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Commentary About Derek Parfit's book "Reasons and Persons - Part Three - Personal identity"

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In these pages you will find my notes about the third part of the book "Reasons and Persons" by Derek Parfit. The text is thought to be read together with the text of Parfit, otherwise it may result obscure in some parts. I am interested to the third part of the book because it is about Personal Identity. I knew about this book through the comments I read in the book "I Am You" by Daniel Kolak, where the author argues against Parfit about personal identity. Kolak classified the view of Parfit as "Empty Individualism", proposing an alternative view that he called "Open Individualism", which may be described as a modern version of Monopsychism. My personal view is about the same of Kolak, but as I came to it by myself, before knowing his work, I maintained some personal opinions on the matter. You may check my personal web site at <http://www.iacopovettori.it/laterzaipotesi/eng/Default.aspx>. Here, my goal is to find the extent to which Empty Individualism and Open Individualism can be considered similar and where the divergences begin. Perhaps a little change in assumptions may bring a great difference in conclusions. I want here to express my admiration and respect for the work of Derek Parfit, I just wanted to make some constructive notes, hoping they may be useful even for who does not agree with me. A careful reader might also notice how the studying of Parfit's book allowed me to express my thought in a sharper way, so I have to thank him like a teacher, in the same way I have to thank Daniel Kolak.

Chapter 10 - What We Believe Ourselves to Be

Section 75 - Simple Teletransportation and the Branch-Line Case

The part of the book of Parfit discussing on personal identity starts at chapter 10 and ends at chapter 15. The first section of chapter 10 considers the case of simple teletransportation, that Parfit thinks might preserve personal identity, and the case of producing a replica without destroying original person, that Parfit classifies as “*a branch-line case*”. Technically, a teletransportation that preserves the states of every elementary particle of the matter should destroy it (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_teleportation), so I doubt that a *branch-line case* might ever be realized by this way, but that is not important for the philosophical goal of this discussion. It's more interesting one of the final phrases: “*Since I can talk to my Replica, it seems clear that he is not me*”. This is the preconception I want to overcome, even if it will require to overcome our bias that it is impossible to live more than a life at any given time. In the following, we will evaluate if this requirement is more difficult to accept than the requirements that Parfit ask us to accept to consider viable his proposal.

Section 76 - Qualitative and Numerical Identity

I am interested in what Parfit defined here as the “numerical identity”, and this is what I refer generally speaking of “personal identity”. Says Parfit: “*When we are concerned about our future, it is our numerical identity that we are concerned about. I may believe that, after my marriage, I shall not be the same person, but this does not make marriage death*”. This kind of change will influence only my “qualitative identity”, which does not imply my death. But he says also that “*indeed, on one view, certain kinds of qualitative change destroy numerical identity. If certain things happen to me, the truth may not be that I become a very different person. The truth might be that I cease to exist*”.

- *that the resulting person is someone else*". Here I must mark a first difference. I believe that qualitative changes may kill me, but I do not believe that another person could silently substitute me, through mere qualitative changes, while my body continues to be alive. Actually, this is what we may think also according with our native view about personal identity. Parfit will show us why he think that this might turn out to be false, but in my view it could never exist anybody that I might call "someone else". We come to this conclusion if we deny the possibility of any absolute foundation of the concept of identity in general. Once every identity will acknowledged as illusory, so it will be illusory also any imagined difference between *my* personal identity and *your* personal identity.

Section 77 - The Physical Criterion of Personal Identity

Considering the "physical criterion" rises some problems. Here I still forget about Open Individualism, and I will pretend to have the original view according with the believing that everyone has their own personal identity, acknowledging the simple condition for the question (1) "*What is the nature of a person?*" given by Parfit: the nature of a person is being "*self-conscious, aware of its identity and its continued existence over time*". But what this identity consists in? Examining the case of physical objects is more slippery than we may imagine at first. This is clear thinking about the case of the ship with continuous changing of bits of wood, that resembles more the case of living humans. Actually, the "identity" of the ship is just an useful convention for humans. The ship itself has nothing that may grab any "identity", nor the ship itself may ever care more about this. If someone had collected all the substituted bits of wood and reassembled it again in a shabby ship, would this ship still be the "original" ship? Moreover, we know that all the things are made of molecules, atoms and ultimately, elementary particles. Because these have no identity at all, also when we talk about a macroscopic thing like the pyramids, we really cannot assume that they might have any intrinsic identity maintained by their continuous existence over time. Each elementary particle that

composes any macroscopical object is something that floats continuously between its undulatory and corpuscular nature. We can say that a given atom is made of one electron, and a proton formed by two quarks “down” and one quark “up”, but it is impossible to trace the continued existence of any of them, and not merely for technical reasons, but for conceptual reasons. We may identify atoms and molecules only for their role in a system, but they do not have any “identity”. Suppose that we have two identical structures of molecules that forms two microscopical pyramids. If we could overlap them so strictly that the equations that rule their corresponding elementary particles became the same, and then we could separate them again so that they returned to be two distinct structures, it would not only practically, but also conceptually impossible to say “this is the pyramid that before was at left, and this is the pyramid that before was at right”. I think that it is true even without this imaginary overlapping: two microscopic pyramids are identifiable just because they are part of a system where we can find one at our left, and another at our right. It does not exist anything like an “intrinsic” identity of any object. Even to consider two objects as spatially separated is just a convention that we use only for our communicating convenience. It would not be impossible to manage our language to consider a pair of gloves as a unity that has a single “identity”, considering an odd glove just as we actually consider one part of a jacket striped in two. Because it is based on a conventional identity that is conventionally maintained in time, I consider the concept of “continued existence” not well defined for objects and also for human beings. I think it actually works in the other way around: the concept of “separate identity” is something that we introduced as a consequence from considering ourselves as having a continuous existence, distinct and separated from the others. This is the reason why it is so difficult to anchor identity elsewhere. This is the reason why I criticize the assumption (2) of *The Physical Criterion* for personal identity: “*X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if enough of Y’s brain continued to exist and is now X’s brain*”. However, even if this cannot be intended as “materially

the same”, we could think that the continuity of the existence of my brain still have sense, if we consider the structure of the brain, not merely the physical matter that constitutes it. Physical matter has no intrinsic identity, but the identity continuity could perhaps to be still preserved by the psychological criterion. This is what Parfit actually believes.

Section 78 - The Psychological Criterion

It is important to clarify here that my final view does not involve the existence of a purely mental entity, as it is often misunderstood by the critics of Open Individualism. In my view the consciousness is a process without identity, but the sense of continuity that we experience is due to psychological causes, so I agree with most of the concepts in this section. So, the *Psychological continuity* made of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness is a good principle on which we may found our sense of being separated persons, even if it does not imply, in my view, any support for the personal identity intended as what matters to be dead or alive. About the narrow and wide versions Psychological Criteria, I prefer the wide version, because more in generally I think that we must leave the idea that the past is necessarily only one. The past must be coherent with the current state of our world, but if this current state does not contain enough information to determine univocally a given past state, we cannot know what is the possible past we come from. For these reasons, even if information in the outside world may still make clear if my memories has the *normal* cause or not, I accept the *Widest version* of the Psychological Criterion, meaning that it does not matter if two people with the brains in the same state reached this same state in two different ways. Because their sense of being themselves depends only by their psychological state, when it is the same it comprehends also the same memories, no matter their forming causes. So I agree that, if the Psychological Criterion was necessary for having the same personal identity, then the replica on Mars would be me in the same degree of the original individual with the damaged heart stayed on the Earth, even if their

stories begin to diverge from the moment of replication. Parfit argues that we may leave the question undetermined, giving the example of artificial eyes, but I think that in this example there is only a question of word definition, not my being live or dead. When successively he want to apply this undetermination also to the question of our survival, I think he ask us to concede much more than what I ask to concede, imagining that the experience of being the original person damaged on the Earth and that of being the Replica on Mars are experienced by the same subject, living twice in the same interval of time. Actually, also Parfit thinks that under certain restrictions, this can be the best description of what happens. But I claim that we can imagine that this subject is always the same for all conscious beings, without the need to introduce any purely mental entity. This subject can be considered as the phenomenon of consciousness itself, without any identity, and without any need to imagine a sort of ghost that go back and forth in time to experience all the possible lives. It manifests itself exactly under the same physiological conditions we may think are necessary for any particular conscious being, but because its identity is not defined at all, it is not subject to change for any reason. Still psychological continuity will continue to be a useful concept to describe the continuity that we experience during our lives.

Section 79 - The Other Views

My position about Materialism or Physicalism is that every mental events have a correspondence with a physical event. There are two way to interpret the same facts, one in third-person point of view, the other in first-person point of view, the objective and the subjective interpretation. Considering only the third person point of view, it becomes impossible to explain the existence of the first-person point of view, which we experience directly. Considering only the first-person point of view, as happens in the case of classical solipsism, it became impossible to explain how I find myself in a world where I seem to be just one person between many others, who seems to be alive as I am. I deny what Non-Reductionists claim, that "*we are separately existing*

entities", and I also deny that Open Individualism needs to introduce a single *separated existing entity*, as many critics claim. I claim that what is called *numerical identity* is just a conventional concept that cannot be reduced to *qualitative identity* and eventually it appeals to something that is classifiable as *separately existing*. I claim that Open Individualism is the necessary consequence of the denying of the numerical identity concept as something real, meanwhile acknowledging on the existence of our first-person point of view experience. Returning to the Parfit's text, this means that consistence between the statement (6) "*A nation's existence just involves the existence of its citizens, living together in certain ways, on its territory*" and the statement (8) "*A nation is an entity that is distinct from its citizens and its territory*" may be just a matter of definition, but this can be applied to persons only if we consider the third-person point of view, leaving off the existence of the *subjective experience* of the world in first-person point of view. And this existence is what we experience directly, and cannot be rubricated just as a matter of definition. A *complete description of the world* could be impersonal only losing the information about the possibility of experiencing of the world from the first-person point of view, so it is questionable if it might be defined "*complete*". Our knowledge of the possibility to interpret some physical events as a mental events is in fact based on our direct experience of these events as mental events, that we have only because our *being a subject* experimenting the world in first-person point of view. Considerations of Parfit about clubs may also be indeterminate as they are just human concepts, but what may ever mean that my existence as a subject experiencing the world in first-person point of view might likewise be *indeterminate*? I may consider "empty" the question, as Parfit suggests, only when referring to other people, but it cannot become indeterminate when it concerns my own personal existence, at least until I maintain a numerical difference between my identity and those of other people. The only way to get rid of those differences, and consider really *empty* the question about my own personal identity, is to embrace Open Individualism. This is not very far from what Parfit

claims. He suggests that personal identity doesn't matter, and what really matter is the Relation R, that he defines in this way: "*Psychological connectedness and/or continuity, with the right kind of cause*", and this cause could be *any cause*, as he claims later. I agree that Relation R matters, but in another sense. If we are aware that the loss of personal identity implies that even my current personal identity is an illusion, like as those of all the other people, then Relation R just establishes the rules of our apparent separateness. Keeping in mind this difference, I may subscribe the Parfit program: we are not separately existing entities (separated from physical facts), but our numerical personal identity is always indeterminate, it is just an illusory concept (implying that between "me" and "you" there's no difference of personal identity). The apparent unity of our own life is given just by Relation R, which provides our psychological continuity, as well as our psychological separateness between ourselves. This model may easily overcome even the problem of the branching form.

Chapter 11 - How We Are Not What We Believe

Section 80 - Does Psychological Continuity Presuppose Personal Identity?

I am quite comfortable with the quasi-memory concept introduced here by Parfit. As I imagine that our mental state entirely depends by the structure of our brain (and in general of our body, as suggested by Antonio Damasio in his book "Descartes' Error"), there's no need to postulate a preceding personal identity, as well as there's no need to differentiate two equal mental states only for the history of their states, once they became equal. The psychological criterion, eventually, appeals to the structural similarity between successive states of the brain, and I agree that this is what gives us the sense of experiencing a continuous existence, including the continuity of our memory and all what Parfit accounts to Relation R.

Section 81 - The Subject of Experiences

Here I have to make some important notes. First of all, we experience in first person that apparently we are distinct conscious beings, each having a distinct personal identity. Once I claimed that personal identity is an illusion, and more in general, that the concept of identity is only a convention without a real physical meaning, I have to acknowledge that each conscious being is subject to this illusion, and that this illusion must still have a recipient. So the discussion here is extremely insidious. My view is that a *recipient* of this illusion exists, as I perceive myself to exist, but I do not say anything about how it might exist, not even whether it might be completely reduced to something physical. Once that I agree that every mental event have a counterpart in a physical event, I can discuss about personal identity being agnostic on the ultimate question about consciousness and reductionism. All what I say is just that it is *the identity of the recipient* to be illusory, and therefore is wrong to think that each of us is *a different recipient with a different personal identity*. In the first part of the section Parfit claims

that we could be not aware to be a Cartesian Ego, and that we might never know if our Cartesian Ego were instantly created with pre-existing memories, so we may reject the hypothesis to have such Cartesian Ego, whom nature of Pure Ego would be separated by physical facts. I agree with this, but I disagree that this should imply that we can fully describe the world in third person point of view. I mean that using only third person point of view we can have a full *technical description* our world, but we are doomed to lose the meaning of the experience of what is “to be alive”. First of all, we have to notice that the third person point of view is an abstraction, because we may experiment only the first person point of view. It is through observation and science that we build a physical model that may describe the world in third person point of view. This kind of objectivity is what makes possible for the science to be modern and effective. Reductionism imply that every mental event corresponds to a physical event, a neuronal activity in the brain. I naturally agree with this, but I believe that we cannot scientifically demonstrate that some physical events can be interpreted as mental events. We simply know this because we experience it directly. I know that experiments have shown that directly stimulation of the brain influences our behaviours, but until we are bounded in a third person point of view, we cannot be sure that these reactions have a mental counterpart. I can image to know everything that matters in neuroscience and to have a device that allows me to observe the neuronal activity of the brain of other people, and also of my own brain. With such device, I might even interpret the thoughts of other people, and see that they resembles very close my own neuronal activity, so that I may consider myself to be just “one of the many” as every other people. But I still had to acknowledge that only when a thought occurs in the brain that appears to be the centre of my first person point of view I directly experience its mental interpretation, or “its mental interpretation occurs”, to use the Lichtenberg form. So I may legitimately wonder how the first person point of view is localized only in a specific region of the outside world that seems to be chosen by chance. I can now generalize and suppose that also the states of the

brains of other people could be interpreted in a first person point of view, and that probably they are. But this fact is not deduced by something of material existing in the world out there: my direct experience by my own first person point of view is necessary to become aware that all the brain states may have a mental interpretation, that they have a meaning that goes beyond the physical structure that they form, that the “meaning” concept exists, and, eventually, that the world itself exists. What is important to notice here, is that science does not need that the physical facts studied in an objective way may have also a mental interpretation in first person point of view. Also in neurology, this does not influence the study itself, it just influences our being interested in studying some kind of phenomena instead of others. What I want to say, is that the existence of a mental world is out of the scope of science: it is just a direct evidence that we cannot deny, which enables us to experience the world and build our reductionist theories. So we have to reconcile two facts: the former is that a third person complete description of the world cannot account the possibility to interpret some physical facts as mental facts. The latter is that these mental facts appears (to each of us) to be *arbitrarily* localized in a specific body/brain, slowly changing in time, giving the appearance that once that specific body/brain will be definitively not working, using Lichtenberg formula, “there will be no thought anymore”.

Section 82 - How a Non-Reductionist View Might Have Been True

Parfit’s argument here is based on constating that evidence of reincarnation cases could support the hypothesis of a Cartesian Ego, separated from physical facts, able to carry memories and maybe other psychological aspects between two successive lives. Because I am promoting a view that may naively be defined as “everybody else is another reincarnation of mine”, I have to do some important distinctions that may allow me to still claim to be acceptable also for reductionist reasoning. First of all, I do not suppose that any information may be

transmitted from a life to another in a non-reductionist way, nor memories, nor any other psychological aspect. But more important, it is the constation that even if we imagine a "Pure Ego" which impersonates all our lives without any exception, a little deeper reflection may show that this "Pure Ego" has no role other than marking the arbitrary body/brain that we currently experience in the first person point of view. Actually, it does not need to have any metaphysical nature deeper than what we may allow to acknowledge for our actual living experience. It's just a mark necessary to select the space-time location that, through the physical existence of a body/brain, allows our direct perception of the mental interpretation of the physical world. This is not an "entity" that I must imagine to have any identity. This just represents the intersection between a physical structure in a given stage of its continuous changing in time, plus an (apparently arbitrary) applying of the axiom of choice, so that a precise physical structure (my body/brain) serves as first person point of view so that the experience of thinking can be given. The problem of the apparent arbitrary of this choice can be eliminated only if we think that all the possible choices will be equally selected. The different instants of a given individual lives are kept together by the relation R , which allows the experience of the continuity. But we may easily imagine that other lives are not experienced differently. My fundamental claim is that there is no reason to imagine that other lives are experienced by "somebody else". Only this erroneous believing would really introduce the need of "Pure Ego" (what Parfit would call "Featureless Cartesian Ego"), necessary to mark the impassable difference between "me" and "all the others". We are inclined to think that the recipient of the illusion of being the particular subject that I believe to be, must necessarily be numerically different from the recipient of the illusion of being another particular subject that somebody else believes to be, just for a reason that appears to be very weak, at the light of the conceptual revolutions occurred in modern physics in the last century: our concurrent existence in the same time interval. Some might ask in what sequence I think our concurrent lives may be experienced in first person point of

view. I claim that this is a proper example of what Parfit called “an empty question”. We live experiencing a *subjective time*, which is driven by the physical states of the outside world, giving an order to some physical relations which constitute the framework of the *external time*. But this kind of *external time* is something like a set of geometrical relations that cannot be useful to give an absolute order to our experiences of *subjective time*. This view may seem demanding, but it can resolve all the problems related to personal identity, as well as many other problems related to our individual existence.

