical' in the formal, or numerical sense. They have no history in common and their alleged identity does not function retrospectively. They exist in separate and distinct space-time coordinates and they share nothing except a common appearance and learning background. In short, they are two separate selves, each with its own identity.

This counter-example refutes the usefulness of the concept of 'psychological continuity' as postulated by Parfit: psychological continuity is by no means *sufficient* to guarantee continuity of identity. The fact that at the moment of first consciousness the two clones share identical quasi-memories does not guarantee a shared continuity. If Parfit's version of psychological continuity is not sufficient, is it at least necessary?

### ***Necessity of 'Psychological Continuity'?***

Locke and his successors pass lightly over a problem of massive importance: if we wish to 'reduce' identity to a criterion of *consciousness*, or conscious memory, or psychological continuity based on conscious memory, then what about those not in possession of such a criterion?

Think of how many persons that are excluded from the class of those with 'personal identity' by such a reduction, starting with very young children. The list also includes elderly sufferers from dementia – sadly, they might lose a sense of continuity and yet they mostly retain recognizable items of personal

identity as reflected in personal habits, figures of speech and so on. There is a long list of persons suffering from amnesia, whether temporary or permanent, including, accident victims, sufferers from brain tumours and strokes. There is the group of those who are born seriously mentally disadvantaged and perhaps have never had a clear sense of psychological continuity at all. All in all, we come up with a significant proportion of the population which is temporarily or permanently deprived of 'psychological continuity' as understood by Parfit, or perhaps even of a *subjective* sense of first-person identity.

If we attribute 'personal identity' to all of those addressed here, then psychological continuity cannot be a condition of identity. The corollary of that position is that, if we claim that psychological continuity is all that matters, then that long list of persons must be *excluded* from the attribute of personal identity, entailing grave ethical issues. The structure of that argument is a simple one: if *B* necessarily follows from *A* and *C* necessarily follows from *B*, then *C* is a necessary consequence of *A*. If you are not conscious, the neo-Lockean doctrine denies you the attribute of personal identity. There are further entailments of such a position down the line. Can a person who is considered to be without 'identity' have any *rights*, for instance?

In response: there are legal and ethical reasons, matters of human rights not be discussed here, for including all human born persons, including *all of the exceptional entities referred to*, within the realm of human persons and therefore imputing personal identity to them – even if the expression of that identity be lightly or severely impaired. The dangers of admitting of exceptions to the attribute of personhood or personal identity are all too obvious and they have played a sad role in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, when many who were mentally deficient were subject to involuntary euthanasia.<sup>24</sup> If one follows my line of argument, then it follows that psychological continuity – *in the version postulated by Parfit* – cannot be a necessary condition of personal identity.

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Singer's radical application of Utilitarianism leads to a discussion which relativizes the conditions for personhood, from which follows the exclusion of large groups of humanity and concomitant suggestions such as: "killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person." His line of argumentation leads to a general discussion on voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia. Such a line of argumentation is abhorrent to me but the issue will not be discussed here. See: Singer, Peter. *Practical Ethics*. Second ed. Cambridge: CUP 1993. 185.

To summarize: Locke, Parfit et al. have shown that memory, or Parfit's version of psychological continuity are *elements* of a discussion on personal identity, but not more than that. Nor has Parfit succeeded in establishing that personal identity is not what matters – that is a claim without foundation and with no sound argumentation but instead just a vague appeal to our 'intuitions'.<sup>25</sup> We leave Parfit for the moment and move on to Bernard Williams, who in a direct interchange with Parfit also rejected the psychological continuity argument. Instead, he proposes a physical criterion of identity.

## 2.2 The Physical Criterion of Continuity

In a much discussed paper entitled *The Self and The Future*, Bernard Williams reaches the tentative conclusion that what counts in identity is the physical argument. The 'body transplant' experiments of Bernard Williams are well-known and will therefore be only cursorily described, leaving out most of the details and the means by which Williams reaches his conclusions. His central experiment is best described in his own words:

Suppose that there were some process to which two persons, *A* and *B*, could be subjected as a result of which they might be said – question-beggingly – to have *exchanged bodies*. That is to say – less question-beggingly – there is a certain human body which is such that when previously we were confronted with it, we were confronted with person *A*, certain utterances coming from it were expressive of memories of the past experiences of *A*, certain movements of it partly constituted the actions of *A* and were taken as expressive of the character of *A*, and so forth; but now, after the process is completed, utterances coming from this body are expressive of what seem to be just those memories which previously we identified as memories of the past experiences of *B*, its movements partly constitute actions expressive of the character of *B*, and so forth; and conversely with the other body.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to some participants in the debate, Williams is canny enough to avoid suggesting something as specific as a brain transplant. Instead, he has postulated a vague notion of body transplant. Williams proposes a complex chain of follow-on experiments involving matters such as instant and total amnesia, torture of one of the bodies involved and so forth. And like Parfit he appeals to our *intuitions* in evaluating what happens. His conclusions are tentative, but he appears to favour a physical criterion of continuity and

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<sup>25</sup> Is an appeal to intuition an acceptable approach in arguing a philosophical point? Do our current intuitions have some special status or in some way give us access to knowledge not otherwise available? I take a sceptical approach to intuition and find considerable support for my scepticism in : Williamson, Timothy. *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, Bernard. *The Self and the Future*. Reproduced in: Perry, John. *Personal Identity*. Berkeley: University of California 1975. 180.

therefore of personal identity. In spite of a certain sympathy with his *conclusions*, my own position is that his argument, based as it is on faulty premises, is an unsound one. It is these premises which will be discussed, as they lead us forward towards a central theme of this paper.

### ***The Implausible Premises of Williams' Experiment***

Williams presupposes that it is conceptually feasible to carry through a body transplant, i.e. to neatly remove the "mentalist" aspects from *B* and to implement them in the body of *A*, and vice-versa. So that *B* is now in some sense in possession of the body of *A* and *A* is in some sense in possession of the body of *B*. Williams himself calls his experiment "question-begging" and refers at the beginning of his text to certain objections to the experiment, "not in order to pursue them further here, but precisely in order to get them out of the way."<sup>27</sup> He dismisses these objections with what I would call chutzpah, because the objections are by no means trivial: some of these objections relate to differences in age, sex and appearance between donor and donee and are not to be treated lightly but instead lead us directly to conceptual quandaries or questions of principle involved in the idea of body transplant. In questioning the experiment, the approach taken is one of *reductio ad absurdum*. We will run through the Williams experiment as postulated and examine the consequences from two different viewpoints, first of all from the perspective of a possible subject and secondly from the viewpoint of the hypothetical surgeon.

Suppose 72-year-old American senator John McCain were to be given the body of a physically similar, brain-dead but otherwise healthy man of equal age. The Secret Service and the voting public might now have their problems, but probably they could be convinced that McCain Mark 2 be identical with McCain Mark 1 and that therefore he should be voted into the senate and pass the identity checks necessary to be admitted into the chamber. John will have to learn to shave a new face in the morning and his wife Cindy might even learn to love the new physiognomy of her husband – although she has an aversion to blue eyes, which happen to be a feature of the transplanted body.

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<sup>27</sup> Williams (1975). 180.



So far, so good, the problems appear to be manageable and Williams' experiment as such to function.

