

# **Endurance, Psychological Continuity, and the Importance of Personal Identity\***

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## **I**

Persons enjoy identity over time. But persons do not have temporal parts. They are not four-dimensional entities “spread out” in time. Rather, persons last over time by enduring. Or so I say. The main objective of this paper is not to defend the thesis that persons endure over time—although I will say something in defense of it—but instead to highlight an important implication of that thesis. I will show that if persons endure, then it cannot be that personal identity over time should be analyzed in terms of—or is nothing other than—psychological continuity. In other words, I will show that any analysis or reduction of personal identity over time in terms of some kind of psychological continuity entails four-dimensional persons and temporal parts.

John Locke was the most important historical defender of the view that personal identity should be understood in terms of psychological continuity. And Locke’s legacy lives on. It is no exaggeration to say that among the analyses of personal identity over time defended today and in the recent past, analyses that make heavy use of psychological continuity have enjoyed almost complete hegemony. Such analyses are endorsed by, among others, H.P. Grice, Anthony Quinton, Derek Parfit, John Perry, David Lewis, Robert Nozick, Sydney Shoemaker, and Harold Noonan.

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Locke's analysis of personal identity was not motivated by a rejection of endurance. Rather, it was motivated by his account of what it is to be a person—"a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (1975, 335).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, most or all of Locke's heirs (even those who may in fact reject endurance) understand personal identity over time in terms of psychological continuity as a result of the conviction that to be a person fundamentally involves having some particular array or other of psychological traits.<sup>2</sup> So it is significant and surprising that the thesis that persons endure, even if enduring persons are "essentially psychological," undermines all analyses of personal identity in terms of psychological continuity.

Psychological continuity is the ancestral of psychological connectedness. Psychological connectedness involves a person at one time sharing psychological states, such as beliefs and desires, with a person at another time. It also involves a person at one time having memories or apparent memories or quasi-memories of the experiences of a person at an earlier time. Some versions of connectedness emphasize the way those earlier experiences cause the later (real, apparent, or quasi-) memories; for example, some such accounts require that the very brain associated with the original experience cause the memory. But the details here do not matter. The claims of this paper will not trade on any controversial point about the nature of psychological continuity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>And Locke had other motivations for his account of personal identity. These include his conviction that one is morally responsible for all and only those actions of which one is "conscious" (1975, 342) and his desire to make sense of personal immortality without presupposing dualism (1975, 542). What is most important here is that an explicit rejection of endurance was definitely not one of the things that moved Locke toward his account of personal identity over time.

<sup>2</sup>Although Eric Olson (1996, 102-105) argues that this conviction about what it is to be a person is actually in tension with a psychological continuity analysis of personal identity over time.

<sup>3</sup>Locke's heirs also wrangle over how best to deal with the possibility of fission and fusion. Again, the details here do not matter. What does matter, as far as this paper is concerned, is that any analysis or reduction of personal identity in terms of psychological continuity—no matter how it handles fission and fusion—is inconsistent with the thesis that persons endure.

The final two sections of this paper address the work of Derek Parfit, currently the most influential champion of the view that personal identity over time is to be understood in terms of psychological continuity. I will show how the fact that—if persons endure—personal identity cannot be analyzed as unbranching psychological continuity bears on his discussion of identity’s mattering in survival. This will afford me an opportunity to make some remarks in defense of the claim that persons endure.

## II

Some philosophers understand psychological continuity as holding between distinct person stages.<sup>4</sup> Person stages are the temporal parts of four-dimensional persons. If psychological continuity required four-dimensionalism, we could make short work of establishing that endurance undermines any analysis of personal identity over time in terms of psychological continuity. But the work will not be quite that short. For the endurantist can easily make sense of the claim that a person enjoys psychological continuity over time. She can also note that it is possible, as in a case of fission, that such continuity branch. The question is not whether the endurantist can make sense of psychological continuity—surely she can. The question is whether the endurantist can accept some form of psychological continuity as an analysis or reduction of personal identity over time.

