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Bonnie Plottner
Macalester College

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Bonnie Plottner
"Me, Myself, My Replica, and Garbo"

Looking at old photographs, seeing myself at age three or four, in the little swimming pool in our old backyard, I wonder how it is that the me now could be the same person as the me then. She looked so much different, acted differently, and thought differently. I can't even remember most of my life when I was that young.

However, I do believe that little girl is me.

In the next few pages I will attempt to show that this girl is me because she is psychologically continuous with me. Much of psychological continuity depends on memory.¹ Locke realized this, and had personal identity defined by memory. There are some problems with his theory that Parfit tries to remedy. While he succeeds to an extent, I believe that he made an error of omission in not realizing that personal identity and memory are closely related. Parfit tries to prove that at times the question, "Is this person me?", has no plausible answer. I believe that his argument for that fails as well.

For Locke, personal identity depends on memory. He says, "For as far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it has of any present action, so far it is the same personal self" (Locke, 213). (Note that here, and throughout Locke's arguments, consciousness is synonymous with memory.) This seems to make sense; if I remember my actions of yesterday, and what it was like to experience them, then the I of yesterday is likely to be the I of today. Here we encounter the first problem. Suppose that I remember most of my experiences when I was seventeen, and my seventeen-year-old self could remember most of her experiences from when she was fifteen, but the I of today cannot recollect these experiences. How is it that I can then be the same person as the fifteen-year-old girl?

Parfit has a way to overcome this problem. He distinguishes between connectedness and continuity. Connectedness is "the holding of particular direct psychological connections" (Parfit, 206). For our purposes, these direct psychological connections are memories. Therefore, if I remember a sufficient amount² of my experiences when I was seventeen, I am connected to that person and am one and the same as that person. As discussed previously, though, connectedness is not a transitive relation. Given that A is connected to B, and B is connected to C, we cannot conclude that A is connected to C. Even if A remembers most of what it was like to be B, and B remembered most of what it was like to be C, A does not have to remember anything at all about C. Therefore, Parfit offers continuity, which is

¹ It also depends on character, intentions, and other various factors of which our psychological make-up consists. Here, I will limit myself to talking about memory.

² Parfit gives a sufficient amount as "at least half the number of direct connections that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person" (Parfit, 206).

"the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness" (Parfit, *ibid.*). Now, given that A is connected to B, and B is connected to C, we can conclude that A is continuous with C. Psychological continuity supports the way we think about personal identity in practice. Most people who knew me (say, my parents) would agree that the three-year old in the picture is me today. Now we have an explanation for why--she and I are psychologically continuous.

Locke explicitly states that personal identity reaches "no further than consciousness reaches" (Locke, 215). This suggests a total dependence on connectedness, which is not a plausible method of establishing identity over periods longer than a few days. Therefore, we have done more that interpret Locke differently than the standard. Rather, we have revised Locke's theory to make a more plausible one. This theory accounts for the small changes we undergo each day in character, overall memories, etc.

There is another, more damaging objection to Locke's theory. Notice the wordings I used above, such as "I remember most of my experiences when I was seventeen." By using the phrase "my experiences," it seems that I have presupposed that the seventeen-year-old was me. I cannot prove personal identity with memory if I have to suppose personal identity to show memory. This is Bishop Butler's objection to Locke. He says that it is "self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute personal identity, any more than knowledge in any other case, can constitute truth, which it presupposes" (Parfit, 220).

Parfit offers a way out of this with what he calls quasi-memory. It goes as follows:

I have an accurate quasi-memory of a past experience if

- (1) I seem to remember having an experience,
- (2) *someone* did have this experience, and
- (3) my apparent memory is causally dependent,
in the right kind of way, on that past experience.

On this definition, ordinary memories are a sub-class of quasi-memories. They are quasi-memories of our own past experiences (Parfit, *ibid.*; italics his).