Section 83 - Williams’s Argument Against the Psychological Criterion

I agree with Williams in the sense that I don’t believe that Relation-R or the Psychological Criterion may define the personal identity, but for a different reason: I deny that anything may ever define it. Relation-R and the Psychological Criterion just give us the sense of unity and continuity of our individual lives. The distance between my view and Parfit’s view consists only in denying that a sum of qualitative differences in personal identity might result in a numerical difference of personal identities. Unlike Williams, I don’t believe that Physical Criterion might be more effective than Psychological Criterion.

Section 84 - The Psychological Spectrum

In this section different ways to alter the Psychological Continuity are considered, so that changes may be applied in different ways: just one little change in the first case, or many changes together in the middle cases, or all the changes at once in the last case. Parfit suggests that the quantity of changes should be decisive to determine if the resulting person after the changes will still be me or *somebody else*. He claims that in the middle cases, when many changes occur at once, the question “will the resulting person still be me?” can be empty. Maybe that his considerations would be different if the resulting person were dead, instead or alive. This would be not an empty question, and we accept that a little more change in any part of a continuous

transformation, whatever it could be smooth, can be fatal, without any relation with the paradox of the heap: when an equilibrium is broken, the living system collapses quickly. I think that also in the theory of Parfit the changing of personal identity might occur in the same way, with a collapse of preceding identity, without the need to think that personal identity can become undefined. Anyway, in my view it is the same “personal identity” concept that has to be defined “empty” and it is what we should criticize directly, instead of the conditions for its definition and persistence.

Section 85 - The Physical Spectrum

In this case, Parfit imagines that a progressively greater percentage of his body will be substituted with exact duplicates of existing cells. I agree that this will be irrelevant, provided that these cells are enough similar with the existing ones. If only a short percentage of cells was changed, it would be like as a normal transplant; if the totality of the body was destructed and recreated from new organic matter, it would be like as the teletransport case discussed before. Parfit says that there is a problem to face next. Considering Williams’s argument, the psychological continuity seems to be not necessary for personal identity, and physical continuity would be sufficient. Considering the physical spectrum, seems that physical continuity is not necessary, and psychological continuity would be sufficient. In my view, neither of these continuities are necessary to define my personal identity, and psychological continuity is necessary only to keep together my sense of self, but this possibility is not contemplated here. Parfit continues his investigation combining both psychological and physical spectrum in what he called the *Combined Spectrum*.

Section 86 - The Combined Spectrum

This case is far more physically impossible than previous cases because the first case is limited to a brain reprogramming, the second case is limited to a substitution of the matter that constitutes the body but doesn’t affect the body structure. We may accept it for the sake of

the discussion, but I found how to figure the transformation of a body/brain to another very different without the death of the subject. We might imagine to compress in a second of complete unconsciousness, fifty year of a normal life. We know that in that time span almost all the matter that constitutes our body is substituted as well as our body structure changes in unforeseeable ways. We may imagine that the subject might survive to this kind of transformation, but in this way it would be lost that psychological and physical continuity that we are discussing here, because the transformation happens during complete unconsciousness. Parfit says that also for non-reductionist believing in a separately existing entity like a Cartesian Ego there would be a change in personal identity, but he imagines a different procedure using progressive transplants of brain parts. He says that there would be a problem if more than a critical percentage of brain were transplanted, which suddenly would result in a person who would be psychologically unlike the original person. It seems to me that this would happen only in some Non-Reductionist theories, but not necessarily in all of them. Parfit says that according to Non-Reductionists, we should figure the existence of a sharp borderline that would mark the change of the *numerical* personal identity of the subject, and if we are Non-Reductionists, we should believe that this personal identity must always be determinate. I don't think that this process might change the numerical personal identity of the subject, anyhow, as I noted before, this sharp borderline could be similar to the one between life and death, where the new incoming of even a little dysfunction may cause the collapse of all the body/brain system (in certain sense, we may see it as the passing from one personal identity to no one personal identity). Parfit seems to claim that this Combined transformation would necessarily involve a numerical change in personal identity because the psychological and physical distance between the the body/brain at the near end and the body/brain at the far end could be great as the difference that exists between two ordinary individuals. So, it seems necessary that somewhere during this transformation the numerical personal identity must change,

because we obtain a perfect replica of *another* individual. I want to notice that this new individual might be already existing before the transformation begins, if we use the structure of their body/brain as the target of the transformation of the first individual. The problems with replicas are debated in one of the following sections, but here we may see that only assuming that exists some separately existing entity like a Cartesian Ego we might have two perfectly equal individuals with different numeric personal identities, because all other conditions are equal (they would had identical body/brain structure). I can claim both that numerical personal identity doesn't changes through the Combined Spectrum and that doesn't exist any separately existing entity like a Cartesian Ego just because I deny the same existence of the personal identity. This hypothesis doesn't need to introduce a Cartesian Ego to hold a distinction between *me* and *anybody else*. This does not affect the Parfit's claim that the brain is the carrier of psychological connectedness, this just denies that the loss of psychological or physical connectedness might cause a change of the numerical personal identity. Parfit claims that this change in numerical personal identity has to occur somewhere during this transformation. Then he claims that it would happen without any evidence to determine where this sharp borderline was. So he concludes that this change has to happen in a way that let the personal identity *indeterminate* in some passages of the transformation. This happen because he thinks that a numerical personal identity must exist and that, being it necessarily bound to something physical or structural in the Reductionist View, it is impossible to preserve it when experiencing a full Combined transformation, where at each end we have two different persons. I want make you to imagine how this should be subjectively experienced according the Reductionist View. The difference between *me* and *anybody else* in a third person point of view is that the individual who may be identified as "me" is the one whose neuronal activity corresponds to the thinking that is going on. This is not an information that can be stored in the physical world. We cannot deduce *for sure* that, because other people has apparently similar cerebral processes,

therefore other thoughts must exist, experienced by “someone else”. In a full third person point of view, I can only notice that the cerebral activity of other people does not correspond with any experienced “ongoing thought”. So all what I should fear, before to undergo such Combined transformation, is just that suddenly the thought ceases to be going on (or maybe gradually, like it happens when we fall asleep). This is not an information that the outer material world may record in any way. Actually, the existence of the ongoing thought is something that cannot be deduced from the mere observation of the physical world. The fact that some brain states can be interpreted and they are actually interpreted as mental states is something like a clandestine presence in the third person model of the material world. The disappearing of this phenomenon would be completely unnoticed: according to the Reductionist View, a world of zombies would work as well as our world is working. But still is impossible to say that this event would not matter, if we believe that the thought will go on only during the survival of the individual whose brain activity happens to match consistently with the thought that is going on. For these reason, it is difficult to accept what Parfit claims here, that because a sharp borderline between two different personal identities would not be detectable, then even my own personal identity can become indeterminate. In a certain sense, I agree, because to claim that no personal identity can actually exists, is very similar to claim that personal identity is always indeterminate. Thus, the observation that I would like to do to Parfit, is that if we concede that sometime personal identity may be indeterminate, then it is more correct to think that it is *always* indeterminate. I may always look at me as the middle state of a transformation between two other individuals, each of them being me only at 50%, one for *one half* of my body/brain, the other for the *other half* of my body/brain. So I could legitimately claim to have the personal identity that is indeterminate in relation to these two individuals, that actually could be “me ten years ago” and “me as I will become in ten years from now”, according his view. If we consider all the personal identities as being indeterminate, also when comparing my personal

identity with the one of my replica on Mars we should come to the same conclusion. Parfit says that if the scan doesn't destroy my original body, my replica would be qualitatively identical to me, but because our lives overlaps (at least for some time) we cannot be numerically identical. This is certainly a concrete difference, but what is the meaning of this numerical difference? In the next chapter, Parfit will address the problem of divided minds. In my view, what happens between me and my replica is not very different: in both cases, the resulting person will be me, even if I can experience *the thought that are going on* in each brain only *one at a time*. I will explain further this concept in the following, but what I am asking you is to think at different streams of consciousness of different individuals not as being experienced by different, concurrent subjects, but experienced by the same *recipient of the illusion of being a subject* in different *subjective time dimensions*. Many criticize this concept of "subject" as Non-Reductionist, because they want that this subject had a physical counterpart: we might consider the whole universe as the physical counterpart, or better, the whole set of all the possible universes, with the full generalization imagined for example by Max Tegmark. This does not mean that the universe might had a *global consciousness*, but only that it has some parts, that we call *conscious individuals*, that developed a brain with brain states, that can be interpreted in first-person point of view, and these interpretations are *subjectively experienced* by the mean of the generation of a *subjective time*. My criticism of the identity concept implies that the same concept of *instance of something* is purely conventional, so if we want to anchor to something solid the personal identity that we imagine for each of these *conscious individuals* generated as parts of our universe, we have to go back to something that does not need to be considered an instance of something with another illusory identity: and it becomes possible only when we consider *the whole universe* (or multiverse). I will write more on this topic in another document. If we consider this view, we may see that numerical personal identity may be considered illusory, even if we perceive that there exist many numerical different conscious

individuals, each having its own psychological continuity. So even physical and psychological discontinuity points like birth, death or teletransportation, do not matter, just because there is no personal identity that might be lost or changed with another. In the case of simple teletransportation, we are inclined to think that after pressing the button, I become the replica on Mars. In the case of non-destructive scan, we are inclined to think that after pressing the button, I remain on the Earth and it is my replica who is *somebody else*, and it's impossible that I may ever become him, simply because I am here on the Earth in the meanwhile he is there on Mars. But if we get rid of the concept of absolute time, and we consider reliable only the concept of different *subjective times*, it's not so difficult to imagine that, at the end of my *current* subjective time, *the thought will continue to go on* in every other possible *subjective time*, including the one of my replica on Mars. Whenever this will happen (here I use the future grammatical form only for communication purposes) I will undergo the experience of being just arrived on Mars through an apparent "normal" teletransportation, and being noticed about my unlucky "original" copy left on the Earth with a bad heart disease. Also in this case, my subjective experience is continuous, I would look to my "original" as a unlucky shadow I left on the Earth. It is impossible to say if I experience one branch "before" or "after" the other. This would require an absolute time where I could sort the two subjective times. Outside the subjective times, we may have at most some physical facts that are more likely to happen in some order, but we know that the experiencing of brain states as mental states is not detectable by any physical measurement. This gives us an indetermination certain that I believe might also leave room for the possibility of the free will. I want point out that this view, even if requires to review our conception of time (no more than modern physics just did in the last century), gives us the minimum required integration that allows us to complete the third person point of view of the reductionist view of the world, removing the arbitrarily distinction between that special individual whose brain activity results always corresponding exactly with *the thought that is going on* and all the bunch of other lives

that apparently have no correspondence with it, and giving a clear reason why the personal identity may be considered illusory and indeterminate. This view leaves room for those who do not believe that consciousness could ever be reduced to a physical phenomenon: it allows us to leave the mystery of its existence beyond the scope of scientific research, without imposing any limit.

Chapter 12 - Why Our Identity Is not What Matters

Section 87 - Divided Minds

Parfit here discusses some medical cases of people affected with severe epilepsy, who were subject to a surgical disconnection of the two hemispheres of the brain. The consequence is that the patient seems to have two separate centres of consciousness. Parfit then describes an imaginary case where he was able to perform a temporary division between the two hemispheres of his brain. I completely agree on the effects that he describes, and also with his conclusion that “a person’s mental history need not to be like a canal, with only one channel, but could be like a river, occasionally having separate streams”. I think that this is the right way to consider all our lives, even if actually they are separate streams, with no intersections. In the same way in which Parfit denies the need to introduce a separate person, with a different personal identity, to flow through the two temporarily separate streams of their consciousness, so I deny the need to introduce any other person to flow through the stream of any other conscious entity. This kind of extreme reduction allows to shrink any question about personal identity to just one technical question: how can “I” be simultaneously “here” and “there”? The answer is the same that we may imagine in the temporary divided mind case: it does not exist an absolute “now”, but many different subjective “nows”. We may think to two past events of our life, that we are not able to sort in time: “What happened first? This event or the other event?”. Sometime we can find the right sequence by remembering some details, other times we cannot. The divided mind experiences should be very similar, but in that case the “right answer” about their sequence would not exist at all. The same should be thought about the experiences of all the other conscious lives. If what we experience is not “my consciousness” but “the consciousness phenomenon” that decodes the physical states of my brain and interprets them as mental states, then the same can be

said for every other conscious entity. This does not require to personify “the consciousness phenomenon”: on the contrary, this is the only way to avoid the personalization of every single “instance of consciousness”, that creates all the problems about identity that we are discussing here. What we have to leave is the need to imagine an absolute time in which we might order our different experiences. Like Parfit says, once we know all what happened in the material world, we know everything that matters: to ask about the order followed by the “conscious phenomenon” in flowing through “my life” and “your life” is an “empty question” without any answer, just like is to ask the order that I followed living the “left stream” and the “right stream” during the divided mind experiment.

Section 88 - What Explains the Unity of Consciousness?

I explained enough my view to make clear how the divided mind experience does not have problematic aspects for it. It is the same stream of consciousness of an individual that creates the subjective time, meanwhile the function of consciousness interprets the physical evolution of the states of the brain as a mental stream. We cannot ask “when” this happens. There’s not an “absolute time” which this subjective time might be placed. We just may observe that the physical evolution of brain states is contemporary to other events (within the limits posed by relativity). This contemporaneity establishes a relation between physical events spatially closed, but it cannot establish the sequence in which two separated set of physical states are translated into two separate streams of mental states. The possibility to interpret some physical events, like the discharge of some neurons, as mental events cannot be proved using physical measurements. We know that this possibility exists just because our own mental events occur, and we are aware of that, and only successively we may see that they correspond to some physical events. I remark this to suggest that the subjective time is linked to the consciousness, and it is not possible to order the experience of two different subjective times in the external physical time. So it should be

no physical obstacles to shift from our native conception “every conscious individual has a physical brain that realizes a succession of physical states that are interpreted as mental states by a particular instance consciousness” to the conception that I promote: “every conscious individual has a physical brain that realizes a succession of physical states that can be interpreted as mental states by the non-instantiable phenomenon that we call consciousness”. The need to imagine more “instances of consciousness” comes only from our difficulty to imagine how we can live together in the same time without assigning different numerical identities to our own conscious processes that take place in partially overlapping time intervals. I think that the attempt to bound these identities to something of physical or psychological is destined to fail. Parfit shows that it is so in some particular cases, when he says identity may become indeterminate, recurring to the “empty question”. I just push it a little beyond, claiming that it is *always* indeterminate, and for this reason we cannot assign any identity even to ourselves. I try to explain what this means, how it may work, and what are the consequences of this way of thinking. The “illusion to be me” is the very same “illusion to be you”: the same attempt to assign different identities to these “illusions” implies the introduction of some form of dualistic Cartesian Ego. You may think that “the function of consciousness”, as I presented it, seems to be dualistic too, or even mystical. But this mystical appearance is not necessary at all, instead this is the only way to bound the mystery of the presence of the mind in an otherwise full reductionist world, leaving the narrowest room strictly necessary to the occurrence of that phenomenon that, according to the most advanced third-person point of view of Lichtenberg and Williams, we subjectively experience as: “There is thought: the thinking is going on”. To return to Parfit text, what constitutes the unity of consciousness is just the brain environment that comprehends all the connections correlated in every brain state. This corresponds to the reductionist view: “there is, at any time, a single state of awareness of [...] various experiences”. When hemispheres are not connected, each of them has its own environment of related

connections, so there are two concurrent brain states, experienced by what seem to be two separated states of awareness. Even if the hemispheres are not completely separated, sharing at least the innermost part of the brain, I can imagine that the stream of consciousness may be unstable and occasionally become separated in two streams and then rejoin, without the need to wonder “who” may experience “the other stream” when I find myself to be conscious of only one half of my brain/body. The Parfit’s reformulation of the Reductionist View meets the requirement to avoid to claim some person as the thinker of any thoughts, but claiming instead that a “thinker” should be meant as “what, at different times, was thought and felt and observed and done, and how these various events were interrelated”, even if all this take place in only one hemisphere of the brain, without the need to introduce a person or a sub-person as the owner of these thoughts. I think that this mistakes the subject of thought with the object, trying to reduce the the first to the second, but losing somewhere the capacity of understanding the meaning of a thought. A final note must be given for the observation that Parfit does about the self-referring thoughts. He says that some utterances against the reductionist objective description of reality are misleading. For example, “I am Derek Parfit” may seem to imply that we are separated existing subject of experiences. But as he explains, what are called “subjective truths” need not to involve a particular subject of experience, because a thought may be *self-referring*. For example, “the thought that this particular thought, even if exactly similar to other thoughts that are thought, is still *this* particular thought”. Parfit accepts that this thought is an impersonal but subjective truth. Then he concludes that all the other *indexical* concepts as “here”, “now” and “this” can be explained without using the term “I”, and instead they (including the term “I”) can be explained in a way that uses only the self-referring use of “this”. In this way, he concludes, we can express all the “subjective” truths without believing in the existence of separate subjects of experiences. This argument would deserved more room, but my aim here is to demonstrate that also my view doesn’t need to