Once we accept the *principle* of the experiment, however, a chasm of counter-intuitive possibilities opens up. Why not give McCain the body of a healthy 50-year-old, which would make more sense than giving him an old body? Or maybe that of a 30-year-old – or perhaps that of a young boy, nothing else being available? Indeed, if the experiment were viable in principle, he could be given the body of a 5-year old *girl*. The Secret Service, the voting public, and Cindy McCain are going to find that situation very difficult to handle: how are they going to conceptually compound the mentalistic properties of their senator with the physical form of a 5-year-old girl? Quite apart from problems raised for McCain himself – or *herself*? – by such a transplant. How is he going to implement his various "character traits" in the body of a five-year-old girl? It will be left to the imagination of the reader to puzzle over the various anomalies which must arise from such an experiment. We have no intuitions available which tell us what that artificially created entity will be like: identical either to the previously existing McCain, or to the 5-year-old who had previously existed, or, most likely, an indeterminable hodgepodge of both? In short, this *reductio* shows that Williams' experiment leads consequences which are both absurd and contradictory. Therefore, the concept of body transplant fails to tell us anything which is plausible about personal identity, let alone offer us a conclusive argument on the issue.

Williams might well dismiss the *reductio* as irrelevant to the point that he wants to make but in fact it highlights a fundamental *objection in principle* to the idea of a body transplant. One is confronted here with a blanc-mange of conceptual confusions and Williams cannot plausibly argue a case by making use of an experiment which cannot function in principle. The objection is based on the non-dualistic premise of this paper: given that we are material beings, i.e. that we are *res-extensa*, that there is no *res-cogitans*, no ghost in the machine and no homunculus in the head, how can we conceive of some physical process to separate 'memories' and 'character traits' from the body? To further argue this point, such a thought experiment will be run through again, this time from the point of view of the surgeon involved.

Being a woman of caution, with extensive professional knowledge of the body but in need of conceptual support, she calls in a team of experts, including psychologists, philosophers and neurologists. What is it that is to be transplanted? Told that she is to transplant "memories and character traits" she will respond that there is no discrete functional unit in the body labelled 'memory' or 'character'. Memory and character relate in some sense to brain storage areas and brain processing areas, but they are parts of a different kind of paradigm. One of the team then makes the suggestion that what must be transplanted is the brain. But this really gets the discussion rolling. What parts of the brain – which is far from being a homogeneous organ? The cerebellum, the neocortex, or the entire brain? And, if one decides to transplant the brain, what about the spinal chord, which together with the brain constitutes the central nervous system? My in-house psychologist tells me that many of our memory functions, as well as other personality-relevant traits, are implemented in the spinal chord or in the central nervous system as a whole, in some cases by-passing the brain. And what about the eyes, which are so intricately connected with the visual cortex as to make it functionally virtually impossible to separate them from the cortex? So should we leave the eyes attached to the brain and transplant them too? But something similar applies to the other sensory organs; if we are to transplant the eyes, we must plausibly move ears and nose too. The discussion intensifies further on matters of glands and other organs, distributed throughout the body, directly or indirectly involved in producing the various hormones and neurotransmitters which are of vital importance in the implementation of personhood, including for instance the gonads. The sexual drive is an important feature of any personal identity, the psychologist points out; but what do you transplant, in order to implement an identical sexual drive in a new body? The final difficulty arises from the fact that the transplant subject in this case happens to be a *world-class musician*. Many of her skills and memory functions are implemented in her hands, making it inconceivable that she could gain a new pair of hands but still maintain her identity as a pianist. (The role of skills in continuity and identity will be taken up in section four).

In short, the conclusion is that Williams et al. are guilty of a category error in implying that memory, personal traits or personality are physically implemented in specific organs and therefore capable of being transplanted in the way conceived. On the contrary, it seems to be the case that 'the person' is implemented in the *body-as-a-whole* – an issue that will be further developed in the following main section. One can no more separate the personality from the body than one can physically separate the morning star from the evening star – or either from the planet Venus. We are involved in a confusion between intensional and extensional definitions.<sup>28</sup>

A further conclusion is as follows: Williams may be on the right track in supposing the body – or the physical criterion – is of critical importance in the issue of personal identity. In that sense I agree with his conclusions. But he fails to make the necessary paradigmatic shift: from a paradigm of dualism, in this case, dualism between what he calls "mentalistic and bodily criteria of personal identity"<sup>29</sup>, to an uncompromisingly monistic position. Some general conclusions can now be drawn from the reductionist debate.

### 2.3 The Reductionist Debate and Frankenstein's Monster

That is by no means the end of the reductionist debate. There is for instance an extensive discussion on what might happen when the two hemispheres of the brain are separated and then commence a separate existence in two different bodies.<sup>30</sup> My in-house psychologist suggests that such discussions are also based on faulty premises, i.e. an idea dating from the first days of research into brain laterality but long since discredited that the two halves of the brain are functionally identical. That is not the case at all. Furthermore, some of the confusions in the reductionist debate are reflected in an issue highlighted by Wittgenstein as follows: "Roughly speaking, to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to

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<sup>28</sup> See: Gottlob Frege: *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*. *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, NF 100, 1892, S. 25-50. A more detailed discussion on the matter of sense and meaning could be meaningful in the context of personal identity.

<sup>29</sup> Williams (1975). 197.

<sup>30</sup> Such discussions are described in: Olson, Eric T (2002/2008). Personal Identity, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL: [plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal).

say nothing at all."<sup>31</sup> Reductionists should take note of such reservations. What general conclusions can be drawn from the reductionist debate?

In section one of this paper, there was reference to Quante in redefining the debate more closely in terms of 'the personal identity of human beings'. In the light of that particular debate, Parfit, and to a lesser extent Williams, are arguing beside the point. Their argument is about 'the (personal) identity of X', whereby X can be one of several things: *a human being, an android or replica of a human being, an identical clone, or a composite of two human beings*. Perhaps even a machine would do, as I myself have argued. That is not the issue we set out to discuss. Perhaps the day will come when there are no restrictions as to which parts of bodies can be transplanted. But, from the point of view of our current knowledge, the *artefact* produced by a combination of parts from two or more persons would be no more predictable in its qualities than that of a fictional creation of literature – Frankenstein's Monster. We cannot reliably conceive of what personality traits such a artefact might have – that was the point that Mary Shelley wished to make with her novel of morality, *Frankenstein*, in which personal identity plays a central role.<sup>32</sup> The scientist Frankenstein sets out to create a paragon of human perfection but ends up instead with a creature which is confused in its identity, and, out of that confusion, develops into a murderous monster.<sup>33</sup> Seen in this light, the reductionist discussion takes on an entirely speculative mantle. *Reductionists be warned*. The reductionist debate will be closed on that ironically moralistic note.

Worthy of discussion, however, are certain concepts arising out of the thought experiments of Parfit and Williams: on the one hand a strongly modified and extended version of the 'psychological continuity' criterion of identity will play a central role in the section on narrative identity; and on the other, the physical criterion of identity will be at the center of attention in the coming main section, that on numerical or formal identity.

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted and discussed in: Honderich, Ted (ed.). *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy. Second Edition*. Oxford: OUP 2005. 418. The author of the insert speaks of "the paradox of identity" but I do not believe that it is a paradox at all. What we have is simply a misuse of language.

<sup>32</sup> Shelley, Mary Wollstonecroft. *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Oxford: OUP 1969.

<sup>33</sup> The mythological Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods and passed it on to humans. He was punished severely by Zeus for his presumption.