In this way, if science found a way to "implant" real memories of person A into person B's mind or brain, then person B could have actual memories that are not hers. This doesn't mean that the memory is mistaken (as it could be from the seer's point of view and not the first-person point of view). Rather, person B has memories of what it is like to be person A.

However, there is a part of this argument that remains vague. Parfit never explains what "the right kind of way" is. Assume that person B is considering two different memories at the moment, M1 and M2. Assume also that M1 is one of B's own memories and that M2 is one of A's that was implanted in B. What could make M1 causally related to experience E1 in such a way as to make it a true quasi-memory? The only logical response is that B had the experience and the experience directly led

to the memory. We cannot say that the person whose memory it is had the experience, as B has memory M2, but she did not experience it. M2 is a true quasi-memory if A experienced it and the experience led directly to the memory. (It would not be a true memory if, say, somebody told B that she experienced M1 and eventually she thought that she remembered it, even if she did in fact experience it.)

Now, it would seem that memory is indeed dependent upon personal identity, although Parfit has tried to rebuff this objection using his quasi-memory theory. However, it is just as dependent upon some unspecified person's identity, not necessarily that of the person in question. We could have a person C whose memories were all quasi-memories of someone else. Then, none of person C's memories are of experiences that C himself had, so his personal identity is not presupposed. However, if C had enough quasi-memories to be strongly connected to person D, then we could justifiably assign D's personal identity to C. Although D's identity was needed to find out C's in this example, C's was not assumed. I believe that Butler's objection was that, in showing someone's identity using memory, that very person's identity was presupposed. Parfit's theory of quasi-memory leads us to presuppose somebody's identity, just not the person in question. Therefore, it answers this interpretation of Butler's objection.

Now Parfit goes to work using his quasi-memory theory to demonstrate his other ideas. Right away, we find a controversial idea, as Parfit believes that personal identity does not matter. While most people would like to think that there is always a definite answer to the question, "Is this person me or not?", Parfit claims that there can be cases where we know all the facts and cannot get a definite answer. He demonstrates this with the example of a club. Say there is a club that disbands. A few years later, the same members get together to form a club with the same rules, name, etc. Knowing all the facts, we cannot answer the question, is the new club the old club or merely something that is exactly the same as the old club? In fact, neither answer holds any weight--it is a pointless question to ask (Parfit, 213).

An example of this involves Parfit's Teletransporter. A person steps into the machine and presses a button. He becomes unconscious. The machine maps out all the exact states of all of his cells and sends the blueprint to Mars. There, an exact Replica is made who wakes up about an hour after the person stepped into the machine. The original person is destroyed (Parfit, 199). Is the Replica the original person, and if not, who is it? In this case, Locke and Parfit would agree that the Replica and the original person are one and the same. What matters for Locke is memory. The Replica would have all of the memories of the original person, and therefore would have the same non-material soul that the original person had. The soul would just have gone from the original person's material body to the Replica's material body (although we are not sure how. I, for one, have never been able to will my soul, assuming I have one, to go into someone else's body and remember my whole life. For now, though, we will humor Locke.). In this case, Butler's objection does not seem to stand. All of the Replica's quasi-memories are the self-memories of the original person. Therefore, the original person's personal identity is assumed. We go on to say that since the Replica has all of the memories of the original person, he has the same personal identity. The Replica's personal identity was not assumed,

we just assigned it to him. The Replica and the original person are qualitatively, although not numerically, the same.

For Parfit, the person and the Replica are R-related. Relation R is "psychological connectedness and/or continuity with the right kind of cause" (Parfit, 215) and further that "[t]he right kind of cause could be any cause" (*ibid.*). In addition, his idea that identity does not matter rids us of Locke's odd diagnosis. What is really the difference between being the same person with the same soul and being a Replica that is exactly the same as the person and has the same soul? Put this way, it seems to be an empty question. For Parfit, it is. Personal identity demands a further fact (a soul, or other such non-material substance) that really isn't needed. Although we know every detail of the facts of what has happened, we have no way to tell whether the Replica is the person, or is something that is exactly similar to the person. We could arbitrarily assign an answer, but as we cannot support either (although these are the only two options), it would be a misrepresentation of the facts to give a definite answer. For Parfit, it does not matter. Going into the Teletransporter and being the same as the Replica is as good as ordinary survival (say, not going into the machine and flying in a spaceship to Mars).