To answer this question, we must get a clearer look at what psychological continuity (or, in other words and for short, the “R relation”) would be like on an endurance ontology. Obviously, if persons endure, the relata of the R relation cannot be distinct person stages. A natural suggestion is that, given endurance, the relata of the R relation are persons. But this won’t do, at least if we want to take the claim that a person is R related to herself in the most straightforward way possible. For a person has all and only the psychological states that she has, and whatever psychological continuity is

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<sup>4</sup>This is the understanding in, for example, the exchange between Derek Parfit, David Lewis and John Perry in Rorty (1976).

intuitively supposed to be, it is not having exactly the same psychological states.<sup>5</sup> (In the next section of this paper, we will consider a more nuanced view of psychological continuity that has persons as its relata.)

Obviously, a person can never differ from herself. But that truism should not cause us to overlook the equally obvious fact that a person can be one way at one time, and another way at another time. This suggests a way that the endurantist can make sense of the R relation. That a person existing now is R related to a person existing at a future time can be understood as saying that now she has certain psychological states, and those states are R related to the states the person existing at the future time will have when that future time is present. So it is not a person that is R related to herself, but rather the way a person is at one time—insofar as her psychological states are concerned—that is R related to the way she is at another time. These “ways” are, of course, distinct.<sup>6</sup>

Taking the R relation to hold between psychological states—unlike taking it to hold between person stages—is consistent with an endurance ontology. Furthermore, such a relation holding between distinct states—as opposed to a relation holding in the most straightforward way between a person and herself—captures the sort of psychological continuity that we are after. So we now have an understanding of the R relation and its relata acceptable to endurantists. But the R relation thus understood cannot possibly provide an analysis or reduction of personal identity over time consistent with the claim that persons endure. In order to see why, we must understand more about

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<sup>5</sup>For this would in one way be too much, since psychological connectedness and continuity need not consist in the sharing of every belief, desire, and intention. And in another way “continuity”, understood as having exactly the same psychological states, would not be enough, for it leaves no role for quasi-memories to play.

<sup>6</sup>A number of factors are involved in one psychological state’s being psychologically connected to a distinct state. The states should include an appropriate number of the same beliefs. One should include quasi-memories of the experiences included in the other. Certain causal connections should hold between the states. And so on.

endurance and its rival, four-dimensionalism; specifically, we must notice a similarity between the views that often goes unnoticed. My explication of the two views will focus on that similarity.

According to the four-dimensionalist, a person's existing at a time just is her having a proper part, a person stage, that exists "wholly present" at that time.<sup>7</sup> (An entity is wholly present if it is not "spread out in time" and does not have temporal parts.) A person enjoys personal identity over time just in case that very same person exists at more than one time. So the four-dimensionalist thinks an instance of personal identity over time just is an instance of a person stage's existing wholly present at one time, another stage's existing wholly present at another time, and those two stages being related in such a way that they are proper parts of the very same person.

The endurantist, unlike the four-dimensionalist, holds that a person's existing at a time just is her—the person herself—existing wholly present at that time. A person enjoys personal identity over time just in case that very same person exists at more than one time. So the endurantist thinks an instance of personal identity over time just is an instance of a person's existing wholly present at one time, a person's existing wholly present at another time, and the person who exists at the first time's being the same as—identical with—the person existing at the second.<sup>8</sup>

Above I said that we must notice an important similarity between the view that persons endure and the view that persons are four-dimensional. Here it is. The endurantist and her four-dimensionalist foe agree that personal identity over time is

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<sup>7</sup>For ease of exposition, I'll assume that the four-dimensionalist holds that persisting objects have instantaneous, three-dimensional temporal parts. But some four-dimensionalists follow Whitehead (1920, 56) and deny this.