### 3 Numerical and Formal Identity

#### 3.1 The Body, *Tout Court*?

We are now addressing *The Persistence-of-Person-Problem (PPP)*. What is the essence of numerical identity, as seen in the persistence of one person over time? A broad approach will be taken in addressing that issue.

There is a long tradition in Western Thought which sees the mind and the body as antagonists rather than as two aspects of a whole. This paradigm finds expression in St. Paul: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law of my members, warring against the law of my mind."<sup>34</sup> The archetypical scholastic philosopher-monk alternated between the exercise of his mind at his desk and self-flagellation in his cell, which was intended to subdue the body. Given a *monistic* rather than a *monastic* premise however, it follows that such mind-body paradigms of the past should be replaced by a new paradigm of the body, a body in which the 'mentalist' aspects of our person are implemented. Such paradigmatic shifts are difficult but confusions are caused by hanging on to old paradigms.<sup>35</sup>

It is not being argued that, given a complete physicalist description of the body, then one would also have a complete description of mental states – that is an issue much discussed elsewhere but not a condition of my own argument. My thesis is a more straightforward one: we *are our bodies*. There is no simple relationship between our thoughts, or mental states and our bodies: but it should be equally clear that, in the absence of the body, there *are* no mental states. When the body dies, the mind dies with it. (Religiously motivated ideas of personal survival after death have been excluded from the scope of this debate).

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<sup>34</sup> *Romans*. 7:23.

<sup>35</sup> On the issue of paradigmatic shifts, see: Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago 1996.

In the philosophical literature, the body has traditionally been sold short. One of the few specifically philosophical treatments of the body is by Mark Johnson. His book, *The Meaning of the Body*, cannot be exploited in detail here, but it can serve to highlight some relevant issues. He makes the following point:

*There is no radical mind/body separation. A person is not a mind and a body. There are not two "things" somehow mysteriously yoked together. What we call a "person" is a certain kind of bodily organism that has a brain operating within its body, a body that is continually interacting with aspects of its environments (material and social) in an ever-changing process of experience. ... we designate certain dimensions of these ongoing experiential processes "mind" and other dimensions "body" but we do this only reflectively and for very specific purposes that we have in trying to make sense of our experience. ... When your "body" ceases to function as a living, organic whole of coordinated activities and processes, you lose your "mind". It doesn't just go away somewhere and hide. Rather, it ceases to exist.*<sup>36</sup>

This passage is compatible with the kind of objections voiced concerning some thought experiments. If a functionally significant part of *A* is removed from *A*'s body, then *A* no longer exists as *A*. If you have any doubts about this, just imagine trying to be angry without your body. When you are truly angry, your body changes. Blood pressure rises, pulse increases, your heart starts pounding, your facial expression changes, as does our body stance. Anger without a body is an empty concept – or a nearly empty concept. Some might argue that, given a body transplant, perhaps *A* could learn to respond angrily by means of *B*'s body, or *A* could learn to make use of *B*'s hands to play her music. But that is question-begging. As anger is not a purely mental process but a process involving the whole of the body, the actual nature of the anger which might arise within the body which consists of parts of *A* combined with parts of *B* is as unpredictable as in the case of Frankenstein's monster, a point previously made. The pianist's hands contribute in some way to the quality and nature of the music produced, independently of anything that her brain or central nervous system might have to contribute. With different hands, she would be producing different music.

We do not consist of discrete functional units responsible for specific mental states or events. We have a body, and within that body there various components or functional units which must cooperate in a complex and

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<sup>36</sup> Johnson, Mark. *The Meaning of the Body*. Chicago: University of Chicago 2007. 11-12.

holistic way in order for us to survive and exist as persons. Indeed, our personal identity seems to survive our death and live on in the body, as will next be argued.

### ***Respect for Dead Bodies***

The earliest undisputed ritual human burial dates back 130,000 years or so but burial fields as old as 200,000 years have been found.<sup>37</sup> We need not concern ourselves with the rationale behind such burial matters.<sup>38</sup> The central issue relevant to our debate is that throughout human history human bodies were not simply 'disposed of' as some kind of lifeless biomass but, even in death, were treated with respect. In some sense at least, personal identity, when seen as identity of body, appears to continue after death.

In our own time and in most or all cultures, the disposal of human bodies is strictly circumvented by laws and ethical strictures. The issue of whether stillborn children should be granted a proper ceremony or simply 'disposed of' causes controversy and pain to many bereaved (potential) parents. Cases in which bodies are unwittingly switched, as happens by accident from time to time, cause anguish to relatives and friends of the deceased, if discovered. A recent case of 'body-snatching' of the body a prominent person, twelve years dead, with subsequent attempts at extorting a ransom from the bereaved, shows us that even after such a considerable time the body is still considered to be a bearer of personal identity. In cases of tragic accidents such as air disasters, forensic pathologists are rushed in from all over the world to ensure the unambiguous identification of the victims' remains. The purpose is not legal, as death could be established by other forms of evidence: it is important in most cultures that the true remains be identified and returned to grieving families.

### ***The Body and Personal Identity***

Given this central role of the body, on the one hand as the locus where our mentalist aspects are realized and on the other as an entity which can formally be given a name and an identification beyond the moment of death, the

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<sup>37</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burial>. 23.01.2009.

<sup>38</sup> Aspects of this issue are interestingly dealt with in Martin and Barresi (2006).

following inferences can be drawn. Firstly, personal identity in a numerical sense is a somatic issue: the body, even when dead, is given the kind of respect and regard which we otherwise associate with living persons. Secondly, the kind of respect shown towards the bodies of the dead indicates that (at least) from a third person perspective, personal identity survives physical death. This undermines any theory which wishes to reduce personal identity to anything other than the body. Memory and psychological continuity have clearly ceased at the moment of death but personal identity continues, albeit in a modified form.

If one accepts that numerical identity is a matter of the body, *tout court*, one is still faced with the issue of *formal* identification of that body, as will now be taken up.

### 3.2 The Story of Luise and Lotte

The most difficult case to be tackled in the matter of formal identity is the case of identical twins. Monozygotic twins are never *perfectly* identical, i.e. in an *idem*-sense, but for the purposes of this paper we will give Luise and Lotte the status of being idealised identical twins, i.e. they are identical in every feature that meets the eye. So do they share a common identity? The answer given by our own reference pair of twins within the family circle is a firm *NO*. They hate being confused with each other, being seen as interchangeable or being treated as *one*.<sup>39</sup> They have a very clear sense of personal, *ipse*-identity; indeed, their perfectly synchronic existence and *idem*-identity makes it more important for them to develop a sense of individual identity than is the case with other siblings. We have a problem of differentiation to solve.

That problem starts at the moment of birth – or even before, if parents go to the trouble of naming the pair in the womb. We don't need to apply any complex theories, however: maternity wards are subject to strict rules and standard procedure with all children is to inscribe the time and date of birth on

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<sup>39</sup> Passionate lovers sometimes claim the desire to merge together, to abandon their individual identity for the sake of a joint identity. That might apply in some *perfect moment of coitus* but is not likely to extend over the whole of the day – or week, or month, or year. And it cannot apply to the body, which in each case occupies discrete space-time coordinates.



an irremovable plastic band around the child's wrist<sup>40</sup>. In a case of twins, a note is made of whether the child is the first-born or the second-born. Formal identity has now been established in a preliminary sense. It is finalised when the parents decide on a pair of names and on whether the firstborn is Luise or Lotte. Their birth is then formally registered at the registry office. Barring accidental or deliberate mix-ups, Lotte and Luise have on the one hand been given an unequivocal means of *identification*, and on the other have taken on an *identity* that they will carry for the rest of their lives.<sup>41</sup> It might be the case, of course, that the one or the other twin change names in the course of their lives but, given a functioning bureaucracy, that change will be documented as such and therefore traceable.