In the above case, personal identity and relation R overlapped, as they usually are wont to do. In other examples, though, the views really diverge. Take Parfit's experiment with the combined spectrum. This involves both physical and psychological continuity. Parfit will go through a range of operations. At the near end of the spectrum, nothing at all is done to him. At the far end, scientists would have created, out of new cells, an exact Replica of Greta Garbo at age 30. He describes the cases in between:

In the second case, a few of the cells in my brain and body would be replaced. The new cells would not be exact duplicates. As a result, there would be somewhat less psychological connectedness between me and the person who wakes up. This person would not have all of my memories, and his character would be in one way unlike mine. He would have some apparent memories of Greta Garbo's life, and have one of Garbo's characteristics.... Near the far end, most of my cells would be replaced with dissimilar cells. The person who wakes up would have only a few of the cells in my original brain and body, and between her and me there would be only a few psychological connections (Parfit, 237).

Now it is obvious that at the near end, the person is Parfit and at the far end it is Garbo. What of the middle cases, though? As Parfit says, it would be hard to set a cut-off point where the identity changes. It really does not seem likely that the change of those few random brain cells more could ruin psychological continuity. (Note: Parfit claims that even were the operation technically possible, experimentation could not give us the answer either, as:

somewhere along the Spectrum, there would be the first case in which the resulting person would believe that he or she was not

me. And we have no reason to trust this belief. In this kind of case, who someone is cannot be shown by who he thinks he is (Parfit, 238).

Add to this knowledge the fact that in the case where Parfit becomes Garbo, Parfit has effectively died. I would like to think that the difference between me and another person, or between my life and my death, depends on more than just a few brain cells. Still, if the question, "Is this person me or not?", is to have a definite Yes or No answer, that must be the case. This seems logically absurd, and contradictory to our very idea of self.

Locke's theory of personal identity does not fully answer the question here. In the middle cases, the person has some true quasi-memories of Garbo and some of Parfit. Using memory just rewords the question into, "Is the person Parfit with some of Garbo's memory traces, or is it Garbo with some of Parfit's memory traces?"

Therefore, Parfit decides that personal identity does not matter. In the middle cases, we can know all the facts about what occurs and still have no answer to the question. The question is empty. For Parfit, what matters is relation R. Relation R is psychological continuity.

I think that Parfit's explanation begins to fall apart at this point. He has said that psychological continuity is overlapping connectednesses. The right amount of connectedness was even given at that point (see Footnote 2). It would seem that up to a point, the resulting person would have the right amount of connectedness to Parfit, and not enough with Garbo, and after that point, the person would have enough connectedness to Garbo and not enough with Parfit. That is why there would be a point where the person who wakes up would believe herself to be Garbo. Parfit does not really say why we cannot trust the person at this point. They are not having delusions, as all the memories he or she has are the true quasi-memories of either Garbo or Parfit. Looked at this way, it seems like the person would change at the half-way point.

Locke seemed to be on the right track using memory as a major indicator of personal identity. He ran into a few problems, two of which we alleviated by using Parfit's counter-arguments. His ideas about quasi-memory and psychological continuity seem very plausible and believable. Delving further into his book, however, we run into problems. He tries to wow us with off-the-wall examples, like an operation turning him into Greta Garbo. Meanwhile, he leaves out central parts of his arguments, such as what "the right kind of way" means. By exploring these omissions, we see that many of Parfit's ideas are self-contradictory (such as that relation R is more important than personal identity, when it turns out that R collapses into personal identity.) Overall, his basic ideas about memory make sense, and most of his other ideas are just not fully reasoned out to find the errors. I have pointed out a few such errors above, answering those which seem salvageable.

Bibliography

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