<sup>8</sup>So the (non-Whiteheadian) four-dimensionalist makes use of two different notions of existing at a time. The first sense in which something exists at a time is its having a part existing wholly present at that time. The second sense in which something exists at a time is its—the thing (such as a temporal part) itself—existing wholly present at that time. (The first sense is defined in terms of the second.) The endurantist, on the other hand, accepts only one of these senses of existing at a time, that of existing wholly present at a time. See Merricks (1994) for a more rigorous definition and discussion of "wholly present".

analyzed as (or “just is” or “is reduced to”) a relation between something that exists wholly present at one time and something that exists wholly present at another. Seeing where they agree allows us to characterize, in a clear way, their disagreement. The endurantist thinks that the relation in this analysis is numerical identity and that it relates a person and herself (Cf. Merricks, 1994, 165-167). The four-dimensionalist denies that the relation in this analysis is numerical identity—perhaps it is psychological continuity instead—and denies that it relates a person and herself.<sup>9</sup>

So the endurantist holds that personal identity over time just is—is nothing other than, is analyzed as, is the very same thing as—numerical identity’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the endurantist must say that a case of numerical identity’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another is the same thing as a case of personal identity over time. Note that the endurantist’s “analysis” of personal identity over time is consistent with many competing analyses of being a person. Since endurance per se does not commit one to

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<sup>9</sup>Even the four-dimensionalist who denies that stages are themselves “wholly present” will analyze personal identity over time as a relation other than identity—and so perhaps psychological continuity—holding between distinct stages. Of course, the four-dimensionalist might also add that there is a sense in which personal identity over time just is the relationship of numerical identity holding between a four-dimensional person and herself. But numerical identity holding between a four-dimensional person and herself cannot be reduced to psychological continuity. Insofar as the four-dimensionalist wants to embrace the psychological continuity analysis or reduction of personal identity over time, she must grant that there is a sense in which personal identity over time just is one person stage’s being related to another in the right way.

<sup>10</sup>There is nothing special here about personal identity over time. That is, the endurantist will say that, for example, table identity over time just is numerical identity holding between a table existing wholly present at one time and a table existing wholly present at another.

To clarify the endurantist’s position here, it might be useful to explicitly distinguish identity over time (simpliciter) from personal identity over time. Identity over time is enjoyed by all persisting objects, and therefore enjoyed by persons among other things. Given endurance, identity over time just is identity holding between a thing existing wholly present at one time and a thing existing wholly present at another. Identity over time can be contrasted with personal identity over time, which is not enjoyed by all persisting objects, but only by persisting persons.

any single analysis of being a person, the endurantist's "analysis" of personal identity over time given above is really a schema for an analysis.

But an analysis of personal identity over time must heed some restrictions to be consistent with this schema. The analyses of any such analysis will involve a person existing wholly present at one time related by the relation of numerical identity to a person existing wholly present at another. Obviously, that relation cannot possibly relate distinct, non-identical relata. But we have assumed that the R relation (unbranching or otherwise), given an endurance ontology, holds between non-identical psychological states, one existing at one time, the other existing at another.

So, given endurance, it cannot be that personal identity over time just is R (or just is unbranching R) holding between distinct psychological states, no matter how we ought to understand being a person. One cannot reconcile endurance with the claim that personal identity over time just is some sort of psychological continuity, if the sort of psychological continuity in question holds—not between a person and herself—but between distinct states. The only hope for reconciliation will be in a sort of psychological continuity that holds between a person and herself.

### III

The preceding discussion of the R relation holding between psychological states has provided the resources to make sense of a reasonable version of psychological continuity that, given endurance, can hold between a person existing at one time and that very same person existing at another. A person now existing is psychologically continuous with a person existing at a future time  $t$  just in case a person's current psychological states are R related to those a person existing at  $t$  has at  $t$ . Presumably, a person now existing could be related by psychological continuity to two distinct future persons. Anyone concerned about branching may therefore add that a person stands in unbranching psychological continuity to a future person existing at time  $t$  just in case a person's current states are R related to only the states exactly one person has at time  $t$ .