introduce any “separate subjects of experience”, and may define constructively the word “I”. The simple use of “this”, and the understanding of its meaning, requires the existence of the thought. I claim that exists something that cannot be included in a purely third person reductionist view, and it is the knowledge that some particular physical events can be interpreted as mental events. Anyhow, we may assume the existence of the thought as given, and then start to reason in third person point of view in this way: It is given that the thinking is going on. It is given that a material world is observable. It is observed that “the thinking that is going on” is bound to a particular individual that is also found to be bound by “the willing that is going on”. So it can be assigned to this person the indexical “I”, or “me”, for practical purposes. Now it is understable that any mental event has a corresponding physical event. This does not implies that any physical event, although very similar to the ones that correspond to the experienced mental event, should correspond to other mental events. So there is a question left open: there are a lot of other people, whose brain activity and practical behaviour are similar to what was found for “me”. Despite of this, it does not result any thought going on corresponding to their presumed thoughts. The fact that the correspondence between the thought that is going on and a particular individual seems to introduce an asymmetry, to be completely arbitrary and without any reason. I can imagine that somewhere may exist other thoughts running corresponding to those active brains, but it cannot be proved. Moreover, the hypothesis that other stream of thought exists but are hidden, opens the question of why this particular individual results to be bound with the thinking that is going on that is not hidden, and wonder that if also this thinking was hidden just like the ones corresponding to every other individual, it would leave this reductionist world without any corresponding mental world. The only rational way out to get rid of this arbitrariness, is that “the thinking that is going on” would correspond from time to time (in some unobvious sense) to every single brain state that is interpretable as a mental state. These brain states are grouped together by some relations that occur between them, the same that

support psychological continuity and connectedness, causing the formation of more streams of consciousness, that normally appear to be linked to separate individuals, so that the thinking that is going on may in turn denote each of them with the indexical “I”. So the conclusion, according to this view, is that “I” will be in turn every conscious being.

Section 89 - What Happens When I Divide?

In this section Parfit examines the hypothetical case in which his brain is splitted in two and each half is implanted in a different body. This theoretical possibility is based on the existence of people that are injured in one hemisphere and survive with only one hemisphere functioning. Actually, a complete division of the brain seems destined to remain technically impossible, but is useful to consider what we think about what would happen. The problem arises when considering that (1) I may survive with only half of my brain functioning and (2) I may survive if my brain was transplanted in another body. Therefore (3) I may survive if only half of my brain was transplanted in another body. But how should we consider the case where (4) half of my brain is transplanted in one body, and the other half is transplanted in another body? Parfit does a long review of all the possibilities: I survive in both, I survive in only one of them and a new person appears for the other half brain, I do not survive and two new persons appear. I agree on most of his observations, but I subscribe a case that he does not evaluate, just because he doesn't think that the same personal identity might be contemporary existing in more than one individual or “unity of consciousness”. He dismisses this possibility differentiating it from the case of the divided mind discussed in section 87 and 88, because in this case the result involves two different individuals and the division is permanent. Actually, also in the present case I can imagine that, after some years, another operation may rejoin the two halves of the original brain together in a new body, so I think that this case should be treated in the same way of the temporary divided mind that according to Parfit involved only one person. But also in the case of permanent division of

the hemispheres of the brain in the same body, when the two halves developed in different ways, he says that “it would become less plausible to claim that the case involves only one person”. Maybe Parfit here thinks that if the division is prolonged enough, it would bring the two hemispheres to lose the psychological connectedness that allows the personal identity to be the same. Otherwise the problem seems to be only the missing future rejoining, that cannot be expected but neither excluded in a future time. Evaluating the possibility of a Cartesian Ego doesn’t help, because we should assume that one or two new Cartesian Egos are suitably created, but nothing in the material world could ever detect when or who has been created. So Parfit concludes that the reductionist view is the only answer that works: we know what is going to happen at the physical level, and we should dismiss all other questions about the personal identity as “empty questions”, even if they concern my own personal identity, because different answers are only different ways to describe the same physical outcome. In this case, he finds that one particular answer can be claimed to be the better description, and this is that neither of the resulting person will be me. Parfit will explain why in the next section. The question he will focus is: “Should I regard my division as like death, or as like survival?”, and how it is possible to motivate the answer. Because, he concludes, both the resulting people after the division are psychologically continuous with me, but at least one of them cannot have my same personal identity, then psychological continuity does not presupposes personal identity. This is what happens according Parfit. Let us examine what happens according my view. This case is not different from the one in which I divided temporarily my hemispheres. Also if this division is permanent, and also if each half is transplanted in another body, no creation of a new numerical personal identity is involved, all that happens is the creation of another channel of consciousness from the same stream, no matter if this channel is temporary or permanent. The key is that each channel has its own subjective time. I may imagine the function of consciousness, that I defined as the function that interprets the

physical state of a brain in a mental state, working on both the channels. What happens is that while the function is working on the original channel, the streams divide, and so the related subjective time also divide, resulting in two streams that seem to be processed by two different instance of the function, but actually doesn't exist any "function instance". Instead of thinking that there are more "instances of the function of consciousness", we may think that there are different instances of subjective time. This conforms with the fact that the time is created as the mental representation of a different but related series of spacetime events. The only thing that remains unanswered is the empty question about the succession in which the function of consciousness is applied to the two different channels. Psychological continuity is what creates our illusion to be different persons, but the function of consciousness can remain the same between all the possible conscious being, despite any physical and psychological differences, living in whatever kind of world we can ever imagine.

Section 90 - What matters when I divide?

The things here become complicated, as Parfit himself says, and my opinion is that here he comes to an unsatisfying conclusion, despite he presents it as the only rational and reductionist explanation. What I hope to show is that the problem disappears adopting my view, and the solution is still rational and reductionist. He says: "Some people would regard division as bad [...] as ordinary death. This reaction is irrational. We ought to regard division as being about as good as ordinary survival". This is because both the resulting persons with half of my brain transplanted would allow my survival, if just one of them existed. The problem is to imagine how can I be one or both of them since they are two simultaneously existing persons. "Suppose that I [...] regard division as being nearly bad as death. [...] I am like someone who, when told of a drug that could double his years of life, regards the taking of this drug as death. The only difference in the case of division is that the extra years are to run concurrently". Concurrence seems to be the main problem here, but it's fine for me. Once we do not consider

the time concurrency as an issue that may prevent that two people had the same personal identity, we could accept also that every possible conscious entity could be considered as having the same personal identity, resolving in this way all the previous problems with the physical, psychological and combined spectrum. Once reduced to one, this personal identity could be legitimately and not confusingly considered as “undetermined”, or even purely conventional. We could shrink all these identity problem to the single problem of figuring how the subjective time might be experienced separately also when generated by subjects living concurrently in the same “external time” interval. But Parfit did not this. He says: “[When you divide] you will lose your identity. But there are different ways of doing this. Dying is one, dividing is another. To regard these as the same is to confuse two with zero. Double survival is not the same as ordinary survival. But this does not make it death. It is even less like death”. This is the same of saying: “we cannot imagine what is about to happen. In someway it seems as good as life, in other ways it seems as bad as death, so it would be something different, even if we cannot figure how”. This is a presentation of the results of all these thought experiments, but it is not a satisfactory solution or explication. My proposal is that time is only subjective, and what we think as “external time” is just a set of relations that link the facts that we experience. It represents the possibility to interpret spacetime events in a logical sequence. When I divide, my subjective time divides, not my personal identity. The process of interpreting the brain states as mind states doesn’t need to change, nor should it be considered as having a different identity. It simply keep on interpreting physical brain states in mental states. It is just our need to imagine that the interpretation of one divided half brain states as mental states should occur somehow “before” or “after” the other, because we cannot figure how it could occur in the same time of the interpretation of the other half brain states, if both the interpretation are performed by the very same “interpreting function”, and not by two different instances of it. Such reasoning needs to presuppose the possibility of the existence of separate identities of different

“interpreting functions” just because we cannot imagine how the time could be just subjective, and see clearly that the question of “before” or “after” is really an empty question, that we may answer in a conventional way or left safely undetermined, that seems to me much less uncomfortable than to be forced to imagine that my own survival could be a matter of conventions and definitions. But let us follow Parfit in his reasoning: “The problem with double survival is that it does not fit in the logic of identity”. Identity, according Parfit, is constituted by (1) Relation R (psychological connectedness and/or continuity) and (2) the Condition U (the Relation R holds between one present person and only one future person). So he says that Personal Identity is given by these two requirements: $PI = R + U$. Again I want make you notice that U is required by our incapacity of imagining that the process of interpreting brain states in mental states could be the same process for everybody, despite it is applied simultaneously to more separated “subjects of experiences”. R instead is a useful relation also in my view, that allows to explain our feeling of being separated subjects of experience also if the process of interpreting brain states is completely impersonal. This allows to get rid of personal identity and to understand why there is no problem also in the cases where Parfit asks us to believe that our own identity should be considered undetermined.

Section 91 - Why there is no criterion of identity that can meet two plausible requirements

Parfit here considers a criticism advanced by Bernard Williams. He considers that to be acceptable, a criterion of identity must itself be logically a one-one relation, it could not possibly hold between one person and two future people. However, the Parfit’s proposal to consider Relation R restricted by the Condition U, is not accepted by Williams because it does not meet two requirements that he considers necessary: (1) Whether a future person will be me must depend only on the *intrinsic* features of the relation between us. It cannot depend on what happens to other people; (2) Since personal identity has a great significance, whether identity holds cannot depend on a trivial fact.

These requirements are not met by $R + U$ because the validity of U may depend on factors that are not intrinsically dependent on the relation between me and my future self, as it is in the case that a second replica of me were created with the same information used in the teletransport example. If another replica is created or not, it did not affect my relation with the first replica, so it is not reasonable to think that I am my first replica only if no other replicas are created. Williams proposes a non-reductionist form of physical criterion, where personal identity is a *further fact* that anyway requires also physical continuity. The case of the complete division, or an amoeba-like division proposed by Williams would be at least an intrinsic feature of the history of a given person. But to be sure whether I will continue to live after a complete division, in the person with my left hemisphere or in the person with my right hemisphere, the Physical Criterion could be modified to require a little *more than half* of my brain. However, says Parfit, this doesn't meet the requirement (2), as many people actually continue to live also with more than half of their brain injured. To meet requirement (1) Parfit practically uses another name instead of "personal identity", so that each person with half of my brain has enough continuity with me to contain "what matters" for my survival, independently of what happens to the other person with the other half brain. The reductionist view proposed by Parfit in this case gives to a different relation the same importance that we give to the identity relation. Parfit thinks that Relation R contains what matters for our survival, also without our personal identity. This does not explain what subjectively I will experience in a branch-line case, but in the Reductionist View, "there's not a real difference between the resulting person's being me, and his being someone else, who is merely exactly like me". The conclusion is that "the reductionist view does imply that in some cases, there is not a real difference between numerical identity and exact similarity. But since it recognizes other cases where this is a real difference, it preserves and explains the truth that these are different concepts". This explanation seems to me at least lacking something to be really satisfactory. Only recurring to the conclusions

explicitly formulated in my view we can manage these cases without problems. My view would descend from the same conclusions of Parfit, if we acknowledged that there are no cases in which we had to introduce a difference between numerical identity and exact similarity. Moreover, my view leaves no puzzle to wondering *in what sense* my complete division could be considered not bad as death, despite I will lose my personal identity. In my view, there's no personal identity to lose, and I will experience each branch-line just like as they would be one after the other, providing that nothing in the reductionist world will ever tell me which is "the first" or "the second" branch. And in the same way, this would work for every other conscious being in every possible world. This is the necessary subjective description of everything Parfit says we have to accept along with the reductionist view, giving also account of the asymmetry introduced in the world by the function that interprets the brain states as mental states. To imagine different instances of the interpretation function, giving them a different identity for each conscious subject, leads us to the concept of personal identity, with all the problems we are discussing. If we forget about this "different instances" and consider this function as something of not-instantiable, resolves all our troubles in an easy, clear and definitive way.

Section 92 - Wittgenstein and Buddha

As my proposal does not need to introduce any separately existing entity, it does not differ from Reductionist View at least in the aspect that Wittgenstein would have agreed according to Parfit. The element that I want to add to the Parfit proposal, is the subjective interpretation that Parfit overlooks when he claims that my survival after a branch-line case was an empty question. My proposal shows how we can answer it, saving all the Reductionist requirements. For this reason, may be that Wittgenstein and Buddha would have agreed, if they agreed the Reductionist View of Parfit. Because the question about the existence of a single intellect can be traced back to Averrois and Aristotle, maybe they also could have agreed with me, even if my view does not ascribe

that single intellect to a God, in the sense that it does not expect the presence of a mind without a brain representing its physical counterpart, attributing to it an infinite knowledge and an infinite power. The meaning of my claim to be reductionist is that in my view it is not allowed for a mind to exist without a corresponding physical structure that had the same role that the brain has for our human minds.

Section 93 - Am I essentially my brain?

Here Parfit considers the view of Nagel, according to which I could identify myself with my physical brain, so I would not survive to teletransportation, because a brain perfectly equal to mine still would be not my current brain. He refers to a more detailed discussion to the appendix of the book, but I remark that in my view also the identity concept for any physical objects (such as “my brain”) is not well defined, it serves only as a communication facility. All the objects are constituted by molecules and atoms and ultimately by elementary particles, that have no identity. The same persistence of a single particle is an abstraction that we accept for simplicity, but what it really happens is that we have a sequence of measurements that are consistent in terms of physical state evolution of a system. We just have a description of the reality that we interpret as “the external world” in our mind states, but when we imagine that these measurement reflects a “real material particle that continues to exist in time”, we are arbitrarily introducing the identity concept that is useful for communication but has no physical meaning. Our belief in the consistence of the identity concept that we commonly use, is generated by our intuitive concept of personal identity. Because we believe to have something that differentiate “me” from “anybody else”, we think to have different personal identities, and then we begin to apply the same concept also to inanimate objects. I think that brains represents an environment where all the required factors and relations for the existence of a conscious mind take place. This does not mean that the brain or the mind had a certain personal identity: this only means that a succession of brain states are interpretable as a succession of mind

states. This does not require the identity concept, it is just the requirement needed to allow that this interpretation took place. To ask what “instance of interpretation function” does the job, or “when”, or also “how”, are all empty questions. These are related to the basic question about the same existence of the mind in a physical world, that according with a full reductionist theory, could have existed also without any mind. We know that mind exists only because we are aware of our own mind. In similar way, we may also wonder why something exists instead or nothing. We may speculate about these problems without the need to appeal to any identity concept.

Section 94 - Is the true view believable?