The situation of Lotte and Luise is analogous to that of the red Volvos mentioned in section 1.3 – my reference twins will hopefully forgive me this comment. There is a double analogy between key-coding and fingerprints on the one hand, and registration plates and personal name on the other. It is not impossible for two cars, by some fluke of statistics, to have exactly the same key coding but the chances of them having both the same key-coding *and* the same registration number is extremely small and indicative of a formal error, something that can never entirely be ruled out. If we relate fingerprints to key-coding and the plastic band or birth certificate to the car registration plate, we will have established an analogy which is sufficient, *ceteris paribus*, to guarantee identification and establish formal identity. As soon as Lotte and Luise are old enough, they themselves will 'flash' in response to the calling of their name and reveal their individual identities – always assuming that they do not choose to play games of identity with others.

The 'identical-twin' case seems to pose special problems of personal identity because of the extreme similarity in appearance between the two. But in fact there is no difference in principle between the case of zygotic twins or the case

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<sup>40</sup> My source for this information is my sister-in-law Angela Jakob, who is not only a maternity nurse but herself a mother of identical twins.

<sup>41</sup> Given our idealised twins, we can speculate on the 'dangers' of the two being at some time or other confused – after the moment at which the band is removed. Maybe Lotte at six weeks has become Luise at seven weeks. This, however, refers to matters of *identification*, as opposed to matters of *identity*.

of any other two persons. The next sub-section will be a generalization of the issue of formal identity.

### 3.3 Formal Identity Generalized

What has been done in the previous sub-section is to attach a rigid designator to each of the twins, or more precisely, to the body of each of the twins.<sup>42</sup> Given the central role of the body which is argued here, that is a procedure which is straightforward. Is this a matter of *identification* as opposed to *personal identity*? On the other hand, could one conceive of personal identity without personal identification?

There is a fine interplay between identification on the one hand and identity on the other, as is seen by returning to Luise and Lotte. Suppose the parents, after the birth of their idealized identical twins, decided not to bother about giving them individual rigid designators, i.e. names. Suppose that they settled instead on Lieselotte as a name for both twins. Imagine the consequences for personal identity. There is no way for the social environment to distinguish between the two Lieselottes. The teacher at school might be astonished to discover that on Tuesday, Lieselotte has a clear grasp of the theorem of Pythagoras, but on Wednesday Lieselotte has no idea what it is. The dentist removes one of Lieselotte's teeth on Wednesday – and removes the same tooth from Lieselotte on Thursday. From the first person perspective, the two would have similar difficulties: suppose their mother called out for help from the kitchen and both Lieselottes responded. But the mother now rejects the one in favour of the other, as she only needs one twin, leaving the rejected one hurt and confused about her personal identity. The examples can be developed ad infinitum. It seems from this example that an unequivocal identification is an essential component of identity.

If the reader is still not convinced, there is another kind of case which illustrates the role of identification in identity. A daily newspaper reported on such a case under the heading: *Verloren im Nebel. Brigitte D. hat nach einer Gehirnblutung ihr Gedächtnis verloren – was sie nicht aufschreibt, verschwindet aus ihrem*

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<sup>42</sup> See: Kripke, Saul A. *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Blackwell 1980.

*Leben*.<sup>43</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Brigitte has lost her personal identity – after all, she was capable of giving a newspaper interview and she still retains many of her daily habits. But without being daily reminded of her name, she in the literal sense does not know who she is. Again, it seems that identification is an element of identity. This could be developed into an extensive discussion on naming and necessity, but the discussion must be broken off here. In summary, it suffices to say that the function of identification is the recognition and the designation of personal identity.

### 3.4 Summing up on Formal Identity

Before summing up, it is worth referring back to the position of Paul Ricoeur, as very briefly sketched out in sub-section 1.3. It was a premise of Ricoeur's position that there is no core part of a person which remains unchanged over time and that therefore the sole solution to the problem of *ipse*-identity is to be found in narrative. Its time to suggest that his position, although interesting, is in fact untenable. There are in fact two things which remain unchanged over time. One thing or set of things is the series of biographical data attached to each person. We do not change our date of birth with age. That side of matters will be taken up within the sphere of narrative identity but there is another set of things which also remains unchanged over time: there are certain qualities of the body which remain with us for all of our lives. All human persons have a body, and just one body, if we leave out science-fiction confusions of the issue. In a primitive sense, the *ipse-identity* of that body can be established and maintained, in the face of all doubts and changes, by straightforward biometric means such as fingerprinting or DNA-typing.<sup>44</sup> By attaching numerical or formal *ipse*-identity to the body, we solve the issue of identity in a way which is unequivocal and inclusive of all. By cross reference to documentation, formal identity can be established and maintained; a formal chain of identity which starts before birth – after all, our parents are registered in that documentation – and continues after our deaths because even when dead we 'survive' in that

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<sup>43</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Nr. 2. 2009. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Even in the case of monozygotic twins, who at birth share most of their DNA but not their fingerprints. Latest research shows that epigenetic modification of DNA takes place over time but enough of DNA remains unchanged to ensure unequivocal identification. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identical\\_twins#Monozygotic\\_twins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identical_twins#Monozygotic_twins)

documentation. That might seem philosophically uninteresting but it is nevertheless an essential feature of any map of personal identity. This is an issue which has always been important in our Western Culture at least, as is shown in the opening lines of the nativity story according to St. Luke: "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...And everyone went to his own town to register."<sup>45</sup>

It is now time to move on to the final substantive section, that on narrative identity.

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<sup>45</sup> *Luke*, 2:1-3

## 4 Narrative Identity

### 4.1 77 2178 *Alias* Miriam Stein

77 2178 was the designator assigned to a baby found wrapped in newspaper in front of the town hall of Seoul/Korea, in the year 1978. Officials later gave her the name of Park Yung Min, an agglomerate of the most common Korean names. Afterwards adopted by the Stein family in Osnabrück, she now carries the name of Miriam Stein. Currently, Miriam Stein stars in a play in Berlin which highlights the issues of personal identity.<sup>46</sup> Her personal story further discounts any idea that personal identity is not what matters but the point to be made here is the following: without application of formal identity, it would have been difficult indeed to trace or recreate her narrative identity, as she had done.

Names alone do not determine identity in all its facets, of course. In a text which bridges the terrain between formal identity and narrative identity, Pierre Bourdieu suggests the following:

The proper name is the visible affirmation of the identity of its bearer across time and social space, the basis of the unity of one's successive manifestations, and of the socially accepted possibilities of integrating these manifestations, in official records, curriculum vitae, cursus honorum, police record, obituary, or biography, which constitute life as a finite sum through the verdict given in a temporary or final reckoning. 'Rigid designator', the proper name is the form par excellence of the arbitrary imposition operated by the rites of institution, the attribution of a name and classification introduce clear-cut, absolute divisions, indifferent to circumstances and to individual accidents, amidst shifting biological and social realities. This is why the proper name cannot describe properties and conveys no information about that which it names; biological and social properties undergoing constant flux, all descriptions are valid only within the limits of a specific stage or place. In other words, it can only attest to the identity of the personality, as socially constituted individuality, at the price of an enormous abstraction.<sup>47</sup>

The purpose of this section is not to give a complete account of narrative identity but to contextualise the theme within a holistic map of identity, and to sketch out some of the issues involved in narrative identity. We are now

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<sup>46</sup> This extraordinary narrative was recounted in a daily newspaper. Laudenbach Peter: *Ich war 77 2178* in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 64/51 nr. 295. 19.12.2008.