Let's use 'R\*' to refer to the kind of psychological continuity holding between persons I have just described. ('R' will continue to refer to psychological continuity holding between distinct psychological states.) Since R\* does not hold between distinct states, but rather between persons, one might claim that personal identity over time just is R\*, or just is unbranching R\* (R\* plus U). At least, one might charge that it is consistent with enduring persons that personal identity is reduced to, or analyzed as, R\* holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another. One might claim, in other words, that endurance alone does not entail that personal identity over time is not R\* (nor R\* plus U).

But it does. For, given endurance, personal identity over time just is identity—numerical identity—holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another. It is, therefore, inconsistent with the endurantist's analysis of personal identity over time to maintain that it just is some relation other than numerical identity holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another time. But of course R\* plus U—even when holding between a person existing at one time and that same person existing at another—is something other than numerical identity.<sup>11</sup> So if persons endure, personal identity over time cannot be identified with R\* (or R\* plus U) holding between a person existing at one time and a person existing at another.

The argument here, like the one of the preceding section, trades on only the features essential to the endurantist's schema of personal identity over time. That schema tells us that no analysis of personal identity over time will be consistent with endurance if

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<sup>11</sup>Here is the proof, for those who need one: numerical identity can hold between a rock and itself; R\* cannot, for R\* (even unbranching R\*) holds only between objects that have psychological states; so numerical identity is not R\* (nor is it R\* plus U).

One might try to circumvent this proof by saying that numerical identity is itself analyzed as rock identity or personal identity or... for every "kind of identity", and then claim that personal identity, understood as one of the many disjuncts in this analysis of numerical identity, is itself R\* (or R\* plus U). But I assume that numerical identity should be taken as a primitive. At least, I assume that numerical identity is not reducible to a disjunction of the multiple and allegedly more primitive "kinds of identity".



it focuses on any relation other than numerical identity. And psychological continuity of every sort is a relation, no matter what the details of the suggested continuity are.

I want to emphasize that this argument, by making use of the endurantist's schematic analysis of personal identity, thereby requires that personal identity over time is distinct from—is not to be conflated with—both numerical identity and identity over time (simpliciter). For, to repeat, the endurantist says that personal identity over time is analyzed as numerical identity relating a person existing wholly present at one time to a person existing wholly present at another. Obviously enough, neither numerical identity nor identity over time (simpliciter) can be analyzed as numerical identity relating a person existing at one time to a person existing at another. Such an analysis—in either case—would be ludicrous, and, in the case of numerical identity, circular.

#### IV

If persons endure, then personal identity over time cannot be identified with the relation of psychological continuity holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another. But one might object that this alone does not establish that personal identity over time cannot be reduced to psychological continuity. For one might object that reduction is not necessarily identification.

The first part of my response to this objection is to note that, at least in many cases, reduction is identification. Consider, for instance, the paradigm scientific reductions. Heat in a gas is (identified with) mean molecular motion; water is (identified with) H<sub>2</sub>O. A similar point seems to hold in proposed cases of conceptual analysis. Some claim, for example, that knowledge is (identified with) justified true belief plus some fourth condition to mollify Gettier. And friends of psychological continuity accounts of personal identity do, at least sometimes, talk as if their project is akin to that of the scientific reductionists and conceptual analysts. They talk as if they are telling us

just what personal identity over time is. And, as we have seen, the claim that personal identity over time is psychological continuity of any sort is inconsistent with endurance.

But suppose the reductionist denied that her project was akin to scientific reduction or conceptual analysis. Suppose she claimed that her reduction of personal identity to psychological continuity—or, more probably, to unbranching psychological continuity—is instead an account of what personal identity over time consists in, an account of what constitutes personal identity. What is constitution? I think the majority view is that an account of what constitutes personal identity is the same thing as an account of the (informative) necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity over time.<sup>12</sup>

Some philosophers will insist that psychological continuity's being necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time is tantamount to personal identity over time's being nothing other than—being identified with—psychological continuity. Suppose they are right. It would then follow that, if persons endure, psychological continuity is not necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time. For we have already seen that, if persons endure, personal identity cannot be identified with psychological continuity (unbranching or otherwise).