The “true view” which Parfit speaks about is the reductionist view, that Nagel said is impossible for us to believe, even if it is true. This gives to Parfit the opportunity to summarize his view. His first claim is that a person is not like a Cartesian Ego, a separate “further fact” distinct from his brain and body, whose existence is an all-or-nothing fact. Instead, it is like a nation, whose identity can be subject to conventions and partial changes. My criticism is that this claim has no subjective experience counterpart, and forces Parfit to classify as “empty question” a fundamental one like “will I survive after branch-line case?”. The problem overlooked here is that in the reductionist view there is no room for any abstract difference between “me” and “other people”. So Parfit tries to reduce the difference between personal identities to physical and psychological differences, so is forced to concede that also personal identities may have the same malleability that physical and psychological structures have. For this reason, he must accept that sometime personal identity may be undetermined. My suggestion is to avoid the distinction between psychological states where personal identity is determined and others where personal identity is undetermined, so we should better consider personal identity as always undetermined, that is the same as saying that it is an illusory concept. I can also give to this proposal a subjective counterpart, to take account of our direct subjective experience of a mental world that

is going on, apparently exclusively conjoined to a particular body/brain. This can be done if we imagine that this interpretation of brain states in mental states occurs in a way that is always the same way, that means that the interpretation process is always the same, independently by the data that are translated. The unity of the consciousness that results from this process is given by the same data processed. It is wrong to imagine that this model would require some Cartesian Ego. This interpretation process has no need to preserve any information between different lives. Considering the subjective time as part of the interpretation of a sequence of brain states as mental states, frees us from the necessity of postulating different numerical interpretation processes, that should create different numerical personal identities for different individuals existing concurrently in overlapping time intervals. Only in this way, the reductionist view can become fully impersonal. Until we try to maintain a difference between “me” and “everybody else”, this result cannot be fully achieved. Here I want to remark that this view allows us to avoid technical questions about the deeper nature of the consciousness, and the difference between full consciousness and partial or limited consciousness. For this reason, I will better use the expression “subjectivity function” or “subjectivity phenomenon”, without appealing to consciousness, but only to our direct experience of the world in our first-person point of view. This is not influenced by any theory of brain and mind, and it is agnostic even about the reductionist question. My effort is to show that the theory is good especially for reductionists, but even if we concede the existence of a “further fact”, this theory allows to reduce that “further fact” to only one, the same one that “now” I perceive as “mine”, giving it an absolute reason to exist, instead to let otherwise opened the wondering about my personal existence, in a world with infinite other possible minds. I discussed this problem in details elsewhere, but here my concern is focused to the reductionist view and how my view can definitely enhance it. Parfit is right when he claims that our stream of consciousness might be divided into more streams, each of them originating a different unity of consciousness, but because he needs to

assign different personal identities to those units, he is forced to consider our own existence as a matter of degree like physical connectedness. If we are many different persons, there always will be a difference between some person's being me or being someone else, and we never will be able to discover from where this difference comes. I suggest that this is a false problem because it does not exist any "someone else". This is possible just by revising our concept of time, instead of considering that my survival might be an "empty question". This solution has no problem managing all the thought experiments described in this chapter, without affecting the reductionist description of these facts. It maintains a central role for Relation R, that is required to create the unity of consciousness in every stream. There is a difference between the sequence of brain states and the interpretation of them as mental states. This differences comes from the acknowledge that many brains exists, but only one has the states that correspond to the mental state that is going on. This asymmetry can be overridden postulating that also other brains correspond to a sequence of mental states, in the same way in which different states of this brain are currently subject to this interpretation. But for a full override, we have to acknowledge that "the thought that is going on" here, inside my head, has not a different identity respect to the "thought that is going on" there, inside your head. The fact that there is a discontinuity between the interpretation of the sequence of the states of a given brain and the one of another person does not require the introduction of different numerical personal identities. On the contrary, this would cause the raise of all the problems discussed here, just avoid the single problem of the time concurrency of these interpretations. I think that this is the only way to find really believable the reductionist view.

Chapter 13 - What does matter

Section 95 - Liberation from the Self

The consideration that Parfit does here seems to fit better Open Individualism than Empty Individualism, as Kolak called the theory of Parfit: “[... Before] my life seemed like a glass tunnel, [... then] the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air”. The fact that I am less connected with my future self, would imply, according Parfit, that I am less disconnected from other people. This is the ground that makes Empty Individualism and Open Individualism so similar: they both affirm that I am connected with other people as well as I am connected with my past and future selves. The problem with Parfit’s theory is that we have to acknowledge that the question if I am about to die may be an empty question. In the version that I support, Open Individualism asks us to acknowledge that the question whether *my subjective time* happens to run “before” or “contemporaneously” or “after” *your subjective time* is an empty question, but me and you and everybody else are always the same *subject of experience*, anyhow we may wish to interpret this expression. We are liberated from identity.

Section 96 - The continuity of the body

Here Parfit summarizes what we commonly mean for personal identity, and examines what we should care when we reason just as simple Egoists concerned only for their future self. If we are reductionists, to maintain the same personal identity in time, we have to believe that it is given by one of these options: (1) Physical continuity, (2) Relation R with its normal cause, (3) Relation R with any reliable cause, (4) Relation R with any cause. The combination “Physical continuity and Relation R” is classified as (2), as physical continuity is part of R’s normal cause. The argument for exclusion of (1) for Parfit is that we may receive transplanted organs and continue to care about our future self. So identity survives through transplants. We consider differently the transplant of the brain only because the brain is the carrier of

Relation R. Probably we would not fear a kind of gradual brain's transplant where new physical brain parts are substituted with others with the same neuronal configuration. For this reason, Parfit excludes that (1) may be sufficient. Then Parfit examines (2) (and (3) that differs only for the reliability of the cause) considering again teletransportation. Because my body is destroyed and then exactly replicated, a non-reductionist may think that something is fatally lost in the construction of the replica, but a reductionist should not. The replica, once built, is related with me through relation R without its normal cause. Here I agree with Parfit, regardless of Open Individualism, because the matter has no hidden memory of what happened before assuming a particular configuration. It would be arbitrary to decide to call my replica "me" or not. Apart the plain reason that in my view there's no one that could be considered "not me", I consider relation R as the link between successive states of mind so that I perceive them as a seamless flow. Parfit then consider again the case of my division in two of my brain, transplanting each half in two different people. Here the difficulty is to manage two different people linked by relation R with the same previous self. Parfit appeals to the "empty question" about the survival of my identity, so he gives no reasons for the egoist to care more for one or the other of the two future selves. This is considered an empty question because as reductionists, we know all what has to be known: the physical brain is splitted and transplanted etc. etc. But this problem can be managed considering the "subjective function" that I introduced early. The existence of such function is just a fact that everyone experiences in first person, so it cannot be denied, but it also cannot be demonstrated for other people. So it is not surprising that reductionists cannot demonstrate whether personal identity may be transmitted somehow through brain division. I think that the same concept of identity comes out from the same subjectivity that we experience and that reductionism cannot manage. So, the way to avoid the need to populate an otherwise reductionist world with spirits that serve only to remark the differences of identity between individuals, cannot be found in the reduction of the identity to something material: this is impossible,

because the same identity of material objects (brains or whatever) is always a handy lexical convection that we project in the outside world basing on our our intuitive experience of our apparent personal identity. The only way out is to consider *empty* the concept of identity itself. My personal identity is not undefined only under some special circumstances, as Parfit claims: it is *always* undefined. Every possible brain states in the spacetime can be experienced as mind states. Some of such states can be sorted and linked through relation R. Discontinuity points such as death or brain division do not create nor destroy any personal identity, they just make the subjectivity function to switch to another stream of brain states (keep in mind that this is just a gross description, because the external physical spacetime is not an absolute time where the individual subjective times can be ordered). You may think that this should imply some identity for that function, but the simple fact that it would be “always the same” allows us to get rid of the concept of identity at all. This let us to avoid any dualistic aspect: considering the function unique allows us to reduce the “one identity” to a “zero identity”, because it had not to have any property at all, nothing that would require any “separate existence”. This is similar to the mathematical concept of “empty set”. Nobody will ever ask for a distinction between two different empty set, nor will warn that an identity should be required to be really sure that exists only one empty set. The concept of subjectivity function that I propose represents the minimum possible condition for an otherwise full reductionist world to explain our direct experience of the existence in first-person point of view without the need to differentiate different subjects assigning them a different personal identity. The concept of identity can be used advantageously in our normal lives for every practical purposes, but it lost the metaphysical significance of a barrier between us. Only using this acceptance, the observations of Parfit about the “empty questions” can acquire a reasonable meaning.

Section 97 - The branch-line case

In this section Parfit makes an analogy between the overlapping teletransportation and the effect of some sleeping pills that cause a retrograde amnesia: if we take such a pill, we may remain awake for an hour before fall in sleep, but we have no memories of what happened in the second half of that hour. So when I awake the next morning, I will be R-related with me as I was before half an hour to fall asleep. If I have a good idea during the last moments that I want to remember the next morning, I need to write it down like I was writing to another person. Parfit says that the same occurred if I was replicated on Mars and my original self left on Earth had a heart disease that leaves him only few days of life. He says that once I died, I still would survive as my replica on Mars, providing that I do not survive for a too long time. This is because he thinks that Relation-R is what matter, and if my death is quick enough, my replica on Mars will still represent my best R-related successor at the moment of my death. But if too many time elapses, then the psychological differences between me and my replica become too large and only for this reason I cannot expect to regain the life of my replica on Mars at the moment of my death. The condition for the occurrence of this “jump” is represented by the strong *psychological connectedness* introduced by Parfit in Chapter 10, Section 78, together with the concept of *psychological continuity*, that is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness. So relation-R might hold between separated spatio-temporal brain states providing that they maintain their psychological connectedness inside a certain tolerance. So far Parfit, with some quote of Nozick supporting the insignificance of a brief overlaps between my life and the life of my replica. Here I want to point out that, if we accept this assumption, Open Individualism may be seen just as a generalization of this concept, that brings some simplifications that allow this model to become stronger. The first point to notice is that to considering viable this hypothesis also for a very short time overlap, we have to get rid of all of our preconceptions about time. The only important thing for Parfit is that Relation-R might hold, no matter how much time is passed

between the two related states of brain, even if the second state in this relation occurred long time ago. This is why he makes the analogy with the sleeping pill: when I awake the next day, I am psychologically continuous with me as I was half an hour before to fall asleep. In the same way, when I die for heart disease, I should experience a kind of wake up in the life of my replica as it started at the time of Teletransportation. This means, according to Parfit, that my physical life may experience some point of singularity, where my body is discontinued, providing that the states of the brains involved are enough similar to hold the Relation-R. Parfit does not discuss what could determine the validity of these limits. He says that a gap of ten days could be enough short to maintain the required degree of relation-R. I want to remember that all this discussion about relation-R started with the searching for what could ever maintain the persistence of our personal identity. Let us try to imagine what we should subjectively experience if the view proposed by Parfit was right. Imagine that we could order all the possible brain/mental states of all the possible brains, measuring their distance using the relation-R. According to Parfit, when I die, if somewhere in the spacetime (as close as on Mars, ten days ago) exists another active brain state sufficiently R-related with mine, I may expect to experience that brain state as my next mind state (and all the successive R-related states that it will have) in the same way I now experience my current brain/mental state and their R-related successors in my normal living. This is analogue to the case of the sleeping pill, where it can be accepted more easily. If we may concede that this might be true, then we may also consider the hypothesis that what matters in that relation-R "jump" is not a very strict brain configuration similarity, but a much more loose similarity that may relate together a much greater number of streams of brain states. Making this assumption, we are not asking to concede something new to the technical plausibility of this model, we are just widening the application of the very special exception that Parfit concedes for the branch line case. If we agree on this, then we must see that, to obtain Open Individualism, we just apply this generalization to the maximum

range, minimizing the requirements to allow the Relation-R “jump”, reducing them to the single basic fact that the brain state must be a full functional brain state. In other words, this means that the same type of “jump” may occur between every neuronal network enhanced enough to support to be interpreted as a mental state by what I called before “the subjective function”, without the requirement of the holding of a strict Relation-R. That’s all. This allows us to consider all the possible streams of brain states as experienced by the same subject. The continuity of a single stream continues to be guaranteed by the nearest available Relation-R state between all the possible states, but it does not limit the size of the “jump” anymore. The minimum requirement to allow the “jump” at discontinuities in other states that have in common with the previous “terminal” state is just the requirement of being “executable” by the subjective function. It does not need to postulate the existence of any peculiar separated entity, in the same way that Parfit does not need it for his model. We just are recycling the same “subjectivity” that we currently experience, just conceding that it may “jump” to other streams when one is finished. The restriction assumed are the same that Parfit invokes for the branch line case, we just widened the jump possibility that he introduced. In this generalization, we gain the further simplification that allows us to get rid of all the problems related to what I called “the Individual Existential Problem” that may take many forms: “why I am me and you are you”, “would I never have been existed”, “why even I exist” and so on. The only rational explication of my individual existence cannot be found in the existence of a sequence of brain states continuous with my current states. This may explain why I survive, but it cannot explain how I started to exist, and how it happens that between all the ever possible brain states, there were a small group that was assigned to be subjectively experienced in a way that makes me defined them as “my mind”, while all the others are destined to define somebody else’s mind. Reducing the subject to only one, makes the choice of “the existence of the mind that I experience as mine” a forced choice, and makes every difference between me and everybody else disappear.

This is the only solid ground to concept this unique “subjectivity function” without the need to imagine any distinctive characteristic, so the “unique subject” becomes thinner and transparent. At this point, reductionists may consider that it can be entirely dissolved, because there is no more need to find something concrete where to anchor the elusive difference that should distinguish “my” personal identity from “your” personal identity. Non-reductionists may prefer to consider the residual “unique subject” in a different way. I think that if we acknowledge that the “subjectivity phenomenon” exists, and that it is impossible to define any non-arbitrary identity to any physical entity, then we can safely overcome any further disquisition whether we should think to live in a reductionist or non-reductionist world.

Section 98 - Series persons

Here Parfit tries to reconcile his view with the one of Nozick, who thinks that what matters is the continued existence of one person’s brain. Taking an example from Nozick, Parfit describes the concept of *series-persons*. We can imagine a community where people might take a blueprint of their complete body-brain state, and then may use a *Scanner Replicator* that destroys a person’s brain and body and reproduces a replica that is physically younger but still R-Related to the original person. We may imagine that such Replica could be built even if the original body is no more available for some fatal accidents. If we believe that relation R is what matters, people in this community might effectively be considered immortal. Instead, if we consider that it is the continuity of the brain what really matters, we cannot consider two successive Replicas as the same person, even if they are R-related. Parfit tries to manage this difference using a terminology redefinition, and comparing the case of successive replicas to the mythical phoenix, the bird that could rebirth from its ashes. This is a mythical example of *series-bird*. Though the continuity of the physical brain of the phoenix is broken, the new phoenix could be R-related to the previous one. So it could be with *series-persons*. In the normal circumstances, persons and series-persons are always the same effective things, but when we

introduce teletransportation or other exceptional cases that could preserve relation R but not the physical brain continuity, these concepts diverge. Parfit want to convince us that we can choose to adopt a new terminology to consider series persons as the concept having a “leading role” over the old-person concept. A person can be considered to be at the same time both a normal person and a series-person, and the same person may chose to speak and act in name of the series-person instead of the “normal person”. Again here Parit appeals to the fact that questioning about the identities of successive series-person bodies would be an *empty question*. I don’t think that I need to repeat again how the view that I propose can explain much clearly in what sense this may be considered an empty question, but I want to suggest a way that allows us to evaluate easily the relationship between people in this imaginary community. We already have a concept similar to the “series persons” described here, and this is the ordinary concept of “family”. We all are both normal persons but also member of a family. We are accustomed to manage the difference between these two concept, but we could imagine to complicate it introducing a process of deep indoctrination, maybe using a technology that allowed brain recording and storing and loading, so that it would be possible for the father to store most of his brain configuration in some external media, and then for the son were possible to became R-related to his father loading in his own brain enough data from the recording that his father did. In this way, the concept of “family” could artificially overlap with the one of “series-persons” presented in this chapter, without the need to destroy entire bodies, and using normal human-replication methods to create new “series person instances”. This would be possibly far less expensive, and let us meditate on this possibility using more “familiar” concepts.

Section 99 - Am I a token or a type?

The argument of this section touches one point familiar for me as a programmer using class-oriented languages. Parfit reports a case imagined by Bernard Williams, in which a person could have many

coexisting replicas. This allow us to introduce the concept of *person-type*. If we imagine a particular person called Mary Smith, and suppose that a machine called Scanning Replicator might produce many replicas of Mary Smith, then we would have many *token-persons* of Mary Smith, all of them being of the same *person-type*. The first question that Parfit asks is: assuming that the scanning replicator destroys the original Mary Smith, what should her believe before pressing the button to start the scanning? In the last section we discussed about *series-persons*, and Parfit opinion is that to be destroyed and rebuilt in a similar way would be as good as normal survival. But the building of multiple tokens introduces a branching-case, and in this case Parfit is not very clear describing what would happen, he just says that it would be quite as good as normal survival, but the question whether might I consider all or one of my replicas as “my future self” would be an “empty question”. In my view, I should consider all my different replicas as one of my future-self, as well as any other different living being, and the empty question becomes: “in what order I experience all these lives?”. In this way, the question about my own survival disappears definitively. Parfit also considers what Williams writes about another question: if someone loved one of these token-person, it might be unclear if he actually would love the token-person or the person-type. For Williams, to think that we would love just the person-type would be so disorienting that he prefers to stick with the idea that we really love a specific token-person, and so basically we love a specific body: “[...] it does not sound very high-minded, [but] the alternatives [...] do not sound too spiritual, ever”. Parfit acknowledge that as time passes by, all the replicas would be increasingly different, and the man who loves one of that Mary Smith-tokens will be more and more relating with that particular replica, but at least initially he would love in the same way all the instances of the person-type that are R-related with the original Mary Smith he loved before. Considering the person-series, it appears quite acceptable that he would love, one at a time, all the successive instances of a particular series-person, and replicas are just a co-existing instances of

series persons. Anyhow, he claims that we cannot love a person-type, because it is just an abstract entity, just like a number or a mathematical structure. According to Parfit, love can be realized only through physical tokens of a particular type, despite the fact that a particular person-type might have the feature to feel love for me. Let us see how can I manage these problems using my view. This requires me to review the general concept of identity, token and type. Basically, I deny the existence of any absolute identity. This means that different tokens of the same type have no intrinsic identity. This is a general principle that is valid for persons as well as for unanimated things. What we naively imagine as “identity” is just a differentiation that may be reduced to little physical differences or to spatial relations with the other objects in the same domain. These “identities” are just tools introduced to manage objects. If we consider two identical coins, we can see that at first sight, their identities may be determined by some very little differences like small peculiar marks or scratches. If they were structurally identical even at atom-level, it would be more difficult to define their identities, and we should trace carefully all their movement in the space. But suppose that the two coins could be superimposed for a moment so that it became impossible to distinguish them by position. Even if this is physically impossible, I can imagine that every subatomic particle that constitutes one of them could be paired with the corresponding particle of the other coin, just for an instant, so that the two equations describing each pair of particles become a single equation. Once that the two coin were separated again, nothing in the earth could ever reassign for sure the same identity they had before. I claim that, because in this imaginary case the “identity” information would be lost, it is meaningless to speak about some absolute identity for the two coins also in absence and the impossibility of a similar match. So the same *token* concept is empty, because it can be reduced to the combination of the *type* concept and the *identity* concept. The same identity of a fundamental particle in time is questioned in physics. All we may know is that having detected a particle in a given state at some given instant, there exist an high