<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Biographical Illusion*. In: Du Gay Paul, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman. *Identity: A Reader*. Sage: London 2000. 300.

addressing what Quante calls *The Structure-of-Personality-Problem (SPP)*. That raises the question: why speak of narrative, rather than simply of qualitative identity per se?

## 4.2 Pro and Contra Narrativity

A plausible approach to the issue of identity and self is given by Daniel Dennett. In a paper of the same name, he speaks of "the self as a center of narrative gravity" – elegantly sidestepping the issue of whether we possess a unitary self in any concrete sense.<sup>48</sup> Dennett uses as metaphor for self the center of gravity of any given object, which is not an actual physical "atom" in the object itself but a virtual point through which the forces of gravity act. In calling any particular atom the center of gravity, we would be making a category mistake. In the same way, it is our narrative that brings together all the various aspects of our self and of our personal identity, independently of whether there may be an identifiable thing which could be called our *self*.

We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography.

The chief fictional character at the center of that autobiography is one's self. And if you still want to know what the self *really* is, you are making a category mistake. After all, when a human being's behavioural control system becomes seriously impaired, it can turn out that the best hermeneutical story we can tell about the individual says that there is more than one character "inhabiting" that body.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, our self is something that exists largely in our biography, or autobiography. I am not sure if I fully agree with Dennett or not but his *working model* of self is a useful one.

In the essay *Against Narrativity*, Galen Strawson highlights some of the issues involved and takes a contrary position to the kind of standard acceptance of narrativity.<sup>50</sup> Strawson speaks of two different narrativity theses: on the one hand there is what he calls "the *psychological Narrativity thesis*" which he describes as " a straightforwardly empirical, descriptive thesis about the way ordinary human beings actually experience their lives." The other side of the coin is "the *ethical Narrativity thesis*" which claims that "experiencing or conceiving one's life

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<sup>48</sup> Dennett, Daniel C. *The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity*. In: Kessel, F., P. Cole and D. Johnson, eds, *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum 1992.

<sup>49</sup> Dennett (1992). 114.

<sup>50</sup> Strawson, Galen. *Against Narrativity*, in: *Ratio* (new series) XVII 4 December 2004 0034–0006.

as a narrative is a good thing; a richly Narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood." Strawson rejects both theses, arguing that is all a matter of personal inclinations. According to his position, there are some of us who are basically *diachronically inclined* in their way of living and they will be naturally drawn towards the narrative approach to their own lives. Whereas others are "Episodic individuals who are likely to have no particular tendency to see their life in Narrative terms."<sup>51</sup> Without going into details of his argumentation, I believe that Strawson is propagating a category mistake in placing the terms *episodic – narrative* in apposition to one another; the correct pairing is *episodic – diachronic* (which he also uses) and he therefore fails to produce a convincing argument against narrativity.

I follow Strawson in believing that there are differences between individuals in whether they might be diachronically or episodically inclined: there are those who go in for long term planning of career and lifestyle and there are others who prefer to live spontaneously and make decisions on the spur of the moment, out of each individual situation.<sup>52</sup> We probably all know individuals at either end of the open scale from episodic to diachronic – and lots more distributed right across the scale. This undermines the hypothesis of Strawson as episodicity and diachronicity seem to be matters of *degree*, of more or less; and not matters of *definition*, of either/or.

Furthermore, variations between episodic and diachronic behaviour can also happen within a given self, dependent on time or on the situation. To give an example: Rebecca might be episodically inclined in the disco, losing all sense of time and living only for the moment of intense music and dance. But next morning that self-same Rebecca might be in a process of intense planning of her future career and therefore strongly diachronically oriented. Most of us will know moments of both kinds in our selves.

In spite of individual differences it seems to be impossible, barring severe mental illness, *not* to be in the process of interpreting our own lives and *not*

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<sup>51</sup> Strawson (2004). 429-430.

<sup>52</sup> Strawson claims for his own self the status of an episodically inclined individual, but the notion of a university professor without long-term career planning, without bothering about his CV, taking up jobs on the spur of the moment and so on – severely overtaxes my credulity.

writing a narrative. In spite of having been highly episodic in the disco, for instance, Rebecca will integrate that particular episode into her own narrative next day in recounting it to a friend. To argue the point by analogy: we can never dress in such a way as to *not* project some image or other. The person who follows the agenda of projecting *no image*, for instance by avoiding all the well-known brands of dress, sports goods and so on, is by default in fact expressing an image of being free of any standard category of image – and that is also a specific category, or image, ironically characterized by the marketing of *no-name* brands, a perfect illustration of the paradox of non-image.

Similarly with narrative: an episodic narrative is *also* a narrative. Those who define themselves as long-term, well-orientated, career-and-family planners and so on clearly express *one kind of narrative*, a conscious and straightforward kind which is characterized by a high degree of diachronic awareness. Those who specifically claim to live in an episodic way, never deciding more than a short period of time in advance on what they are going to do or where they are going to be, are expressing *another kind of narrative*, an episodic narrative which is a part of their own way of living their lives. The episodic narrative might appear paradoxical but both kinds of narratives are in fact narratives, however disjointed or inconsequential they might be in individual cases. The story of the beach bum is *also* a story, even if nothing of particular significance ever happens in his life. The spontaneous beach bum is creating or projecting his identity just as clearly as the career-minded academic. Post-modern fictional authors have on occasion tried hard to avoid the inevitability of narrative, as they have tried to do away with any kind of structure: but narrative appears to be unavoidable because, even if the author succeeds in writing a novel without a clear narrative progression, dissolving issues of time and space in involved ways, the readers tend to undermine that very attempt by simply superimposing a narrative interpretation on the work.<sup>53</sup> It seems that we find it

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<sup>53</sup> A good example is Paul Auster's novel *City of Glass*, which builds on an intricate interweaving of various levels of episodes and events in the course of some weeks or months in New York, the time scale is unclear. The author himself appears by name, his own apartment in New York play a role in the novel, as do some actual family members; and the first person narrator, who is not an impersonification of the author, himself becomes drawn into a story which is not his own story but a story that he observes unfolding. In the face of the best efforts of the author, the typical reader (as evidenced by most of the participants in a recent university



difficult to deal with anything that is supposedly without trans-temporal meaning.

Narrativity, whether psychological or ethical, is unavoidable. That leads us into a central issue in the business of narrativity: do we create ourselves in our narrative or do we discover ourselves in our narrative?