But suppose, just for the sake of argument, that we can distinguish between what personal identity over time is, on the one hand, and what is necessary and sufficient for it, on the other. The friend of psychological continuity might insist that endurance alone does nothing to undermine the claim that psychological continuity (unbranching or otherwise) is necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time. Since that latter

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<sup>12</sup>Mark Johnston says that “the idiom of constitution of facts [of personal identity] is best understood” in terms of facts of personal identity's supervening “upon the facts of mental and physical continuity and connectedness” (1992, 591). And E.J. Lowe tells us a criterion of identity gives us what identity over time, for the relevant kind of thing, “consists in” (1989, 2). In that same paper, Lowe also understands a criterion of identity as providing necessary and sufficient conditions for the identity over time of the relevant kind of thing (1989, 6).

claim is all her reductionism amounts to, she might conclude, her reductionism is after all consistent with endurance.

I concede that this latter claim is not precluded by persons enduring.<sup>13</sup> But this latter claim does not secure any sort of reduction of personal identity over time to psychological continuity. For the essence of any genuine reduction of this sort is the claim that personal identity is “nothing over and above”—is “not some further fact in addition to”—psychological continuity. So the thesis that psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for the further, distinct fact of personal identity over time—a fact which, as we have seen, the endurantist identifies and defines in terms independent of psychological continuity—is not a reduction of personal identity.

To see this, imagine souls or “Cartesian egos” that, necessarily, have their psychology uniquely and, moreover, cannot possibly suffer amnesia or any other break in psychological continuity. Imagine, further, that each person is identical with such a soul. Then personal identity would be—to use Parfit’s locution—a “further fact” in addition to psychological continuity; personal identity would amount to a fact about soul identity; personal identity over time could be analyzed as soul identity over time. What we are imagining is not, therefore, consistent with personal identity’s being reduced to psychological continuity. What we are imagining is, however, consistent with—indeed, implies—that psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time.<sup>14</sup> So the claim that psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for

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<sup>13</sup>But note that once we reject an identification of personal identity over time with unbranching psychological continuity, there is little motivation to claim that personal identity over time holds of necessity if and only if unbranching psychological continuity does. So I do think that if persons endure, one has a good reason not to endorse—even to deny outright—the claim that psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time. (Cf. my (forthcoming).)

<sup>14</sup>Because our imagined souls cannot possibly suffer a break in psychological continuity, such continuity is necessary for their persistence; because, necessarily, they have their psychology uniquely, it is sufficient.

Our imagining such souls does not, of course, make them possible. But if they are impossible, it is because some substantive metaphysical claim is true, a claim like “No soul necessarily has its psychology uniquely.” And the fact that a proof that such souls are impossible would rely on a substantive metaphysical claim shows exactly what the example is intended to show; it shows that necessary and

personal identity does not imply that personal identity is reduced to (or analyzed as) psychological continuity.

Further evidence for this point—that mere necessary and sufficient conditions do not secure reduction—will be emerge below when I discuss Parfit’s attack on the value of personal identity over time. During the course of that discussion, it should become clear that psychological continuity’s merely being necessary and sufficient for personal identity leaves far too much of a “further fact” of personal identity over time to be a genuine reduction.

Perhaps what “constitutes” personal identity over time—or what personal identity “consists in”—is supposed to be something other than just the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity over time. And perhaps it is also supposed to be something other than an analysis of personal identity, something other than what personal identity itself is. But, if so, then there is no clear explanation, anywhere, of what the requisite sort of constitution is supposed to be. The closest we get to an explanation is analogy. Personal identity’s being constituted by psychological continuity is sometimes said to be analogous to, for example, a bronze statue’s being constituted by—but not identical with—a bronze lump.