probability to detect again a particle in the same state in the near space and in the near future, but this it is does not implies that the particle is the same. Physical particles are actually considered indistinguishable. For these reasons, I claim that *token-identity* is an empty concept This argument requires a much longer explanation, but here I want to give the basic idea how to see that also the token-identity of macroscopic objects can be considered as completely arbitrary. Imagine that all we have is a given domain (a table with two coins, or the whole universe) in which some parts (the two coins, or two replicas of the same person) may be considered as different tokens of the same type. This way to consider the two coins is useful just for the sake of simplicity in the system description, but actually we have a domain in a particular state, and also this domain as a whole can be considered like as an unidentified instance of a particular type, in the set of all the possible states of all the possible universes. Being completely isolated from other possible instances of different or identical universes (if any), speaking about the token-identity of this universe is meaningless, and consequently also the question whether we should consider it as a universe-type or a token-universe of a particular type became an “empty question”, because the identity of something that cannot be compared with anything else become an useless concept. In this way, we may see that it is impossible to define the “token” concept in absolute way, because two *tokens* of something can be always considered as parts in the description of a bigger *type*, and when we come to the biggest object (the universe) the question of being a type or a token loses any sense. So it is illusory to anchor the different personal identities of Mary Smith-tokens on their being different physical objects with different identities. Open Individualism generalizes this step, considering that different brain states generates different mind states, but still they do not have any intrinsic identity that might be inherited by the physical structure of the individual that experiences those mental states. The only common requirement is that the physical structure is complex enough to support its interpretation as a mind by what I called “the subjectivity function”. Both the Mary’s lover

and the "original" Mary Smith, and everybody else, can equally be considered as having the same personal identity of all the token-persons of the Mary Smith person type. What the Mary Smith's token-persons shares between is just the R-Relation that allows them to consider their stream of consciousness to be continuous with the "original" Mary Smith. The lover should consider all of them as different possible future selves of the original woman he loved, just like the branch-cases presented in the film "Sliding door". I would suggest him to replicate himself in the same way to resolve the situation. If not viable, he and all of the Mary's replicas could decide to use a random choice. But the main principle to keep in mind, is that it is wrong to consider that there is "something" different inside each of them, if not just the little different stories that will increasingly drive all the replicas to become different persons. This is not so different from the Parfit view, but this way to motivate his conclusion makes it easier to find the right way to manage the situation, and we may avoid the mess of all the identity troubles just removing the illusory concept of personal identity, without losing no significative information.

Section 100 - Partial survival

Parfit here considers a pair of cases that complete the possibility of identity messes: fusion and division. Even if it is not possible in actual cases, he imagines a world in which fusion is a natural process: *"Two people come together. While they are unconscious, their two bodies grow into one. One person then wakes up"*. The resulting person will have both the memories of the previous persons, and will combine somehow their different characteristics, desires and intentions. These could be opposite, so that they neutralize each other, or similar, so that they will be reinforced. Because Parfit relates our hope to survive to a fusion to the degree of the holding of relation R between me and the resulting people, he supposes that my surviving depends by the similarities that I have with the person which I will fuse with. "Fusions, like marriages, could be either great successes or disasters". I think that this imagined fusion could have a technological equivalent that has

some probability to become real in the future. I imagine two helmets that two people may wear to connect their brain in such a way to function like it was a unique bigger brain. I imagine that this connection could be set and unset without any damage of participants, without even a temporary loss of consciousness. I think that Parfit in this case would not have any doubt about the surviving of both the participants, even if they will remain connected until the natural end of their lives. I think that subjectively we would live the experience of connecting with another brain (no matter how much similar or different from our own), like a suddenly remembering of a lot of things of our own past life. In the same time, there will start a huge reconciliation for all that information and desires and intentions that differ between participants. If there differences are too huge, maybe the process would be very unpleasant and many conflicts could remain after the fusion just like it happens in schizophrenic people. In this case I imagine that the resulting brain would be like a stormy sea that needs a long time to find some quiet. In other cases, this brain fusion could be far easier, and even very pleasant, if we imagine to do it with a person we love. In any case, I think that the resulting person will be just one person, in the sense that being in the resulting mind state, we would not be able to know whether our “self” was the one that comes from the first person or from the second person who have merged together. In my view, this question would be really “empty”: because there is no personal identity that can be loss or messed, all we have is a stream of mind states where the subjective time itself exists as a necessary component of the states’ interpretation process. We always walk through all the possible paths, no matter if these paths lay on overlapping spacetime regions. Subjective time is a different thing from spacetime: is the way that allows spacetime itself to be experienced in a conscious way. The question “experienced by who?” can be left unanswered because is an “empty question”. If we could experience the brain connection in the technological version that I described, once the experience ends and the two participants return again to have two individually separated brains, I think that such experience will affect definitively their relation

with the other person. They could even question whether their own “self” will be the same it was before the connection, or the two “selves” were swapped. You may see that the question is again empty. There’s nothing that can be swap in a reductionist world. We can then understand in what sense we are literally always “the same person” with everybody else, even if our brains will never be connected in such way. What we share during connections, are information and desires and intentions, originating a new state of consciousness that is more aware and hopefully capable to manage all the eventual mental conflicts. Once separated, both the brains returned in the normal “individual state” will benefit of the past acquired awareness, like it were if a child could experience for a little time the way of reasoning of an adult person. In the second part of the section, Parfit introduces another kind of imaginary people that reproduce themselves by a process of natural division like amoebae. A picture displays a tree where the root person is called “Eve”, the two persons originated by the first division are “Secunda” and “Tertia”, and so on, always dividing every new person in two further persons. Then he asks what kind of relation may exist between Eve and Quinquagesima (separated from Eve by five successive divisions). She may remember something of Eve, and she is psychologically continuous with her, but she may have lose any psychological connectedness with her. For this reason, Parfit thinks that Quinquagesima cannot be consider a surviving form of Eve, even if both Secunda and Tertia may be consider to be. You may see that in my proposal there’s no problem about how much people may be psychologically different, once we allow that different stream of consciousness may be experienced by the same subject even if they lives in overlapping external time regions. Parfit seems to allow it for Eve with Secunda and Tertia, but he denies it for Eve with Quinquagesima. At the end of this section, Parfit tries to show some reason why we should regret the loss of psychological connectedness, but I think that it is not required for our survival. Psychological continuity and connectedness can be used to explain our sense of individuality, that is exactly what gives us the illusion that other

individuals are different person from me, and that my perceived existence as thinking subject is apparently bounded into the limits of the birth and the death of my current body.

Section 101 - Successive Selves

About the relations between members of the world described previously, Parfit notes here that “being ancestor of X” and “being descendant of X” are transitive relation as well as “being psychologically continuous with X”. This is true only if we allow only one direction of the relation, that means that this relation is not commutative: if X is psychologically continuous with Y, and Y is psychologically continuous with Z, then X is psychologically continuous with Z (through Y). But because the missing commutative property, it does not follow, and is generally false, that if X is psychologically continuous with Y and X is psychologically continuous with Z, then Y has to be psychologically continuous with Z. the counter example could be given considering Secunda and Quinquagesima (who is generated by the branch passing through Eve, Tertia, Sexta, Duodecima and Vigesima Quinta): both are psychologically continuous with Eve, but they are not psychologically continuous each other. Much more complicated would be the relations between members of a last kind of imaginary people, that combine both fusion and division, occurring continuously every six months. Parfit imagines that they fuse in autumn and divide every spring. Because of their short reproducing cycle, we can assume that psychological connectedness lasts for more than six month, so each of them should have a number of ancestor and successors that are psychologically continue and psychologically connected with them. They could refer such ancestors and descendents as “past selves” and “future selves”. Finally, Parfit considers creatures that does not reproduce at all, but they have everlasting bodies that gradually change in time, so that in five hundred years they are no more psychologically connected to the past self that they had at that time. In a sense, they are immortal, but because of their continuous changes, they may completely become a different

person in time, having no memories, no desires and no intentions in common with their ancient “past selves”. The term “I”, in their case, should be applied only to that period of time when they still have a good psychological connectedness. What Parfit wants to suggest is that our own lives can be considered in the same way. He quotes Proust and Solzhenitsyn for literature sample where the author questions whether, after many time and experiences, a person can really be considered as the same person he was before. This suggests that in personal identity many qualitative differences may matter more than the numerical difference, as defined in section 76, chapter 10. According to the view of Parfit, a number enough large of qualitative changes can cancel psychological connectedness between a person in a given time of their life and the same person in another time of the same life, and in this case we should think that their personal identity is definitively changed, even if their body is always numerically the same body, though aged. This should be true even without any sharp discontinuity. The degrees of psychological connectedness may vary smoothing, but nevertheless inexorably. I just mention that in my view there exist only qualitative differences, but there is no subject that may become another subject. I would like to appeal to Occam’s razor to say that is not necessary to imagine that something more changes than the psychological relations, but Parfit identifies the personal identity with the psychological relations, so it changes when the former changes. All the observations of Parfit about the importance of psychological relations are right, what is wrong is the unnecessary assignment of an identity to this subject, and to link its persistence to some psychological features, so that we have to imagine that psychological features themselves may constitute elementary blocks that can be used to define the personal identity. But this means that your identity descends by a geometric structure, that represents the neuronal schema in your brain that constitutes the media for storing the psychological features you should stay in psychological connectedness to continue to exists. Parfit denied that this geometrical structures may have an identity, like an abstract mathematical concept, so we should have a token of such

structure to assign an identity to it. What I claim is that the conceptual differences between types and tokens are not well defined. As a programmer, I know that the same informations of every token could be used to define a more constrained class. At the end of this arbitrary process (though it was a bad programming practice), we could obtain a monolithic program without classes and tokens, that in our discussion would represent the whole universe. In this case, considering the program just a type or a single instantiation of its own type is just another “empty question”. The only solution is to give up with any attempt to assign any intrinsic identity to persons or things or geometrical structures. You may find that it is possible to ignore the identity of everything that is not “me”, considering it just a language convention, but your own awareness to be “a subject” distinct from the rest of the world, does not allow you to get rid of your own personal identity. This is the only reason that forces us to consider that “identity” must be a real concept. How can you get rid of your personal identity? To do this, you must identify yourself not with an individual subject, but directly with that “subjectivity function” that allows to experience the material world in first person point of view. This is just the evolution of what Descartes meant with “I think, therefore I am”, in the sense that Lichtenberg suggests: “thought is going on”. The sense of this shift to a non-identified subject can be found only dissolving our illusory identity in a impersonal function that just allows the thinking to go on. This does not imply any mystical interpretation: it is just the function of thinking and feeling and interpreting a brain state as a mind state, the very same function that each of us may experience in every moment. The error is to think that it had to be instantiated in different tokens because we are different individuals living in overlapping time periods. This error forces us to find a place where to anchor our personal identity.

Chapter 14 - Personal identity and rationality

Section 102 - The Extreme Claim

Here Parfit applies the theory discussed in a practical case. This will help us to understand what he really thinks about the problem whether I should expect or not to become some particular future person. In a previous part of the book he discussed the Self Interest Theory: "For each person, the supreme rational ultimate aim is that the things go as well as possible for himself". To avoid a bad behaviour, we include in this well-being also the wellness derived from the honest and consciously behaviour, also if this means to renounce to some possible advantages. The balance could be find in different points, according to everybody own mind. Everybody normally retains that a rational agent should have a temporally neutral bias in his own favour, so it is irrational to do what soon or later will cause an harm or a loss for himself. I may notice that actually the more distant is some future event, the less I may count to reach it alive. The say "better an egg today than a hen tomorrow" is reversely true also for unpleasant or risky events: it may be rational to procrastinate risky events, unless they may become much worse in the meantime. Anyway, Parfit just recaps these points to deny them, enunciating what he calls "the Extreme Claim" of the Reductionist View: "If Reductionist View is true, we have *no* reason to be concerned about our own future". If there is nothing that guarantees the persistence of personal identity, this persistence could be a fiction. If our lives are just "series of feelings" not glued by the same personal identity, why one part of this series should be more concerned with another part of the same series, any more than with a part of any other series? This points out the deep analogy between E.I. and O.I.: both affirms that the differences between my current living experience and the living experience of my future selves can be considered as deep as the differences that occur between my current living experience and the current living experience of another person: E.I. states that, because nothing can guarantee that they will be experienced by the same subject, we may assume that

they are experienced by different subjects, because the identity of a given subject cannot be assigned by other than something that continuously changes in time (body/brain physics or psychologic properties). O.I. similarly states that, because nothing can guarantee that they will be experienced by different subject, we may assume that they are experienced by the same subject, because the identity of a given subject cannot be assigned by nothing, neither body/brain physics or psychologic properties changing in time or not. This is often mistakenly interpreted as a statement that requires some “further fact” to be true, like a media that may support and guarantee that this unique “personal identity” might be always the same. On the contrary, because my view propose to consider that no media could ever support any personal identity, this is unnecessary in the same way in which ether was unnecessary to figure how light may travel through the space. We have a “subjectivity function” that creates an illusory subject when a physical structure (the brain) become enough complex to support to be interpreted as a mental phenomenon (the mind). In this way, I left out of discussion the question about how it may happen, or about what are the minimal conditions to allow it happen: I just claim that the question of “who is the consciousness instance” is empty, and so it is wrong considering that the subjectivity function might generate many different personal identities or even a single personal identity that should be “always the same”, we simply should accept that it does not need to generate any personal identity. This condition can be subjectively described as “I am always the very same subject that lives all the possible lives”, every time wondering about “who am I” and “who are others”. This is not difficult to imagine, once we concede that our contemporary presence in the same spacetime region is not a real obstacle. The advantage of O.I. on E.I. is definitive if we consider what I called “the Individual Existential Problem”, that is the wonder of finding myself alive in a world where apparently everybody else might be alive even without my presence. A detailed discussion of this problem requires more room than what is appropriate here. Returning to Parfit, he cannot exclude the Extreme Claim (“we have *no* reason to

be concerned about our own future”) but he promote a “Moderate Claim” that he consider defensible as well. Because in his view the psychological continuity and the psychological connectedness acts like the carrier for personal identity, we may well trust to be the same person who tomorrow morning will awake in my bed. If my personal identity will be subject to a smooth change, I cannot trace a line beyond that I will not be that future person anymore. Also in case of my division, both my Lefty and Righty parts will still continue to have some special relation with me, even if Parfit does not arrive to claim that both may have my very same personal identity. Parfit here applies the label of the “empty question”, but practically he leaves the question “open”. Further in the discussion, he appeals to the good of knowing that both Lefty or Righty may fulfill his concern for the future of his works and of his familiar relations. This is a good news indeed also for a person that is about to die, but it is not linked to personal identity, it is just linked to our psychological wellness in knowing that all will be well also after our death, opposing to the nihilist view according with nothing will care about my death, because I once dead I will feel no pain not even leaving my dears in pain. Parfit is not nihilist, but he has to settle for a draw with the nihilist view. Open Individualism can rationally get rid of nihilist view: I will be the same subject who experiences the life of all my dears and also of all my enemies... so suddenly I should stop to consider them as enemies, and I should start to consider everybody else as another dear of mine. Parfit on the contrary thinks that many different personal identities may exist in turn inside the same individual life. At the beginning of his book, Parfit introduce the definition of “The Self-interest Theory”, or “S”: “S is a theory about rationality. S gives to each person this aim: the outcomes that would be best for himself, and that would make his life go, for him, as well as possible”. The Extreme Claim denies this theory, giving more importance to the current myself because my future selves could be not-me. Parfit concludes that the Extreme Claim is defensible, but it could be also defensibly denied, so it does not definitively refute the Self-interest theory. Open Individualism turns S in the Utilitarian aim: “we should try to gain the

best overall outcomes for us, that would make our lives go, for everybody, as well as possible”.