### 4.3 Self-Creation versus Authenticity

Building on the previous section, four central questions arise with regard to the issue of narrativity and identity:

1. Is personal qualitative identity something that is *given*? Is it a set of characteristics or predispositions given by the circumstances of heredity and birth, something to be *discovered* rather than created?
2. Or, is personal qualitative identity something that is *made*? For instance the measures that we take in writing our own narratives, our participation in the creation of our own personality?
3. What is the role of *the other* in the making of personal qualitative identity? Most significantly, the roles of parents, siblings, teachers, friends and the partner that one chooses – and later the role of one's own children?
4. In a wider sense: what is the role of circumstances in determining our identity? This addresses matters such as place and time of birth, family circumstances, the education we receive, choice of profession, lucky or unlucky incidents and other events outside of our control, all matters of significance in our narrative, and therefore relative to our narrative identities.

The latter two questions concerning the role of the other and the effects of circumstances will not be directly addressed here: such issues in any case require the assistance of psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists. The first two issues are however essential elements in a philosophical mapping of identity, in a way summarized by Kwame Appiah:

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seminar) find themselves looking for a narrative thread or coherence in the work – which they also find. Auster, Paul. *City of Glass*. London: Penguin 1987.

At this point, it may be helpful to consider two rival pictures of what is involved in shaping one's individuality. One, a picture that comes from romanticism, is the idea of finding one's self – of discovering, by means of reflection or a careful attention to the world, a meaning for one's life that is already there, waiting to be found. This is the vision we can call *authenticity*: it is a matter of being true to who you already are, or would be if it weren't for distorting influences. "The Soul of Man under Socialism" is one locus classicus of this vision. ... The other picture, the *existentialist* picture, let's call it, is one in which, as the doctrine goes, existence precedes essence: that is, you exist first and then have to decide what to exist *as*, who to be, afterward. On an extreme version of this view, we have to make a self up, as it were out of nothing, like God at the Creation, and individuality is valuable because only a person who has made a self has a life worth living.<sup>54</sup>

The authentic vision is considerably older than Romanticism but that is a minor quibble. The existentialist picture has a long history behind it too, dating back to ancient times. The modernist discussion on the matter dates back to the Age of Reason and to the concept of *tabula rasa* as developed by Locke and others. Appiah goes on to suggest that both pictures are wrong: "The authenticity picture is wrong because it suggests that there is no role for creativity in making a self, that the self is already and in its totality fixed by our natures."<sup>55</sup> In rejecting the existentialist picture, Appiah goes on to quote John Stuart Mill:

"Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow ... according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing," Mill told us. His metaphor makes the constraints apparent: a tree, whatever the circumstances, does not become a legume, a vine or a cow.<sup>56</sup>

Appiah goes for a reasonable middle view that it is a good thing to construct one's identity but that the identity is to be constructed taking into account " facts outside oneself." And also, one should add, taking into account facts *inside* oneself. Both aspects are immanent in any theory of narrativity and identity. Extending Mill's metaphor: a tree grows and develops in response to the environment in which it finds itself, but also shapes the environment in which it grows. The shade cast by the tree determines what kind of plants are likely to grow in its immediate environs, for instance. And the tall oak constitutes a significant modification and feature of the environment, or landscape in which it grows.

The time scale is a necessary component of any narrative, and it is continuity over time which plays a central role in narrativity. Continuity theories so far

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<sup>54</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University 2005. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Appiah (2005). 18.

<sup>56</sup> Appiah (2005). 18.

mentioned are far from adequate and this leads into the previously promised, more comprehensive theory of continuity.

#### 4.4 Memory, Continuity and Identity

Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* is a narration centered on the decline and fall of the eminent and ancient Marchmain family in the England of the 1920s, a decline exemplified by the complex and disastrous fates of the various surviving family members. The narrative is recounted from the perspective of World War II, when family friend Charles Ryder returns to the former family seat Brideshead, now in disrepair and a military camp:

My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning of war-time. These memories, which are my life – for we possess nothing certainly except the past – were always with me. Like the pigeons of St. Mark's, they were everywhere, under my feet, in little honey-voiced congregations, nodding, strutting, winking, rolling the tender feathers of their necks, perching sometimes, if I stood still, on my shoulder; until, suddenly, the noon gun boomed and in a moment with a flutter and sweep of wings, the pavement was bare and the whole sky above dark with a tumult of fowl. Thus it was that morning of war-time.<sup>57</sup>

Should this elegiac metaphor of memory be seen as an affirmation of the central or supreme relevance of such conscious memories to our qualitative identity – *These memories, which are my life?* But the rest of the novel belies this jejune reduction of continuity to memory alone by the first person narrator. The novel shows, as many novels do, that *memories* and *the past* are not synonymous, quite apart from the fact that we can possess neither *certainly*. In this section, the reader can cash in the rain check previously issued and expect a more complete theory of continuity than that offered by Parfit et al., a theory which includes continuity in the widest sense of the term and substantially modifies the psychological continuity theory previously highlighted. In discussing continuity, a good place to start is the distant past, beyond the reach of mere memories.

##### *The Distant Past*

The first objection to a straightforward concept of memory and psychological continuity is as follows: many of the most important events in our lives, events which contribute significantly to both our numerical and our narrative identity,

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<sup>57</sup> Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited. The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*. London: Chapman & Hall 1954/1960. 251.

happen before we are born and are therefore not a part of our *personal* memory. The Marchmain family consciously and unconsciously traces its origins back at least to Elizabethan times and the family residence, which plays a central role in the drama, is several hundred years old. The decline of the family can be traced back to events which took place long before the actual story unfolds; in the narration, Ryder recounts matters which neither he nor any living member of the family experienced personally, and which therefore cannot be simply personal memories.<sup>58</sup>

The distant past, roughly defined as the sum total of events which occurred previous to our own psychological awareness but which influence our own personal narrative, is the first component in our personal continuity. Now it is time to move on to the past as we personally experienced it.

### *Our Personal Past*

Like many others, I clearly and distinctly remember my own first schoolday as if it were yesterday. A problem arises, however, from the fact that this memory version of the narrative is essentially untrue. Photographic evidence and the contradictory memories of that day given by older family members show that there are substantial confusions in those memories which are supposed to be my life. There is nothing unusual in that, my in-house psychologist tells me. Conscious memories are dramatically unreliable. We 'remember' events that never took place, or forget significant events that did, or confound things we have been *told* with things we feel that we have *experienced*. Memories are *reconstructions* of the past, rather than *recollections* of the past. The storage of memories is a procedure which nature has arranged with economy. A straightforward recording of past events would confront our bodies with impossible quantities of data to store, so we store some bare bones and theories and reconstruct from them. We are aware that there are some things which we forget, of course, or only remember vaguely. But most of us have stories like the one recounted above, things we feel pretty certain about in our memories, by the simple fact that we do not have two versions of one event

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<sup>58</sup> Even if *Brideshead Revisited* is a work of fiction, the novel is written in the tradition known as Formal Realism and, for the purposes of this analysis, we can treat it as if it were a true account.

available in our memories, and therefore have no internal possibilities for verification. Only an external verification can bring incongruities to light, incongruities which undermine a straightforward idea of psychological continuity. Happily, the incongruities discovered in this and other instances do not lead me to doubt my numerical identity at all – although they should, were I a consequential follower of Parfit's theory. In such a case, there would be one *self* as portrayed in my own 'psychological continuity' and another *self* as shown by documentary evidence. Such speculation is unproductive.