A statue and its (alleged) constituting bronze lump share all the same atoms, occupy the same space, and—somehow—have differing persistence conditions. If this is all the relation of constitution amounts to in the case of the statue and the bronze, it is hard to see how an analogous relation could hold between personal identity and psychological continuity. If, instead, constitution amounts to something more in the case of the statue and the bronze, it is hard to see what the “more” could be. Merely insisting that it amounts to more in the statue’s case, and then using that mysterious “more” to

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sufficient conditions for personal identity are not the very same thing as a reduction. For if they were the very same thing, then we could rule out the possibility of the imagined souls—not on the basis of a substantive metaphysical claim—but rather simply on the grounds that they would have the contradictory consequence that psychological continuity is necessary and sufficient for, but not a reduction of, personal identity.

illustrate what it is for psychological continuity to constitute personal identity, is to illustrate the obscure with the more obscure. Indeed, I think that the charge of “*obscurum per obscurius*” applies to all attempts to illustrate constitution in the case of personal identity simply by referring us to other supposed examples of constitution. (Another familiar example is that of a nation’s being constituted by—but not identical with—its territory and inhabitants.)<sup>15</sup>

So it is hard to know how, exactly, to understand the claim that psychological continuity constitutes personal identity in the way a lump of bronze constitutes a statue. It is hard, therefore, to show that this claim is inconsistent with the thesis that persons endure. But I think we can take a stab at it. I assume that the continuity that supposedly does the “constituting” holds between an enduring person and herself. I assume, that is, that  $R^*$  is the alleged constituting relation. Keeping the relata of  $R^*$  in mind, we can see that personal identity over time’s being constituted by  $R^*$  would amount to personal identity over time’s being constituted by  $R^*$ ’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and a person existing wholly present at another. And this—by way of the endurantist’s analysis of personal identity—would amount to numerical identity’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and another’s being constituted by  $R^*$ ’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and another.

That claim—the claim that numerical identity’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and another is constituted by  $R^*$ ’s holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and another—implies that the relation of numerical identity, when holding between a person and herself, is itself constituted by  $R^*$ . For, suppose numerical identity, when holding between a person and herself, were not

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<sup>15</sup>For example, Parfit (1995, 17) compares personal identity and the psychological and/or physical continuity that (he says) constitutes it to statues and their constituting lumps and to nations and their constituting inhabitants and territories.

constituted by R\*. That would imply that numerical identity's holding between a person and herself is not constituted by R\*'s holding between a person and herself; that is, it would imply that personal identity is not constituted by R\*.

So the friend of psychological continuity's constituting personal identity must say—if persons endure—that the relation of numerical identity is sometimes constituted by psychological continuity. But it seems false that numerical identity—even when its relatum is a person and herself—is constituted by psychological continuity in the way that a statue is constituted by its constituent bronze or a nation by its constituent inhabitants and territory. For there seems to be no relevant parallel between numerical identity and psychological continuity (unbranching or not) on the one hand, and, on the other, statues and bronze or nations and territories and inhabitants.

Indeed, I think we can go even further. If we understand constitution as something more than necessary and sufficient conditions, we can undermine not only the claim that personal identity is constituted by psychological continuity, but the claim that it is constituted by any relation other than numerical identity. For numerical identity—no matter what its relata—seems as good a candidate as any for being primitive, not “constituted” by anything else at all. (And if it is, it is presumably constituted by something like indiscernibility, not R\*.) If numerical identity is never constituted by anything else, then if persons endure, personal identity over time can never be constituted by any relation other than numerical identity holding between a person existing at one time and at another. For the endurantist, the only difficult question about constitution and personal identity is “What constitutes being a person?”.

## V

In light of the above arguments, I conclude if persons endure, we should leave behind the suggestion that personal identity is reduced to, or analyzed in terms of, psychological continuity. In the final sections of this paper, I want to explain and emphasize one moral we should draw from this conclusion. That moral is that if persons

endure, then Derek Parfit's celebrated attack on the claim that identity matters in survival fails. This is of independent philosophical interest. And it will constitute a defense of the claim that persons endure. For, as even Parfit himself recognizes, the view that personal identity does not matter in survival is counterintuitive and very difficult to believe (1984, 279). Any view—such as endurance—which avoids this unhappy result thereby has a mark in its favor.