Section 103 - A Better Argument Against S

The Self-Interest Theory states that the rational aim for each people is that things may go as well as possible for him. The Extreme Claim states that if Reductionism is true, we have no rational reason to concern about our own future. Anyway Parfit says that even if Extreme Claim is defensible, it can also be defensibly denied, so it cannot refute the Self-Interest Theory, indicated with “S”. S is based on the Requirement of Equal Concern: a rational people should be equally concerned about all the part of their future. Personally, I think that this concern should be moderated by an evaluation of costs / benefit because the simple fact that an event is more far in time, makes it less probable to happen, but once taken in account this factor of moderation, this concern is justified. A good example could be a painful medical care that we should undergo before an ill become worse. May be rational to wait for the discovery of a less painful drugs for some time, but as our ill become worse, we should undergo the available cure, even if painful. Anyway, Parfit here discuss his theory that is based on two claims: (A) Since personal identity does not involve the deep further fact, it is less deep, or involve less; and (B) What fundamentally matters are psychological connectedness and continuity, that represents the fundamental claim of his theory. The Extreme Claim appeals to (A) alone, but Parfit considers the consequence of (B), concluding that the concern for our own future may correspond to the degree of connectedness between me now and myself in the future, so it can be rational to care less about our further future, as connectedness is nearly always weaker over long period. This is possible because personal identity according Parfit is not a matter of whole-or-nothing, and is proportional to the degree of connectedness. In this way, Parfit undermines the Requirement of Equal Concern, that in turn invalidates the Self-interest Theory, that is what Parfit want really to gain. In my view, I can criticize the Self-interest theory in

another way, with an argument that is definitive once my view is accepted: because the loss of any personal identity (considered as an illusion created by the subjectivity function interpreting a brain state as a mind state), we have no basis to consider mind states of other people as undergone by a different subject from the one that currently appears to me as undergoing my present mental state, as well as all my past and future mental states. Saying that no personal identity exists, has the same practical effect than saying that everybody has the same personal identity that I now believe to have. So the Self-interest statement “it is rational to aim to obtain the best outcome for myself” becomes “it is rational to aim to obtain the best overall outcome for everybody”, because the same “I” that I believe to be is always the same “I” that everyone else believes to be, as their apparent different identity is just an illusion created by the running of the subjectivity function. Both this view and Parfit’s view states that between me-now and me-in-another-moment there is the same relationship that occurs between me-now and everybody else: Parfit states that we are all strangers, I state that we are all the same subject. This make me feel interested to the overall wellness much more than what the theory of Parfit may ever make. But the reason to give more importance to my theory is not based by this good result. It is based on considerations about what I called “the Individual Existential Problem”.

Section 104 - The S-Theorist’s Counter Argument

This section is spent to demonstrate that the possible appeal to the claim “all the parts of a person’s future are equally parts of his future” (here called “the truism”) which a Self-interest theorist might appeal to, is too trivial to support the argument. This claim presupposes that personal identity does not changes in time, and it is what matters to grant survival. Parfit believes that what really matters is Relation R, while personal identity may gradually vary in time, because it is not a matter “all-or-nothing”. Anyway, he considers the use in the claim of the words “parts of future” and “equally”, noticing that in a wider sense, this is obvious like the claim “all things with property X has equally the

property X”, so it doesn’t demonstrate nothing. In a more detailed sense, if property X may have different degrees, the same statement become false, because each thing with property X may have it in a different degree. In particular, in Parfit’s view, personal identity may vary during the life together with psychological connectedness, resulting in a different degree of ownness of the farthest parts of future by a given person. According my view, all the parts of the life of all the living beings are equally parts of my own life, so the truism results to be true, but also applicable to other persons’ lives, so it does not support the Self-interest Theory, that would become “the Everybody-overall-interest Theory”. Anyway, the discussion of Parfit about different meaning of “relatives” give us the opportunity to anticipate an interesting ethical argument. Parfit says that, in a wide sense, the concept of “relative” may be applied in a transitive way, so going back enough through generations, all the people may find a common relative, and we may consider everybody else as our relative. Extending the concept further back, we may consider relatives also every animal. This makes the concept of “relative” useless. To be useful, using “relative” we have to mean “close relative”, that is not a transitive relation. When we come to evaluate my view, because all the living beings equally share the property of being experienced through the very same “subjectivity function”, we have no degrees of personal identity. So, to speak roughly but effectively, I have to consider everybody else’s life as another part of my own living experience. This may generate the concern that then it would be right to divide all my ownership equally with everybody else, just because they are “equally me”. I think that if everybody would share my view, the overall ownership of the Earth resources would be shared much more equally than it is now, but there would still remain some differences in resource availability. This will be discussed further commenting the next chapter, but here I want to make you notice that also in my view there are differences in psychological connectedness between people, and that everybody is limited both in resources and in intelligence. So it still would be natural that I may want to leave my individual resources to

people that are more psychologically connected with me, even if I am convinced that they are “different version of myself” as well as everybody else is. Doing this, I will express my affections (that can reasonably still be different for different individuals) and my will to continue to support certain culture expressed in my life by me and the people near to me, if I find that that culture is worth to be supported and known by a wider range of “other versions of me”.

Section 105 - The Defeat of the Classical Self-Interest Theory

Here Parfit simple recaps that, once rejected the Requirement of Equal Concern, the Self-interest Theory needs a revision. He points out that the Requirement of Equal Concern is not influenced by a discount rate simply due to the passing time, but due to a lower level of psychological connectedness that may occur during that time. So he proposes to call the Self-interest Theory “Classical Self-Interest Theory” and introduces a “Revised Self-interest Theory”, that takes account of the fact that we may be less concerned of those parts of our future to which we are currently less closely connected. In other words, the Self-interest theory has no more the scope of a whole life. So it does not result to be irrational acting knowingly against one’s own future self-interest, just because that “future self” might be no more yours. As Parfit points out, this should be considered a version of the “Critical Present-aim Theory” that was formulated in Chapter 35 as follows: “What each person has most reason to do is whatever will best achieve those of his present aims that are not irrational”, giving precedence to the present time over the future times. Parfit acknowledge that there is a problem with this Revised Theory because it needs to explain what makes the discount rate introduced by a lower psychological connectedness enough important to stop considering irrational an act against our (apparent) self-interest. This problem is due to the lacking of a precise formalization of the required degree of disconnectedness needed to stop considering an individual as having a different personal identity from a given preceding state. This results in

Parfit's claim that the personal identity is not a question of all-or-nothing, and that the question about its persistence might be an "empty question". We can see that assuming that we all are not separated by different personal identities is an effective way to explain many of the problems discussed by Parfit, and to make clear also why this question about personal identity may legitimately be classified as "empty", with no need to wonder how could I feel having only a "partial" or "undefined" personal identity. According to my view, not only it is rational to care about my own future, but also to care about the future of any other people, though in different measures, according to my current judgement about the importance and the rationality of their acts and initiatives. Parfit cannot appeal to rationality for a self-respecting behaviour, so he needs to appeal to something other to criticize imprudence.

Section 106 - The Immorality of Imprudence

For the reasons explained above, Parfit cannot claim that imprudence is irrational. Anyway, he wants to criticize at least "great imprudence". So he suggests that the territory abandoned by Revised Self-interest Theory should be covered by an expanded concept of morality. He points out that this appeal to morality is independent by the fact that imprudence rarely involves only the author, considering that every person lives in a social and familial context where their simple presence and wellness is valuable for other people. For this new concept, an imprudence would be immoral even if a person lived in complete loneliness. This can be done in two ways. The first is appealing to Consequentialism, appealing to an agent-neutral Principle of Beneficence: if I, for minor present benefit, impose greater burden on myself in old age, my act can be considered immoral because its overall consequence will be to increase the sum of suffering, even if I actually damage only my future self. This can be applied also if my personal identity will not change in that gap of time. The second way is simply to consider my future self in the same way we should do for our children and all the persons that can be affected by our present behaviour, and cannot defend themselves, because unaware or

unable, or because they still do not exist. We should consider our future selves as different persons, and we ought not to do to our future selves what would be wrong to do to other people. Incidentally, I notice that the same fact of undergoing some risky experiences makes us change, causing some differences in our own psychological connectedness. This is evident in some primitive initiation rituals, but still we have trace of this in some modern risky experiences that are common between young people. I may remember some imprudent things I did in my young age, and the reason for myself was “I want to become a person who experienced this, even if it is an imprudent action”. In a certain sense, I accepted the risk to allow me to cease to be as I was before the act, and to become a different person who have experienced it. According Parfit, I deliberately accepted to create a psychological connectedness break that would accelerate my becoming “another person”, that I considered worth to become, even if the price was to burden that person with the possible bad consequences of my imprudence. Considering that new person as a person with a different personal identity from the previous person, explains what Parfit wrote in Chapter 13, Section 95: “There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people, but the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my life, and more concerned about the lives of others”. Consider now how much more liberating would be eliminating also that residual “difference”. Ethics may become a matter of rationality, and our relation with other people would be much more sympathetic. We may cooperate basing our choices only on the degree of rationality and utility that we see in the acts of our “other selves”.

Chapter 15 - Personal Identity and Morality

Section 107 - Autonomy and Paternalism

This last chapter of the Part III of the book “Reasons and Persons” is devoted to the ethical implications of the philosophical view of Derek Parfit about Personal Identity. How Daniel Kolak noticed in “I Am You”, there is an apparently amazing convergence between the view of Parfit, which Kolak called “Empty Individualism”, and the view of Kolak, called “Open Individualism”. My view is basically the same of Kolak, but can be defined as a subset of his view, because he faces the problem of Personal Identity in a general way, while I try to offer a specific model, and occasionally my opinion diverges from the one of Kolak. About ethics, I agree with Kolak when he says that whilst Empty Individualism, like Parfit writes in this book, turns some rational questions in ethical questions, on the contrary Open Individualism turns some ethical questions in rational questions. It is so because both these views considers me and any future version of me like as me and another person: Empty Individualism, by splitting our individual life like as owned by more than one person, and Open Individualism, by joining our individual lives like as owned by the very same person. For this reason, both these theories converge toward the Utilitarian Ethics, as Kolak says, “one from one side of the mountain, the other from the other side”. Personally, I think that we should care about some details that may temperate our subscription to Utilitarian ethics, as I will expose commenting this chapter. In this first section, Parfit examines Paternalism: “We are paternalists when we make someone act in his own interest”. Because it involves infringement of someone’s autonomy, it should always be justified somehow, for example to prevent someone to do something that is seriously wrong. Autonomy does not include the right to impose upon oneself a great harm. For Parfit, this is especially true if this oneself is the future self of a person, who should be considered as another person. Anyway, Parfit agrees that in other cases it is better if we learn from our own mistakes, and

may be hard for others to know that these are mistakes. Open Individualism appears to exclude paternalism, in the sense that if it is true that I am also everybody else, this could seem a sufficient justification to infringe other's autonomy, without incur in paternalism, but in a generalized form of self-interest. But I don't think that it is true, for the same reasons for which Parfit does not consider that we always have the duty to be paternalists. Being aware of Open Individualism does not makes us infallible, and our opinions may be wrong, we are subject to bias, so even our best intentions may actually be not good. What fundamentally would change, comparing our ideal behaviour as open individualists with the behaviour of the nowadays man-of-the-street, is that we would care more that the imprudent people will be aware of the risks that they face, even if we do not know personally that people. I may anticipate that in my opinion, if we all would embrace Open Individualism, the only big change in our behaviour would be that we would treat everybody else with a care comparable to the one we reserve to our beloved ones. Even if some differences will always remain, because I always will have more empathy for those people which I am most affected, or share my culture or my opinions, I believe that such change would be enough to gain a planetary peace. Religions tried to say the same thing from centuries, but they too often consider people of different religions as enemies. Moreover, religions are almost always associated to some practices that are justified by dogma, and not by reason, so this makes they always have the possibility to be harmful. If the convincement that "to take care of other people coincides with our own direct interest" is gained in a philosophical way, whoever realizes it does not have reasons to exclude anybody from his care. This is one of the most important reasons why I spend my time proposing and discussing these ideas.

Section 108 - The Two Ends of Lives

Parfit examines the way we should change our views about the beginning and the end of the life, and how this should affect our ethics. According to non-reductionists, the existence is all-or-nothing, so there

must have been a moment when I started to exist. As many religious people say, this might be the moment of conception, so abortion would be the same as killing an innocent person, an act morally wrong. On the reductionist view, we may deny that there is a sharp borderline, so a fertilized ovum is not a person, even if it is something that slowly and gradually becomes an human being and a person, in the same way that an acorn is not an oak tree, but it can become it, given enough time and nutrients. So also the abortion has to be considered an act that initially is not morally wrong, but it becomes gradually more wrong in time, as the fertilized ovum becomes a person. In this reductionist view there is room for disagreement: for Locke, a human being become a person only when becomes self-conscious, some time after the birth. So, we may think that also if it is bad to kill a human being, it is worse to kill a person, when this distinction can be given. In the same way, in the reductionist view, a person may gradually cease to exist some time before the heart stop beating, as the features of the person's mental life disappear. So in some extreme cases as for example in irreversible coma, we may think that the person has ceased to exist, and only a living body is still alive, so if we stop to help the heart to go on beating, it is not so wrong as it was to kill a person. My view changes the framework for these arguments. Some reductionist may think that anyway, an abortion stops a unique process that would have bring to life a given, irrepitable human being and person. Conversely, to stop keeping alive a human body would mean to deny that person to return to life (or maybe another person, as some reductionists claim that also a temporary loss of consciousness could cause a change in personal identity). So these acts would interfere with the possibility of life of a person with an unique personal identity, presumably representing the only possible chance to come or return to life. In my view, this is no problem at all. There is not a range of personal identities from which the process of birth may select one, or in which the process of death may lose a specific identity. In this view, the value of a person does not consist in having an irrepitable personal identity, but in the world of affection and expectations of the people surrounding them, and in the

experiences and the information that each of us has. So we are free from the paranoia that we cannot have the responsibility to decide about the life of somebody else for whom we do not have the right to take any decision. We may consider pros and cons of a given life-critical situation and try to take the best decision just evaluating the affection and the expectation of the people involved, and the knowledge and the experience of the person exposed to the critical situation. But definitively, we are free from the responsibility derived from managing “the unique opportunity to live for a person who is not me”, this can never be the case, as I am everybody else, and I will live every other possible life. But we should also keep in mind that this does not mean that I will be always wise enough to take the best decision. Another question that the model of birth proposed by Parfit leaves open, is that psychological connectedness and continuity may help to determine whether a given personal identity may be considered to be the same in time, but it remains undefined which are the critical psychological factors that make the first personal identity to appear gradually from no previous personal identity. Note that if we ever knew what they are, we should theoretically find a process to build a number of bodies with the same personal identity. Because in my view there’s no need to select any identity, it is not a problem even to build a great number of persons with the very same physical and psychological features, they would represent just different streams of consciousness, each one with their individual subjective time, created by the application of the subjectivity function to the stream. Also at the death of a person, we do not lose that person and that personal identity forever, but nevertheless we lose all the valuable things that that person represents, including their affections and their capabilities. So people does not cease to be individually valuable: but their value depends only by the affection they share with their dears and all the useful things they know. There is no more anything like a soul that should be considered sacred, nor a personal identity that I should consider to be only mine or of another person. In the Reductionist view, we cannot get rid completely of this conception, until we do get rid of

the personal identity concept. But this cannot be achieved just changing continuously the personal identity, as we try to do when anchoring it to some changing physical or psychological feature: it can be achieved only acknowledging that the “running of my thoughts” is experienced by the same *recipient of the illusion to be a thinking subject* that you believe is now experiencing “the running of your thoughts”. Believing that this solution would imply a one very special (and dualist) subject, means to try to apply again the empty concept of “identity” that you would apply to each different thinking subject, when believing that this view was false. Believing that each occurrence of this phenomenon of “running thoughts” implied a subject with a personal identity derived by some physical or psychological structure, means to try to build personal identity from something that is illusory because it is arbitrary, as the identity of physical or psychological structure is.

Section 109 - Desert

Here Parfit discusses the question whether we should deserve to be punished for our past crimes, even if they are so far in time that currently our personal identity is completely changed. Locke thought that if we forget our crimes we deserve no punishment. If we are Reductionists, we may consider other factors than memory, but the issue is that a psychological difference between me now and me at the moment of the crime might be enough great to imply a different personal identity. For this reason, some critics like Reid need to believe in a “further fact” that maintains our personal identity in time, when giving the foundation of morality and our accountability for our past crimes. This problem brings other writers to attack the view of Parfit. Actually, Parfit does not claim that we cannot apply any punishments. Anyway, as Parfit says, these attacks are fallacious because they apply “argument by consequences”: to show bad or good consequences does not influence if a thesis is true or false. Parfit returns on the case of my division, when half of my brain is transplanted in Lefty and the other half in Righty. A Non-Reductionist may think that I will become,

for example, Righty: in this case, Lefty did not deserve to be punished for my previous crimes, even if he is psychologically continuous with me as Righty is. A Reductionist may think that the question whether I am Lefty or Righty is empty, and the best answer is that I am none of them, so they both did not deserve to be punished for my crimes. Parfit says that this view is defensible, but it can be defensibly denied. Here he makes a digression about Determinism and free will: there are two views about Determinism: the Compatibilist view says that the kind of free will required for desert would not be undermined by the truth of Determinism, and the Incompatible view says that Determinism undermines both free will and desert. In the latter case, even a guilty person does not deserve punishment, because if there is no free will, the guilty is just another victim. On this basis, if the punishment is given for the aim of deterrence, it is irrelevant whether the punished is guilty or not, the deterrence would work even punishing an innocent. Here I want not to discuss about free will, I just notice that the act of conscious understanding would lose its meaning, and therefore its evolutive utility, in a rigidly deterministic world. Parfit does not take a position about determinism, but he proposes that in the same way, also in Reductionist view we can defensibly claim that psychological continuity may carry the desert for past crimes. Here I notice that having memory of a past crime makes most of us in the awareness of deserving a punishment, as well as a reward for our merits. Parfit next considers the different degrees of psychological connectedness, and comes to make a general claim: when some convict is now less closely connected to himself at the time of his crime, he deserves less punishment. He takes the example of an old Nobel Peace Prize laureate that confesses that when he was young, he injured a policeman. This shows that there are different degrees also in responsibility, in the same way we accept that there are different degrees in complicity in committing a crime. I deeply agree with this conclusion, but I find that it is not necessary to justify it appealing to a different personal identity. The reasoning about deserves and punishments affects also the aim of the punishment and its social utility. I think that it is wrong to punish a given

person only because their being the same person who once committed a crime: we should punish some bad behaviour, some bad inclination, claiming also a payoff for the damage done. A physical revenge may function as deterrent, but in my view is only a sign of weakness of a society that is unable to give a mature education to its members. If the individual that once committed a crime is now so changed that there is no danger that he might repeat the same crime, demonstrating the change practically in his daily life, there is no sense to punish him in the same way that would be right if he was arrested and processed at the time of the crime. A delayed justice is no more justice. The aim of the punishment should be the transformation of the individual in another who can be safely let free again. If time did that job in place of the punishment, it may just remain the right of a compensation for the people injured, but not much more than this, whatever our view on personal identity will be.