So what, the sceptic might say? Does it matter if our memories correspond to the facts? If we are not made by our true memories then perhaps we are made by our *perceived memories*, or memory chains? But it is not that straightforward. Suppose a person called *A* was involved in a skiing accident with fatal consequences and suppose that *A* suffered severe concussion in the accident, with resultant amnesia. From the introspective, or psychological continuity point of view, the incident has simply not taken place. This will not save *A* from being confronted with the consequences of the accident, such as police investigations and so on. There are two (or more) actual narratives involved, and both are relevant to *A*'s identity: the narrative as stored in his conscious memory, and the actual sequence of events, maybe as recorded on TV tape.

There is a further element of uncertainty to our memories: we frequently rewrite our own conscious memories of the past and in doing so, we are in a process of reconstruction of our narrative identity. Perhaps we reinterpret a painful incident of the past in terms more flattering to ourselves; and typical for lovers is that they reconstruct their own past in the rosy light of today, maybe giving a romantic touch to their very first meeting. Alas, the opposite can occur when they fall out of love, as conversations with estranged lovers show. Retrospectively, they gradually come to the conclusion that they were *not that much in love*. So that the past, while undoubtedly a part of our identity, is an ambiguous and unreliable matter. That takes us to the present.

### ***The Present***

I am here, now, at this instant, at my desk. I have a pain in my shoulder and I feel hungry. The sun is shining outside. I am aware of the confusion on my

desk, the quality of air in my room and the fact that the heating is too high. I remember where I was yesterday and I anticipate where I will be tomorrow.

The dictionary gives a first definition of continuity as *unbroken and consistent experience or operation (COED)*. If we talk of psychological continuity, then that should imply not just the ability to recall the past in the present but an unbroken continuity chain extending from the past into the present and from there into the future. But much of the continuity discussion excludes the *present qua present* from the concept of continuity: the only function assigned to the present is the recollection of the past in the present.

If continuity is not just a matter of that which *was* in the past but that which *is* in the present, hypothetical duplications of personal identity are no longer plausible. To refer back to the thought experiment in which a person is beamed to Mars: at the very instants at which Eddy<sub>Earth</sub> and Eddy<sub>Mars</sub> become conscious, their continuity diverges. At the moment of awakening, the continuity of Eddy<sub>Earth</sub> includes a previous history of existence, *H*, plus an *Earth* experience in the present, *E*. The continuity of Eddy<sub>Mars</sub> includes a previous history of existence *H*, plus a *Mars* experience in the present, *M*. In other words: the psychological continuity of Eddy<sub>Earth</sub> consists of (*H + E*) and the psychological continuity of Eddy<sub>Mars</sub> consists of (*H + M*). And therefore, the two Eddys do not share an identical *psychological continuity* at all – all that they share are *memories*, or *quasi-memories*. So that, even if the hypothesis were true, that it is psychological continuity that matters, Eddy's replica on Mars is not even in that sense identical to Eddy. Not only that: the matter takes on a further dimension when we look to the future.

### ***The Future***

In discussing the issue of personal identity, Martine Nida-Rümelin makes use of the argument of anticipation. The point she makes is a sound one. The argument is centered around the idea that it is a part of our continuity to anticipate the future. That does not mean certainty, of course: I anticipate being in Konstanz on Thursday but something might occur to prevent that. But at least *in principle* I can anticipate the future, and dependent on personal inclinations and temperament, the future might be a very important feature of my narrative identity in the present. But in cases of indeterminacy, for instance

if we return to what Parfit called the branch-line case, it is not possible *in principle* to anticipate the future. If Eddy does not know whether he is going to be Eddy-on-Earth or Eddy-on-Mars, his future is underdetermined. In the words of Nida-Rümelin:

Der tatsächliche Lauf der Dinge legt in diesen Fällen nicht fest, welche Antwort auf die Frage der Identität korrekt ist. In unterbestimmten Fällen geht es nicht um Grenzen unserer Erkenntnisfähigkeit. ... Vielmehr gibt es keine korrekte Antwort auf die Frage, wer mit wem identisch ist in den Fällen, in denen diese Frage unterbestimmt ist. *Das bedeutet nun allerdings für die betroffene Person A, die zum früheren Zeitpunkt t existiert, dass es keine zutreffende Antwort auf die Frage gibt, was sie[sic, probably sich] zum betrachteten späteren Zeitpunkt ergeben wird.*<sup>59</sup>

Having now shown that psychological continuity is not primarily a matter of remembrance of things past, but encompasses the past, the present and the future, it is time to take a closer look at continuity in a more general way, starting with a broader view of 'memory'.

### *Conscious and Non-Conscious Memory*

There is a long tradition of conscious memory in relation to personal identity, summarized by Ian Watts as follows:

Locke had defined personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions. this location of the source of personal identity in the repertoire of its memories was continued by Hume; 'had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person.'<sup>60</sup>

This tradition of focussing on the conscious has been carried in a surprisingly artless way into our own time – more than 100 years after the postulation of the unconscious by Freud and a century of ongoing psychological research. It is not only *conscious* memory which determines our identity – both numerical and qualitative. There is much more to it than that.

The following brief typology of memory is drawn from a standard introductory work of psychology.<sup>61</sup> Details need not concern us, being a part of the psychological debate but a basic outline is relevant to the philosophical discussion. The author distinguishes between two main categories of memory:

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<sup>59</sup> Nida-Rümelin, Martine. *Der Blick von innen. Zur transtemporalen Identität bewußtseinsfähiger Wesen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2006. 129. Nida-Rümelin argues for what she calls a realistic theory of personal identity, as opposed to a reductionist approach. Although her line of argumentation is different from my own, the conclusions that she reaches are highly compatible with my own. In speaking of a "realistic" concept, her idea seems to be close to my own *holistic* concept.

<sup>60</sup>Watts, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Hogarth 1987 (1957). 21.

<sup>61</sup> Becker-Carus, Christian. *Allgemeine Psychologie, eine Einführung*. München: Spektrum 2004. 387.

on the one hand there is our **explicit memory**, which is our declarative or factual memory, the aspect of memory which is *conscious*. On the other hand there is **implicit memory**, which is procedural rather than declarative and relates to our behaviour, or habits. The use of this side of memory is *non-conscious*. Our explicit memory contains both *semantic memory*, including specialized and general knowledge, as well as *episodic memory*, that is our memory of events and personal experience. The implicit memory is subdivided into *skills and habits*, our *expectations/priming*, as well as *classical and operative conditioning effects* and *non-associative learning*. Without going into detail, it should be apparent that it is not only our explicit memory which is relevant to our personal identity, but also our implicit memory.

Chiara can ride a bicycle, play the piano, and speak French. All three skills show elements which are conscious but also elements which are unconscious. All three are relevant to her personal identity. It is true that she might remember having attended French lessons, but such a memory is only indirectly relevant to the fact that she can speak French. She has no memory of learning to ride a bike, but she can ride a bike. Should she one day wake up and discover that she can no longer play the piano, then she will have a feeling of something being gravely wrong with her identity. Furthermore, Chiara, having grown up in Italy, likes to drink espresso in the morning – the psychologists speak of priming, or conditioning. This and many more personal traits are features of her personal identity.

In other words, it is the sum total of our memories which determine our identities, and not just the kinds of memories that we can consciously recall. Both our conscious and our unconscious memories must be integrated into a concept of *integrated psychological continuity*. The argument must be developed one stage further because continuity per se is more than simply psychological continuity.