Before examining Parfit's argument, we ought first to understand what the claim that identity does not matter in survival amounts to. So imagine that God is going to destroy me and then (perhaps even in the same instant) create an exact duplicate of me. This duplicate will seem to remember my experiences and even my innermost thoughts, it will look like me and have my personality, and so on. God will then shower this duplicate with delights beyond imagining. On hearing this, I wonder whether I should be full of joyous anticipation or instead—with apologies to Epicurus and a nod to Hobbes—the fear of death. So I ask God: will that duplicate be (identical with) me?

If identity does not matter in survival, then the answer to this question does not matter. Not only does the answer to “will that duplicate be identical with me?” not matter in the grand scheme of things, it does not, or at least should not, matter to me; that is, it should not matter even from an agent-relative standpoint. Even if the duplicate were not identical with me, Parfit would say, it would still have what matters—psychological continuity. So even if the duplicate were not identical with me, I should anticipate its experiences just as I would anticipate my own; if identity does not matter in survival, I should not, given the existence of the duplicate, regard my ceasing to exist as a bad thing for me. But this—the claim that my ceasing to exist should not matter to me—is hard to believe. As I said above, any view of personal identity that can resist Parfit's argument for this claim will thereby have a mark in its favor.

Parfit's most famous argument for identity's not mattering is driven by the possibility of fission. Were I to divide in the sort of case Parfit imagines, both products

of fission would be psychologically continuous with me (1984, 216). If I will never divide, on the other hand, I am psychologically continuous with only one person existing at any given future time. Note that whether psychological continuity is unbranching and some future person is uniquely psychologically continuous with me depends not just on facts about me and that future person, but also depends on whether someone else will be psychologically continuous with me as well. So whether my psychological continuity with a future person is unbranching or not is “extrinsic”. And, says Parfit, whatever it is that matters in survival should not be “extrinsic” in this way (1984, 263). So one moral Parfit draws from fission is that, while it might matter that we are psychologically continuous with some future person, whether or not that continuity branches does not matter, or at least not very much.

There is much that is controversial in Parfit’s discussion of fission. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that Parfit’s arguments involving fission are, up to this point, wildly successful. Suppose, that is, that the possibility of fission demonstrates that psychological continuity’s holding in an unbranching fashion has little, if anything, to recommend it over psychological continuity alone, in and of itself, considered independently of whether or not it branches. Would this show—as Parfit insists that it does—that it is psychological continuity and not personal identity that matters?

Only if, obviously, personal identity just is unbranching psychological continuity. Only if personal identity is nothing other than unbranching psychological continuity does devaluing unbranching psychological continuity devalue personal identity. But we have seen that an analysis or reduction of personal identity over time in terms of unbranching psychological continuity is simply not possible given the thesis that persons last over time by enduring. So, if persons endure, then Parfit’s argument for personal identity’s not mattering is a complete non-starter. If persons endure, then we have no reason whatsoever to deny that identity matters even if the possibility of fission proves that



unbranching psychological continuity is not more valuable than psychological continuity considered independently of whether it branches.<sup>16</sup>

## VI

One might object that, even given endurance, there is a way to salvage Parfit's argument against the importance of identity. One might remind us that it is consistent with endurance that, necessarily, personal identity over time holds if and only if unbranching psychological continuity holds. In other words—in the terms introduced above and understood to be consistent with enduring persons—the endurantist can claim that R's (or R\*'s) holding in an unbranching fashion is a necessary and sufficient condition for personal identity over time. And one might conclude that this—and not a full-blown analysis or reduction of personal identity in terms of psychological continuity—is all that is needed to generate Parfit's attack on the value of personal identity over time.