Section 110 - Commitments

Commitments have many analogies with desert, so Parfit just says that reasoning in a similar way we can conclude that also my commitments may become weaker as psychological connections between my self now and my future selves become weaker as well. Anyway, he notices this asymmetry: the person who receives the promise may change their personal identity, but the formulation of the commitment may include all the future selves of the receiver, in the same way we may promise to a friend that we will help his children after his death. Conversely, we should not commit our future selves to maintain a promise we do now. It was like to promise that my children will do something for the receiver in future: we cannot have the right to promise that another person will do something for us. In later samples discussed in this section, Parfit seems to overlook this distinction, but I think that it can be the key to solve some of the proposed issues. Another thing that I want to notice is that commitments have to be reasonable and may become useless or even harmful in time (like the punishment after a long time). For this reason, I agree on his

conclusion about the less weight of commitments in time, even if I think that there's no personal identity that may change in time, and we continue to be the very same person than before: our qualitative changes may be a sufficient reason to reconsider whether it is still the case to honor our past commitments. Just think to a promise we could have done in our childhood, for example to meet again all our friend somewhere after 20 years: This may be pleasant to do if possible, but it would be foolish to scold our friends if they do not meet the promise they did when where child, even if we think that everybody of us is still the same person with the same personal identity. The reason is that those children were not able to judge about the suitability of their remote meeting in their future living conditions. This is not very different for the case of the young Russian idealist taken as example by Parfit. He wants his wife to promise him that she will not allow his future-self to take back the land he now gives to peasants for free. Fifty years later, his future self may change his mind and may have become another person, but we may think that also the wife may have no more the same personal identity that she had at the time of her promise. So her judgment should be more proper after her evaluation of the current situation, the state of their lives and the behaviour of the peasants, instead of worrying out her being fair with the old promise. It is not necessary to change personal identity to maintain our honesty even without maintaining our commitment. Also the example of the general who says to his troops "I order you to attack at dawn, and to disregard any later contrary order", and later says "Disregard my last order" has some gaps and resemble the paradox of the liar that says: "this statement is false". For example, disregarding the order may be right if the general reflects deeper on the current war situation, but may be wrong if the general is captured by enemies and make the appeal via radio to his troops. Anyway, Parfit concludes that there are events (or succession of events) that we may regard as birth or death. These events may (or not) mark some sharp or fuzzy boundary between earlier and later selves in our life. We may devote our emotions or apply our principles just to one out of this series of selves. But since

there is not a fixed criteria, we can choose when it is the case of considering a self different from another. In the same way, we may speak of the history of Russia dividing it into the histories of the Empire and the Soviet Union (and also the current Russian Federation, I would say today). But I want to notice that this distinction remains arbitrary, and in the same way we have no hope to find something in the material world that may ever define the boundary between a given personal identity and another. I want to recall that Parfit holds this distinction only because he finds that the physical and psychological differences within the lifetime of a single person may have the same depth of the ones between two different people, and so, if we assume that different people has different numerical personal identities, we must conclude that even during our own lifetime, if these changes happens (and they do, if we consider the differences between a child and an old man), we also change our personal identity and perhaps more than once, and gradually in time. Parfit links these changes to psychological connectedness and continuity. This works because these are the factors that allow us to have a sense of being a particular individual with some personal traits but with a unitary life. These are the factors that determines the most important qualitative differences between us, and gives us a qualitative identity that make us qualitatively different, but in chapter 10, section 76, Parfit's aim was to discuss the numerical identity. He is right when he concludes that there is nothing that may define it, so we may appeal only to qualitative identity, but he is wrong when he tries to maintain numerical identity reducing it to qualitative identity. We just have to acknowledge that numerical identity is just illusory, and so is illusory the concept of numerical personal identity, and therefore they cannot exist different personal identities at all.

Section 111 - The Separateness of Persons and Distributive Justice

With the *Separateness of Persons* is meant the fact that we are different people, each with its own life to lead. Parfit says that on the Non-Reductionist View this become a deeper truth than for

Reductionist View, or at least for those Reductionist views that do not consider personal identity as a deep further fact. Henry Sidgwick, supporting Utilitarianism, said that for each person the supremely rational ultimate aim is that its own life go as well as possible, but there is another ultimate aim given us by morality, that is that things go, on the whole, as well as possible for everyone. But when morality conflicts with Self-interest, there is no answer to the question of what we have most reason to do. Parfit claims that according to his view about personal identity, we may refute the Self-interest Theory that for Sidgwick is the foundation for the Separateness of persons. Sidgwick thought that the ultimate moral principle is Impartial Benevolence, meaning that we should try to gain the greatest net sum of “desirable consciousness”, minus the “undesirable consciousness” (or the greatest net sum of benefits, minus burdens). This is the Utilitarian View, that is *impersonal*, because no matters how these amounts are distributed between different people. Other people claims that besides the Utilitarian Principle we need some principles for Distributive Justice, as the Principle of Equity, according to which it is bad if some people are worse off than others through no fault of theirs. If we are equally deserving, our lives should go equally well, or at least should have equal chances of going well. This principle is grounded on the separateness of persons. Once we become Reductionist, this principle has less ground. Parfit claims that there are two reasons to give more scope to these distributive principles, so they become more important, but there is also one reason to give them less weight, so they become less important. We may ask what the net effect would be. In my view, as Kolak noted in his book, all the moral considerations become rational consideration. Nevertheless, I think that some distributive principles may be grounded to some rational considerations, so my view differs from the one of Kolak. In a nutshell, I never can be sure to act rationally, so I should care to give good chances to a good number of “different version of me” (other people) to develop their talents and their ideas, even conflicting with mine, if they demonstrate to deserve some credit. I think also that some people deserves more than others

to have resources and opportunities, because the Utilitarian goal has more chance to be improved if people who demonstrates to be more clever may use more resources. This is what we do also within our own life, when we divide our ages in time to study, to work, to marry and have children, to retire. It would be not rational to always divide our benefits and burdens equally in every part of our life. This continues to be true also when we think that other people are “different versions of me”. This shows that even for Open Individualism it is irrational a uncritical division of all the resources in equal parts between all the human beings, as well as it is irrational a division based on privileges, or selfishness, or the uncritical defence of the status of existing divisions. This principles are theoretically already partially applied in those countries that provides for a progressive taxation and free education and scholarship. I think that common sense spontaneously drives us to a Open Individualism compatible society. The most serious problem nowadays is that in the absence of a widely spread and acknowledged justification of the Open Individualism Theory, this “common sense” does not seem to be convenient in the logic of a blind Self-interest.

Section 112 - Three Explanations of the Utilitarian View

As also Kolak notices in his book, Utilitarians reject the distributive principles, so that they aim for the greatest net sum of benefits minus burdens, whatever its distribution is, so we can say that they *maximize*. Parfit acknowledges that considering a single life, we may maximize this net sum, but always with a reasonable distribution of benefits and burdens, and I agree that this suggests that also when maximizing between many lives we will probably search for a fair spreading of benefits and burdens between different people. But this is not a principle: it is just a criterion to achieve the best maximization possible. For Utilitarianists, this means to ignore the boundaries between our lives. Parfit lists three different ways to justify this ignoring: 1) To morally reason in a way that leads to overcome these boundaries; 2) To think that a set of lives may be considered as a single life; 3) To

accept the reductionist view about personal identity. Examining the first reason, Parfit says that it was suggested by Rawls introducing the method of the *Impartial Observer*, who tries to evaluate moral problems identifying himself with all the affected people. A variation is to imagine that we will become one of the affected people, but without knowing who in advance (what Rawls calls “the veil of ignorance”). About this view, Daniel Kolak in “I Am You” says that it would lead us to minimize the overall possible loss, instead of maximizing the overall possible gain. Another variation is called the *Detached Observer*, and it consists in imagining to be none of the affected people, leading us again to maximize. Suggestion 2 is quickly refused by Parfit as contrary to the evidence. It actually is the reason that Open Individualism supports, and so I do, but in a way that Parfit did not see. Parfit thinks that 2 would imply to consider humanity as superorganism, or that all the people had a hidden link between their minds. The metaphor of the actor that plays all the roles in a movie may be useful to understand that these assumptions are not necessary. Parfit, like almost everybody else, reasons this way: now I am here, and you are there, and we think in two independent ways, so we cannot reasonably be the same person. What I criticize is the concept of “now”, that in my view is subjectively defined within the running of the subjectivity function, and the concept of identity, that in my view is created by the subjectivity function in an illusory way and so it may be well considering as “always the same”, even if the subjectivity function evaluates different streams of data, whilst in Parfit’s view it is something that comes out from the physical and structural properties of the streams. I acknowledge that these physical and structural differences between us exist, I just deny that they might ever define an identity in a meaningful sense. This is the reason why Parfit is forced to concede that in some circumstances the question “this person will be me or not?” might be an “empty question” (without specifying how I should subjectively experience such mental condition). Between the three reasons of being Utilitarian, Parfit prefers the reason number 3, claiming that Reductionist View about personal identity would lead us to consider “me in the future” in the

same way I consider another person. But this way of thinking may lead also to accept the “Critical Present-aim Theory” discussed in chapter 35 and again in section 105, that gives precedence to the present time over the future times. For this reason, Parfit needs to revise the scope and the weight of distributive principles as he stated in the previous section.

Section 113 - Changing a Principle’s Scope

Here Parfit discusses how, despite he considers the acceptance of the Reductionist view as the best explanation to justify the Utilitarian view, his view apparently conflict with this claim, because it gives more scope to the distributive principles, while Utilitarians normally reject this principle. He consider the example of *the child burden*. We must decide whether impose on some child some hardship. We may consider whether this will be justified by 1) a greater benefit in the adult life of the same child, or 2) a similar benefit for someone else. Utilitarians should not make distinctions in these two cases. Everyone else would consider unfair if the benefits go to a different person than the same child. But according the Reductionist view of Parfit, we should consider the adult person the child will become like as one of the future-selves of the child, not having the very same personal identity. We should regard subdivisions within the same life like the divisions between different lives. So we should consider unfair to apply a burden to the child also when it will bring a greater benefit in some future-selves of the child. We can apply distributive principles to both, or to neither. For this reason, Parfit concludes that being reductionist leads to give a greater scope to distributive principles, because they should be applied also within a single life. This would work against the Utilitarian view. But Parfit claims that for the same reason, these principles should have less weight. In my view there is not such a problem. All the people should be treated as my own future selves, so the distributive principles should be founded on different basis than the separateness of individuals. I think that if we lived in a society where all the adult persons are aware to be different expressions of the same “subjectivity

phenomenon”, and that our different identities are illusory, yet it there will be a difference between the cases 1) and 2). I think that the example takes a child not just for our emotional involvement, but also to consider the fact that the burdened person does not understand the reasoning behind our choices. This should be taken in account in computing the sum of burdens and benefit. A real life examples may be a child that must undergo the removal of a part of bone marrow for a future transplant. Maybe that the recipient will be the same child, after a heavy medical therapy, or maybe the recipient will be the brother or the sister of the child, who needs it by having a serious disease. We may see that actually a motivated child supports the same burden much more easily if motivated, both for their same benefit, or for the benefit of another child. If it is impossible to give any motivation, for example when a baby cannot even understand what is going to happen, this impossibility should have weight on the decision about what is the best overall outcome, and we should also take in account all the involved people like the child’s parent and every other people emotionally involved. The awareness of being all different expressions of the same “subjectivity phenomenon” may help us to consider other people more emphatically and act accordingly, but it does not authorize anybody to compute the overall best outcome without caring of the emotions of all the people involved, even if everybody is fully aware of what we are. That’s not very different from what happens today, when decisions involve a small group of people that cares each other without social tensions, even if they does not believe to be different forms of the same phenomenon of subjectivity.

Section 114 - Changing a Principle’s Weight

It is normally accepted that distributive principles can be ignored within a single life, just because the receiver of all the benefits and burdens is always the same person. This allows a single person to try to maximize the benefits, ignoring the distributive principles, if they are obstacles for the maximization. So Gauthier critics Utilitarians because they treat mankind like a super-person, maximizing between different persons.

Utilitarians may answer that they do not need to consider mankind as a super-person, as maximization may be justified just by the goal of diminishing global suffering. The Reductionist view of Parfit makes less deep the unity of a single life, so in his view maximization within a single life cannot be justified by appealing to the fact that all the life moments are equally owned by the same person. Utilitarians should not justify maximization just by considering mankind like a super-person, but just because they do not apply distributive principles between different lives, neither within the same single life. Parfit reconciles Reductionism and Utilitarianism claiming that the loss of unity within a single life, while should give more scope to distributive principles (applying them also within a single life), should also give them less weight, eventually reducing them to no weight at all, so that the Reductionist view should coincide with the Utilitarian view. Parfit claims that after the disintegration of the unity of the single lives, Reductionists should behave like Utilitarians, giving no moral difference if benefits and burdens come within the same life or not. This Utilitarian view is impersonal, but as this impartiality comes from considering to be a *detached* observer (and not an *identifying* observer), then Reductionist view, limiting the nature of the person, may help to justify this kind of Utilitarianism. In my view, Open Individualism should not be interpreted as considering the mankind as a super-person, but must be interpreted considering other lives being “mine” in the same way I consider mine all the other parts of my own life. This is the fundamental relation by this view and the one of Parfit: both consider different parts within the same life in the same way of different parts in different lives. The difference is that according to Parfit, I don’t own none of these, excepted the one I find myself currently being living, instead according to me (and Daniel Kolak), I own them all. This makes more easy to support maximization between lives, ignoring distributive principles when it is useful. I want remember that it is Reductionism by itself that states that we should consider different parts within our single lives in the same way of parts of different lives. Parfit thinks that we should assign to every part a different personal identity, deriving it by

psychological states, and therefore, ultimately, by the brain structure. Kolak thinks that we should assign the same personal identity to every conscious being, and that it cannot be derived by nothing physical or structural. I add that once we did this, we can get rid of the same concept of personal identity, because it became completely useless. So we can reconsider the identity principles given by Parfit as the explanation of why we believe to have a separate individual existences, and feel a sense of continuity and unity within our lives.

Section 115 - Can It Be Right to Burden Someone Merely to Benefit Someone Else?

