

Philosophical Review 108 (1999): 422-425.

READING PARFIT. Edited by JONATHAN DANCY. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997. Pp. viii, 352.

Like many others interested in Derek Parfit's work, I've been awaiting this collection of (with two exceptions) original essays on *Reasons and Persons*, having placed an order with my bookstore at least a year before the book was finally published. The delay was due to the editor's original plan of including Parfit's responses, a plan that had to be abandoned. Eventually, Jonathan Dancy tells us (viii), Parfit will publish responses to these pieces. And at least one (partial) response has already appeared in print, Parfit's (1995) discussion of Mark Johnston's contribution to the—then forthcoming—Dancy volume. So the bad news is that all of these essays were in their completed form five or six years before the book was published; as a result, the arguments sometimes seem a little bit familiar and, of course, neither profit from nor engage the most recent literature on the topics they address.

The good news is that *Reading Parfit* includes some very fine essays (and, in my opinion, a few not-very-fine essays) by talented philosophers. These essays, taken together, address all four parts of *Reasons and Persons*: Self-Defeating Theories, Rationality and Time, Personal Identity, and Future Generations. I'll focus my discussion on (the parts of) those essays—about half of the essays in the collection—that say something about Parfit's metaphysics of personal identity. Unfortunately, this means no further mention of contributions from Dancy, David Gauthier, Frank Jackson, Michael Stocker, Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, or Larry Temkin.

What *is* Parfit's metaphysics of personal identity? It involves, in large part, the relation of psychological connectedness and continuity. What are the *relata* of psychological connectedness and continuity? David O. Brink says that Parfit ought to say that the relata are distinct person-stages. If, instead, the relata are one and the same person at different times, Brink says, then "automatic intrapersonal compensation" holds between "them", which, according to Brink, would undermine Parfit's attack on egoism (111 and 132n26).

Judith Jarvis Thomson also suggests Parfit should embrace an ontology of person-stages and four-dimensionalism for physical objects, arguing that this provides the only way to combine a psychological criterion of personal identity with the intuitively compelling view that a person just is her body (209-211). Thomson's argument turns on the claim that a four-dimensionalist could insist that the persistence conditions of a *body* have to do with psychological continuity. (But I think this is as implausible for bodies with four dimensions as it is for bodies with three.) In his contribution, John McDowell also suggests that the persistence conditions for human organisms involve psychological continuity (237), although McDowell doesn't tie this striking claim to four-dimensionalism.

Now Parfit has been served a metaphysics of person-stages before, but has so far declined to partake (Cf. Parfit, 1976, 91 and 102n3). If not stages, however, what could the relata of psychological continuity be? Sydney Shoemaker interprets Parfit as holding that the relata are "experiences" that are independent of and prior to persons (138-139). (Shoemaker then argues against such independence.) If Parfit really does think that the relata of psychological continuity are things that exist independently of persons, one might argue, then presumably he is committed to persons' being "built up" out of these independent experiences, not all of which exist at any single time. And so, one might argue, Shoemaker's interpretation leads right back to person-stages.

This story provides a plausible way to wring something like a person-stage ontology out of Parfitian reductionism. But perhaps Parfit isn't really committed to the metaphysical independence of experiences that this story requires. McDowell argues, for instance, that while Parfit requires psychological states and their interrelations to be independent of personal identity, this independence amounts only to their being "detachable in thought from personal identity" (230). Moreover, Johnston's contribution reminds us that there is a *second* version of reductionism in *Reasons and Persons*, a version apparently less Humean than the one Shoemaker discusses. Johnston reads this version as claiming that a person's existence and persistence *consists in* the existence and persistence of a brain and body and physical and mental events,

though the person is distinct from any brain, body, or physical or mental events (153-154). And while this version of reductionism plays a minor role in *Reasons and Persons*, it seems to be the version Parfit now defends (1995, 19).

Johnston says that a person's existence and persistence *consisting in* certain other things is best understood as a person's existence and persistence *supervening on* these other things (154). (Simon Blackburn also suggest that Parfit's reductionism amounts to the claim that a person's persistence supervenes on "the basic ontology and relations between its elements" (185).) Johnston then argues that this tame version of Parfitian reductionism has no practical upshots. Johnston says Parfit mistakenly concludes that reductionism *does* have radical practical upshots by way of the invalid "argument from below," which presupposes that if the supervenience base as such is not valuable, then neither is what supervenes.

Parfit's response (1995, 33) to Johnston turns on the claim that *consisting in* is more than *supervening on*, being instead a "closer and partly conceptual relation". And Shoemaker, in discussing Parfit's claim that identity *consists in* psychological connectedness and continuity, insists that *consisting in* must be something stronger than *supervening on* (143-144). (It certainly seems that Shoemaker's claims about *consisting in* ought to apply to that relation as it is found in the version of reductionism Johnston addresses.)

But the authors of this volume generally agree with Johnston's verdict that Parfit is mistaken in the practical consequences he attributes to reductionism, even if they reach that verdict by differing paths. Shoemaker says that Parfit thinks non-reductionism makes special concern for one's own future more reasonable than that concern would otherwise be only because non-reductionism implies that one's identity with someone in the future is a "deep a further fact"; but this, says Shoemaker, is "unsatisfactory" (145-146). Similarly, Adams objects to the inference from "less deep" to "less important" (263-264). Simon Blackburn thinks that the practices Parfit attacks are undergirded by the essential nature of "agency" and "deliberation", and that this is independent of the metaphysics of the "aspect" of persons with which Parfit is concerned (190-195).

I think the disagreement among the contributors of this volume about *why* reductionism fails to have revisionary practical upshots is best explained by their disagreement about *what* reductionism is supposed to be. In fact, they agree on only three things about Parfit's views on personal identity: Parfit thinks, first, that personal identity can be, in some (not merely epistemic) sense, indeterminate; secondly, personal identity has, as a matter of contingent fact, nothing to do with Cartesian egos; and thirdly, personal identity has something to do with (on one version) psychological continuity or (on another version) brains and bodies and physical events and mental events.

Even in combination, these three theses present a view so vaguely sketched and short on detail that it can hardly be considered a proposed metaphysics of personal identity. (Imagine someone offering a "radical analysis" of knowledge by claiming that sometimes it is, in some sense, indeterminate whether one knows; that knowledge in fact, contingently, requires that we are not brains-in-vats; and that knowledge has something to do with being "connected to" the truth.) One who comes to *Reading Parfit* confused about the further details of Parfit's reductionism—and so presumably confused about reductionism's practical implications—will leave *Reading Parfit* confused. Perhaps the further details of Parfit's allegedly revisionary metaphysics of persons and personal identity are so inscrutable because—to wax Quinean—there is nothing there to scrute.

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