### ***An Integrated Approach to Continuity***

I am still sitting here at my desk. I have not only *memories* of the past but *awareness of the past* through other channels. The bump on my right finger, better called a *memento* than a memory, makes me aware of a childhood accident I can in no way recall to memory and is as much a part of my identity-in-the-present



as the wrinkles in my face, which I also cannot remember acquiring. There are many more mementos around me, such as things collected on holidays, or documentary evidence of having passed some examination or other. Continuity with the past in the present is not just a matter of *psychological* continuity. The previously mentioned John McCain carries on his body the marks and disabilities of his wartime injuries and torture in the Vietnam War – these disabilities are a part of his identity and exist quite independently of his *memories* of having been inflicted with them.

There are other elements of continuity which are not related to memory at all, or only indirectly related to memory. From her earliest childhood onwards, Helena has loved being outdoors, and has had a deep interest in animals, features of her personality which guided her in her choice of profession as a farmer. She still spends the largest part of the day outdoors. Should Helena one day wake up and discover that she nevermore wishes to leave the house, then she would be suffering from a grave discontinuity in her qualitative identity – and maybe even in her numerical identity. She would neither recognize herself easily, nor would her friends see her as continuous with Helena. Her love of the outdoor life is reflected in her memories and psychological continuity, but it is not *constituted* by her psychological continuity.

In summary: it is an understandable reflex of some philosophers to see identity as a matter of conscious psychological continuity. After all, the business of the philosopher centers around conscious thoughts, ideas, arguments and conclusions. But such an approach is analogous to looking at the tip of the iceberg only and thereby formulating theories about the whole iceberg. Such theories must be incomplete and they might be gravely misleading.

Continuity – whether consciously experienced or not – is a central dimension of our personal identity over time and therefore of our narrative identity. But continuity implies a chain of matters past – present – future, rather than reference to the past alone. And continuity is not restricted to cerebral, or memory continuity. Continuity per se is a factor which applies to all the aspects of our personal identity. So what is the relationship between continuity and narrative?

Paul Ricoeur takes the position that a narrative discourse is necessary in order to bring together the previously mentioned strands of *ipse* and *idem* identities. It is the narrative which brings together the individual at the moment of birth with the *ipse* individual at the end of its life, in spite of the enormous changes in *idem* identity. It is continuity that welds together individual items of biographical data into a continuous narrative whole.

Before concluding this paper, there will be a brief glance at the central roles of autonomy and freedom in personal identity.

#### 4.5 Identity, Autonomy and Freedom

I am sitting on my exercise bike in front of a panorama window, watching the dawn break. My morning workout takes 40 minutes and today I am not enjoying it at all. A soft inner voice asks me: *why are you doing this? You find it most unpleasant this morning. You are a free person and therefore you are free to stop straight away and enjoy the breaking morning.* Another inner voice chips in, however, in a sterner tone: *you decided yourself on a programme of exercise. If you fail in your programme now, you are endangering your own long-term goals. Stopping is not an expression of freedom, it is an expression of inconsequentiality.*

Which voice is me? To which voice should I respond? I cycle on and other voices are heard – not, I hope, because I am a victim of mental illness but because it is the way we are to be constantly faced with a process of optimization between various desires and wishes. There are larger and more fundamental internal discussions which reach beyond the significance of everyday examples such as morning exercise, ones which most of my readers will be able to infer for themselves in their own narrative of life.

We are touching on core questions of practical philosophy, questions related to freedom, autonomy and identity and the various aspects of our motives. I cannot but conclude that the issue of freedom and autonomy is *the central question* in the matter of personal identity. Those who are free from restraint, who enjoy a reasonable degree of freedom in the negative sense, (probably a tiny minority of the population of this planet) are faced in turn with a whole bundle or bouquet of motivations, desires, wishes and dreams, short-term, medium term, and long-term. It is the paradox of our freedom that we are

forced to decide between the options open to us, something that those who lack negative freedom are not forced to do. In deciding on which option to choose, one is in effect continuing one's own narrative and therefore creating narrative identity.

Having placed the issues and paradoxes of freedom and autonomy right at the centre of my map of personal identity, I will break off this discussion on this indecisive note, not least a reflection of my own aporia. Is it a better expression of autonomy to break off my morning exercise, or is it a better expression of autonomy to force myself to continue, in accordance with long term goals? I do not know. This theme will be further developed by me, at another time and another place.

#### **4.6 General Conclusions on Narrative**

My conclusions on the issue of narrative identity are as follows: giving a person a name is not sufficient to tell us much about that person's identity. We must look to the person's personal narrative, which consists of a past, a present and a future which stand in a relationship of continuity to one another. That narrative both constitutes and reflects the subject's personal identity. In pursuing the issue, we inevitably land up in core issues of autonomy and freedom, which ultimately determine our own personal identity. The debate on issues of autonomy and freedom is far from closed.

My map of identity is now finished although hardly complete and it will be exploited in the final brief section in order to gain an overview on the issues related to the personal identity of persons as promised in the introduction.

## 5 Identity and Self as Narrative

*All the world's a stage*, and the life of a person is a trajectory across that stage, from the space-time coordinates at the time of birth to those at the moment of death. Identity is a holistic matter: we do not observe separate features of an individual, each on its own trajectory through time and space. Rather than claiming some theory of unity of self, I argued instead for the weaker vision of the self as a center of narrative gravity, as proposed by Daniel Dennett.

The qualitative changes in the course of that trajectory are inimitably described in Jaques' monologue in *As You Like It*, reproduced on the opening page of this paper.<sup>62</sup> In a village environment, personal identity doesn't seem to be much of a problem: if you see your neighbour daily, for all of his lifespan, then you are no more likely to doubt his or her identity than he or she is likely to doubt her own. The line of continuity is unbroken and one is not faced with the task of relating the old man to the tiny babe, but the easier assignment of relating the infant of yesterday with the young boy of today. In a global world of mobility, however, the undertaking assumes different dimensions as such a continuity of experience and observation is likely to be broken.

We have seen reductionist approaches to solving the problem of identity but such approaches largely produce confusions, as well as raising ethical problems. Without doubting that such issues might arise in some future technological age, I see my own task as interpreting the world *in our own age and culture*. A fundamental criticism of the reductionist debate is that there is a reluctance to break with hallowed traditions of (latent) dualism and take the paradigmatic shift to a truly monistic position.

The debate takes a more productive turn with Ricoeur, who distinguishes between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity and highlights the antinomy caused by

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<sup>62</sup> Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Act II, Scene VII. Ca. 1600.

changes in ipse-identity over time. *Pace* Ricoeur, but the central argument I make is that there *are* two parts of our identity which do escape such change: on the one hand, there are features of the body which permit of unequivocal identification over the entire course of our lives; and it is to that body, being the locus of our mentalistic states, to which an identity must be assigned. On the other hand there are certain biographical data, starting with the date and place of our birth, which also remain unaltered over time.

Personal identity is now largely a matter of relating those two strands, i.e. relating the body to the set of its biographical data. But there is a third strand to be integrated too: that is the strand of our *qualitative identity*, which changes over time. All three strands can be brought together by following the path chosen by Ricoeur, that of *personal narrative*. In the version developed in this paper, personal narrative relates to a chain of continuity past – present – future. My qualities are revealed in my personal narrative and are constituted by my personal narrative. That is as much the case from a first person perspective as from a third person perspective.

In conclusion: the formal identity involved in the naming of that numerically singular entity which is our body, and the qualitative identity which is both formed by and illustrated in our personal narrative, are the two essential building blocks in the constitution of self.

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