Parfit evaluates the Utilitarian believing that benefits and burdens can be freely weighed between different people. He makes a distinction between a burden that factual outweighs another, meaning that it is greater than the other, and a burden that morally outweighs another, meaning that we ought to relieve it even at the cost of failing to relieve the other. This applies between burdens, but we can also compare benefits with burdens. A given benefit factually outweighs a burden if we would choose to undergo the burden to get the benefit. Parfit considers whether these comparisons can be applied also between different lives. Here his discussion becomes subtle and I hope to not miss some important point. Parfit considers whether someone's burden can be morally outweighed by *mere* benefits to someone else. He uses '*mere*' meaning that the question is about the justification limited to Utilitarian ground, just considering that the benefit is greater of the burden. Here he makes a distinction from distributive justice, that justify to tax the rich to benefit the poor. I imagine that he makes this distinction meaning that taxation has some practical goals that may find out to be useful also for the rich, as the availability of common services and better social security that eventually makes more easy the life also for the rich. Anyhow, Parfit considers the simplest form, that Rawls put in a form that he called the *Objection to Balancing*: "The reasoning which balances the gains and the losses of different persons (as if they were one person) is excluded" (the parentheses contain the

original words of Rawls that Parfit omits in his quote because he thinks that this reasoning does not need this assumption). Next, Parfit says that this Objection rests in part on a different claim, that he calls the *Claim about Compensation*: “Someone’s burden cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else”. He says that even if our burdens can, in a sense, be compensated by benefit to those we love, they cannot be compensated by benefits to other people. Next he says that the Claim about Compensation cannot be denied. I would like to observe that because one exception exists, this is not completely true, but I think that Parfit here means that compensation presupposes a reward that must be given to the same person who deserves it. A benefit to someone we love is still a compensation because make us feel happier. Parfit then considers the consequences of his Reductionist view: like in the case of desert and commitments, the weakening of psychological connectedness with our future self will imply that a future compensation should become less or even no compensation. The Reductionist view changes the scope of the Claim about Compensation. Here I notice that anyway, a benefit to our future self is very similar to the benefit to someone we love, so some kind of compensation is still present. Moreover, taking for example the need to undergo a surgical operation to benefit my future self, I am the only person who can ever do it; I cannot find someone else that may possibly to give the same benefit to that future person, excluding possibly another future self that however I cannot meet: this put me in a significant position of responsibility. Once Parfit found that the Reductionist View changes the *scope* of the Claim of Compensation, he next considers its change of *weight*. Because the Reductionist View implies that personal identity over time is less deep, also the importance of Compensation become less deep, and consequently has less weight, because it implies the same personal identity between who get the burden and who get the benefit. I think he means that in every case, this personal identity cannot be perfectly the same, so it become impossible to give someone a *full compensation*. Anyway, Parfit does not deny the sense of the Claim of Compensation, because it must be

referred to a given personal identity. On the contrary, *Objection to Balance* does not presuppose personal identity, so we can formulate a denial for it, that represents the Utilitarian View: “Even if our burdens cannot be compensated by mere benefits to someone else, they may be morally outweighed by such benefits”. Parfit specifies that in this case, the *moral outweigh* will coincide with the *factual outweigh*, no matter who have the burdens and who have the benefits. If I understand Parfit correctly, according to Reductionist/Utilitarian view, to achieve a moral outweigh big enough, we can disregard compensation. Actually, I see another problem here, because the factual outweigh was defined by my evaluation of what burden is worth to undergo to obtain a certain benefit. This is a subjective justice that can be denied by someone else, especially if burdens and benefits come to different persons. Parfit summarizes in this way how the Reductionist view gives some support to the Utilitarian View: Objection to Balancing rests on Claim to Compensation. The Reductionist View gives less scope for compensation (because we should apply it to a restricted time in the life of a person, and not to the whole life), but also less moral weight (because it becomes impossible to give a full compensation, if I interpreted Parfit correctly). Because for this reason the Claim to Compensation becomes morally less important, so it gives less support to the Objection to Balancing. So the Reductionist View give *some support* to the Utilitarian View, even if it does not imply that we must accept it. Differently speaking, according to Parfit, the Reductionist View should make us to consider boundaries between lives in a similar way of different ages within the same life. These differences become a matter of degree. So Parfit claims that we should consider a matter of degree also the borders between our own lives. Someone may object that Reductionism claims that the parts of each life are less deeply unified, but it does not claim that there is more unity between different lives. But here Parfit explicitly reply: “*If some unity is less deep, so is the corresponding disunity. The fact that we live different lives is the fact that we are not the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep, so is the fact of non-identity. There are not two different*

facts here, one of which is less deep on the Reductionist View, while the other remains as deep. There is merely one fact, and this fact's denial. The separateness of persons is the denial that we are all the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep, so is this fact's denial". I reported these words literally because they are very important and show how my view can be reduced to a very special interpretation of the view of Parfit. I simply reduce the personal identity to zero, reducing to zero also the non-identity fact. What does it mean? How should we interpret this fact subjectively? My answer requires to concede that the fact that our lives run concurrently in overlapping time interval is not a definitive obstacle, but once we accept it, all the answers are much clearer than those drawn by Parfit. We have not to figure how, subjectively, we should experience the fact of having only a partial personal identity while a new one is growing with the age in our own body, or what it means that there is no answer to the question whether a certain my future self will be me or someone else. I interpret the personal identity as an illusion that is necessarily created when the subjectivity function is interpreting a given brain/body state as a mental state. This does not require to give some special kind of existence to a supernatural ego: this simply descends by 1) the direct experience that at least one interpretation of this kind exists (what everybody of us calls "my own life") and 2) the acknowledge that personal identity is an illusory concept, created as a side effect of this interpretation, but having no effective consistence, nor it can be reduced to something of well defined. About the impossibility of making it "well defined", I mean that any definition will result to be circular, referring to the subjectivity function itself when is interpreting our brain state in a mental way. I am convinced of this because we derive the same concept of "identity" by our illusory experience to be an individual with a specific personal identity in a world that contains many things and many other subjects that I perceive as "different" from me. This is true in a functional sense, but the existence of different identities cannot be reduced to an objective fact or to a specific materialist feature.

Section 116 - An Argument for Giving Less Weight to the Principle of Equality

While it is true that a certain degree of inequality can produce a gain in the total amount of benefits, generally we think that is morally preferable to adopt a Principle of Equality, giving some priority to helping those who are worst off, through no fault of their. Also in the Utilitarian View this may be true, not for moral reasons, but just because this may turn out to be the way to obtain the best gain given a certain amount of resources. Parfit avails this view comparing the division of benefits between different persons to the division of benefits between different parts of a single life. If the total gain does not change, we do not believe that the equality of benefits at different times is morally important. For the same reason, Utilitarians say that does not matter also to whom these benefits are given, if the total gain does not change. Non-Utilitarians think that the distribution is morally relevant and we should always reason accounting the different persons who receive the benefits. Parfit then examines how the fact of being reductionist may affect our position about this issue. I may anticipate that in my view, once we determined that different lives can be managed as different parts of the same life, we may easily see that the differences in distribution of benefits and burdens in different times should always have a rational cause. This does not mean that we may care one part of our life more than another, but for example, we may work harder when we want to buy an house, or decide to undergo a surgery operation to have less troubles in our old age. Conversely, if we may plan our entire lifetime, we may choose to have more time to play in our childhood and more time to relax in our old age. We leave out a strict equality to get a better overall gain. So I think it would be the same between all our lives, if we all were convinced that Open Individualism is true. This is more simple and straightforward to understand than adopting the Parfit's theory. Parfit considers the comparison between persons and nations, as he already did speaking about the nature of persons. Nations are made out of people that lives

in there, and do not have an independent way to be real. According to Parfit, the same is true for persons: they do not have a separate existence that involves more than their related physical events, and even the continued existence in time of a given person does not involve anything more than psychological continuity and connectedness, and for this reason it is not a matter of all-or-nothing, but it varies gradually as the psychological connectedness varies in time. I already expressed my perplexity for the consequences that this view should have in our subjective experience, anyhow Parfit uses these conceptions to come to the same conclusions that my view implies: just as we are right to ignore whether people comes from the same or different nations, we are right to ignore whether experiences happen within the same or in different lives. He then gives the example of two suffering people. If helping only one of them can be more effective even if the other suffers more, an utilitarian will help the first, while a non-utilitarian may choose to help the second, even if the total gain in sufferance level is less. I want to notice here that actually when resources are insufficient, people tend to behave like utilitarians, despite they may know nothing at all about Utilitarianism and Reductionism: when only few people may survive in a critical situation, people tend to help who already has more chance to survive. This behaviour is demonstrated in critical situations like as in extermination camps or in military hospitals. Parfit justifies his thought using the example of nations: it would have no sense to help the nation that had suffered more in the past, because in relieving suffering nations are not significant units. So it would be also for the lifetime of people, says Parfit, if Reductionist View is true, even if this cannot be a complete defence of the Utilitarian View. He concludes that the Reductionist View makes more plausible to give less weight to Equality Principles, but it still may be implausible to give them no weight. So the Reductionist View makes the Utilitarian View to become more plausible, but whether this increment is great or small remains an open question. According to Open Individualism, the weight of Equality Principles becomes zero, and the Utilitarian View becomes fully

plausible. But I think that the Principle of Equality is still valid and represents a fundamental tool to get the ultimate Utilitarian aim, not on moral ground, but on rational ground, to optimize the use of our limited, available resources. Unlike the Reductionist View of Parfit, which Kolak classifies as Empty Individualism, Open Individualism gives us a very good reason to have equally care of all the different moments of all our different lives. However, the problem of caring of everybody is so vast that we are forced to make choices and to overlook some problems to resolve more important others. This does not mean that we do not care about some people, but that we are try to reach the best overall gain for everybody, using our limited possibilities, and our limited understanding. We just do our best, and in doing this, we cannot always be equally fair with everybody, as we would like to be. This is not difficult to understand, if we think how we try to act and make choices in our own life. Between different lives, once everybody knew the reasons for being Open Individualists, it should be the same way, providing that everybody is well motivated to have the same goal, that should be decided by a collective and well informed discussion.

Section 117 - A More Extreme Argument

Here Parfit examines the hypothesis that compensation within the same life does not merely presuppose personal identity, it also requires a “further fact” that only Non-Reductionist theories support. He wants to show that it is defensible to claim that becoming reductionist not only implies that personal identity requires less and becomes less deep, but also that such reduced concept might not support any kind of compensation, and so forth any maximization: these should require the Non-Reductionist “further fact” to be supported in the scope of a whole life. He considers the case of “my division” introduced in Section 89. If we are Non-Reductionists and we believe that Personal Identity implies a further fact, if we suppose that after the division I will become Righty, it would be unfair that Lefty had to bear (as Righty) some burden due to my preceding bad behaviour, even if it is psychologically continuous with me, as Righty is. If we become Reductionist, we may still continue

to think that psychological continuity by itself does not make compensation possible, in absence of any further fact. In other words, the new conception of Personal Identity, based on psychological continuity and psychological connectedness, might be defensibly considered not sufficient to support compensation and maximization, even if it can also be defensibly denied. But because the scope of distributive principles depends upon the scope of possible compensation, in this view we should aim for equality between the states that people are in at particular times. Parfit here quotes Nagel who remarks: "*these thoughts do not depend on any idea of personal identity over time, though they can employ such an idea*", "*the impulse to distributive equality arises so long as we can distinguish between two experiences being had by two persons, and their being had by one person [in different times]*". And also: "*The criteria of personal identity over time merely determine the size of the units over which a distributive principle operates*", so according to Nagel, our concept of Personal Identity defines the size of the time intervals in which compensation is possible, and beyond which we should apply the distributive principle. Parfit here is discussing what happens if we think that only a further fact might justify compensation, considering the mere psychological continuity insufficient to make possible compensation over time. According his view, despite our psychological continuity, our personal identity is gradually changing along with the weakening of our psychological connectedness with our preceding psychological state. Parfit here considers if, without any "further fact", even a small change in psychological connectedness may undermine the possibility of compensation. In this case, we should apply distributive principle between every particular state in the life of all the persons. This coincides with *Negative Utilitarianism*, which gives priority to the relief of suffering. If the relevant units are the states that people are in at particular times, our Principle of Equality will tell us to prevent or improve the experience of great physical or psychological pain, giving this priority over promoting desirable experiences. As Parfit notices, in this case we should aim for equality of welfare between

these single states, whilst equality of resource may have not the same importance (I would say that this is in accordance with the Epicurean View). Conversely, distributive principles should be given less weight. Parfit quotes Haksar who suggests that, if the Parfit's theory is right and individuals gradually change their personal identity, suffering becomes less bad that it would be if the same individual keeps suffering on and on. Parfit acknowledges that this does not deny that a person suffering is greater if the person knows that the suffering will be prolonged, so we should try to alleviate such suffering in any case. What Parfit says is that there is not a further moral reason to give priority to preventing suffering, in opposing to what Negative Utilitarians claims. Considering all these reasons, Parfit believes that, once the scope of Principle of Equality has changed because it should be applied also between different parts of the same life, we should give it less weight, but they still have some weight, partly accepting the Haksar's reason. Parfit summarizes his reasoning in this way: if the unity of a person's life does not involve a deep further fact, it is defensible to claim that there cannot be compensation over time. But for the same reason, there is no possible the full evil that a prolonged suffering would be, if the Non-Reductionist View was true. So according to Parfit, Distributive Principles should have less weight, but they still have some weight. I have to say that I have difficulties to understand some of the distinctions discussed in this section. The kind of reasoning discussed is based on the assumption that only a further fact can justify the effectiveness of the unity of life that we perceive directly. To claim that this perception of unity is illusory just because we cannot figure out what might justify it, if there is no further fact, seems to me a hasty conclusion. In my view, the disappearance of the personal identity concept bring us to conclude that if we consider illusory what we perceive as "my personal identity", then it cannot be something that changes continuously: what changes is just the data to which is applied the subjectivity function, and they change continuously, through different lives as well as within different times in the same life. Parfit has correctly found that the sense of unity of our

lives comes from psychological continuity and psychological connectedness. This allowed him to manage correctly many problems, but forced him to introduce the possibility of *empty questions* about our personal identity, because he still wants to preserve something differentiating the “being me” from the “being you”, and he cannot figure that we could be always the same person, being here simultaneously in more than a single place at a time. But he is in the right direction when he discusses the case of teletransport with overlapping copy, or the memory pill, allowing partial exceptions in these cases. I claim that if we overcome our preconception about time, we may see that the personal identity concept may be completely dismissed, or used just as a convenient (and arbitrary) simplification, and we can consider every life as a sequence of mind states produced by a *subjectivity phenomenon* which does not need to be thought as instantiated with a different identity for each state, nor within a single life, nor between different lives.

Section 118 - Conclusions

Here Parfit summarizes his main claims made in this chapter. The changes he proposed in our concept of personal identity imply other changes in our beliefs of rationality and morality. This might also affect our beliefs about the Principle of Equality and generally about distributive principles. The Reductionist View should imply that there is less scope for compensation within the same life. The distributive principles should cover not only different lives, but also weakly connected part of the same life. This is a move away from the Utilitarian View. But because distributive principles are founded on the separateness, or non-identity, of different person, once the identity becomes less deep as it is according to Reductionist View, also the non-identity becomes less deep, so it becomes plausible to give less weight to distributive principles. Also, if we believe that the unity of a life does not involves a further fact, but no more than various relations between the experiences in this life, it becomes more plausible to be more concerned about the quality of the experiences, and less

concerned about whose experiences they are. This gives support to the Utilitarian View, so that it becomes a plausible consequence of the Reductionist View. The Extreme Claim that only a further fact would justify our special concern for our own future is defensible, but also its denial is still defensible. The Classical Self-Interest Theory, that states that is rational that people act just caring their own self-interest, should have less importance, because if personal identity is grounded just to psychological connectedness, it holds to a reduced degree in time, and it cannot be irrational to be less concerned about less closely connected part of our own future. Even if the Revised Self-Interest Theory cannot always consider acts of great imprudence as irrational, they should be criticized as morally wrong, giving more strength to Paternalism. Reductionism gives plausibility to the acceptance of abortion which would be not wrong in the first few weeks, and gradually becomes more wrong, if we believe that the identity of a fertilized egg is not the same identity of the human being it will produce during pregnancy. The reduced degrees of personal identity over time induces also a reduced degree of desert and commitments. Weaker identity connection implies less deserving and committance. The Extreme Claim, that denies the rationality of any concern for our own future, may be disturbing, but Parfit denies it, claiming that what he welcomes in himself is to have less concern about his own future, and more concern about others. But I think that these welcome effects are very much greater in my view. Instead of suggesting that it might be rational not taking care about my future selves, as well as about other people, my view suggests that it would be supremely rational to take care of other people, as well as of all my future selves. Having followed all the cases presented in this part of the book, I found how my view can manage them, in many cases giving simplification and clearer explications. I am aware of the points of my theory that are often criticized. I will dedicate my next time to write another summary of my view, considering in a deeper way many points discussed here, along with a complete discussion of the Individual Existential Problem, that I am convinced can be solved only by Open Individualism. Anyway, one

of the main criticism is that my view requires a conception of time that seems impossible, and seems to imply the loss of free will. I call this a technical reason, but I do not classify it as crucial. Time conception has already been criticized in physics and philosophy, and what my theory requires is to link the *subjective time* to the *subjectivity function*, considering the outer material world as consisting in spacetime events that may be ordered, without the need of introducing an external *absolute time*. Another misunderstanding, which I suspect also Parfit had, is to suppose that this view would require a “mental entity” with a given, unique personal identity. This is due to other versions of Open Individualism that support this view. The importance of my proposal resides in the consideration that this supposed “unique mental entity” becomes completely useless. It could be used conventionally to describe some examples, like the paradigm of the actor that plays all the roles in a comedy, but it should not be taken literally, that actor does not have a separate existence from all the interpreted characters. I simply observe that, if we completely eliminate any concept of personal identity, there is nothing left that might make the perceiver different, nor between my experience of an instant of life and the next, nor between my current instant and another instant very far in the past or in the future of my life, neither between my current instant and any other instant of any other life. Parfit is right when indicates psychological continuity and psychological connectedness as the causes that give us the sense of unity of our life. But is useless to try to anchor there our personal identity, we just can get rid of them. The concept of personal identity hides the last shadow of our Non-Reductionist instinctive conception. Actually, I think that the fact that some physical structure may become conscious, or that they result to be interpretable by the sort of subjectivity function that I spoke of, it is not a fact that can be further reduced. We know that mind exists just because we experience it directly. But the view that I propose allows to treat it without the requirement to make further assumptions on its nature. It confines the ultimate debate about dualism and reductionism, as well the one about free will, or the same debate about the nature of

consciousness, beyond the scope of the debate about personal identity.

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