So suppose, just for the sake of argument, that R plus U and R\* plus U are each necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time.<sup>17</sup> And suppose, again for the sake of argument, that this is consistent with the endurantist's claim that personal identity over time is something distinct from—i.e., cannot be analyzed as—R plus U and R\* plus U. One might then point out that U is “extrinsic”. Or one might try to devalue U by way of other considerations arising from fission. Suppose this can be done. This might show that R/R\* plus U as such is no more important than R/R\* alone. That is, it might show

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<sup>16</sup>Parfit's most recent arguments against identity's mattering (Parfit, 1995) are predicated on the claim that personal identity “just consists in” some sort of continuity (physical and/or psychological) in the way a statue “just consists in” a lump of bronze. But if personal identity over time is numerical identity holding between a person existing wholly present at one time and wholly present at another, then, as I argued above, it is false that it “consists in” any sort of continuity in this way.

<sup>17</sup>Given our definition of R\* plus U in terms of R plus U, one will be necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time if and only if the other is.

that when we consider R/R\* plus U in and of itself, and give no consideration to what else it implies, we find nothing to recommend it over R/R\* alone.<sup>18</sup>

But this is no threat to the importance of personal identity. For if persons endure, it is not the case that personal identity just is the R relation—or the R\* relation—holding in an unbranching form. So what is true of R plus U and R\* plus U (such as each being no more valuable than R or R\* alone) need not be true of personal identity. We have already seen this. Personal identity just is the relation of numerical identity holding between a person and herself; R plus U and R\* plus U are not.

Of course, if R/R\* plus U is in fact necessary and sufficient for personal identity over time, then states of affairs in which R/R\* plus U holds are much more valuable than states of affairs in which R/R\* alone holds. But that is not because we value R/R\* plus U in and of itself. It is because when R/R\* plus U holds, so does something else, personal identity. That—according to the endurantist—personal identity is “something else”, not the same thing as R/R\* plus U, has been established.<sup>19</sup> And the value of the “something else” implied by R/R\* plus U is not threatened by arguments for the claim that R/R\* plus U as such is no more important than R/R\* alone.

Two points should be clear. First, if persons endure, no attack on the value of R/R\* plus U as such will cast any doubt on the value of personal identity over time. To aim at R/R\* plus U is to aim at the wrong target. In fact, to aim at any relation such as R or R\* that possibly holds between distinct entities—and thus threatens to branch unless we explicitly add that it be “unbranching”—is to aim at the wrong target. Secondly, the

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<sup>18</sup>Actually, such a conclusion is not so surprising once we deny that personal identity is R/R\* plus U. Of course, the endurantist might put a great deal of value in psychological continuity. Who wants amnesia? But if persons endure, unbranching psychological continuity, in and of itself, will have nothing like the importance intuitively afforded to the distinct fact of personal identity.

<sup>19</sup>So we have seen that if persons endure, then personal identity is a “further fact” in addition to unbranching psychological continuity. And we have also seen that a further fact of personal identity other than some sort of continuity does not—as Parfit sometimes suggests—require dualism. Endurance alone is sufficient.

discussion of this section has provided the further evidence—promised above—for the claim that mere necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity do not, in and of themselves, amount to a genuine reduction. For even if R/R\* plus U were necessary and sufficient for personal identity, the fact of personal identity over time would be some “further fact”; it would be “something else” whose value would not be impugned by devaluing R/R\* plus U; thus R/R\* plus U would not be a genuine reduction of personal identity.

Given the assumption that persons endure, we can decisively and finally lay to rest the Parfidious threat to the importance of personal identity. I think a defense of the importance of identity based on only the assumption that persons endure is the simplest and most elegant of the many that have been offered. Endurance is, after all, a view appealing to many independently of its bearing on Parfit’s argument. Other defenses of the importance of personal identity over time must make more controversial and less independently appealing assumptions, such as the existence of “Cartesian egos”, the joint occupancy of pre-fission bodies by multiple persons, or the denial that fission is possible. None of this constitutes a proof of endurance, or even a proof that the endurantist response to Parfit’s arguments is the best one. But it does, I think, speak in favor of the thesis that persons endure to all who find incredible the claim that personal identity does not matter in survival.

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