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## Technological fictions and personal identity: on Ricoeur, Schechtman and analytic thought experiments

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### 1. Introduction

It is notable when philosophers in one tradition take seriously the work in another and engage with it. This is certainly the case when Paul Ricoeur engages with the thought of Derek Parfit on personal identity. He sees it as worth engaging with, but as emblematic of errors in the analytic approach to the topic, especially when it comes to methodology. But he is, in a fairly clear way, taking the analytic debate on its own terms. Marya Schechtman's work is also noteworthy in this regard. Although she writes in the analytic tradition, in many ways she has represented thinking like Ricoeur's in the tradition – pressing concerns that echo his, and demanding that the debate needs to take notice. I will focus on complaints that both of them present, which I think are closely related, about the thought experiments that feature large in analytic discussions of personal identity, especially in the seminal work of Parfit. The complaints relate both to those devices and to the theory they have produced. I want to offer something of a defence of both.

### 2. The Psychological View of Personal Identity

Before considering their criticism, I want to outline briefly the Psychological Continuity Theory of personal identity (PCT) which Ricoeur and Schechtman consider, and how thought experiments are supposed to relate to it. The theory in general holds that person X at time t is identical to person Y at an earlier time t – n if and only if X is uniquely psychologically continuous with Y. Parfit describes the details as follows.

Psychological continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness ... For X and Y to be the same person, there must be over every day enough direct psychological connections. (Parfit 1984, 206)

The connections he has in mind are links of memory (or, rather, apparent memory), continuing dispositional attitudes like desires and beliefs, projects, emotional attachments, character dispositions and so on. Parfit does not mention unconscious connections, but those should be included among the links which make up the continuity. There need be no such direct links over a whole life, they may only be short-term, but it is the continuity that overlapping links provide that constitutes a person's persistence.

Although not all versions of the PCT do so, the theory is well-placed to forefront our agency. It focuses on psychological connections, and among those are the ones, especially sophisticated ones like intentions and higher-order beliefs and desires, that most obviously facilitate agency. By highlighting these attitudes, it is in position to provide an account of the persistence of things which are capable of agency and which are appropriate as the subjects of judgements of responsibility and attitudes of self-concern. Psychological views differ on how close the link between moral identity and personal identity should be. Schechtman takes all versions of the PCT to adopt a “coincidence model”, whereby the limits of a person coincide with the limits of relevant practical judgments – X is the person who did A iff X is responsible for A, and so on (Schechtman, 2014, p. 41). Parfit does indeed seem to opt for this model, although his claims in this regard are often tenuously expressed. My version (Beck, 2013a, 2013b) accepts that practical matters are related to issues of identity, but not as directly as this. You must be the sort of thing that is an agent and can have moral identity, but personal identity is not the same matter. There may well be actions which are yours but for which you are not responsible, just as there may be mental states of yours to which you have no conscious access. We will return to this issue in due course.

We can begin to see already how the PCT contrasts with the narrative view of identity that Schechtman and Ricoeur share.<sup>1</sup> Roughly, the narrative view is that to be the same person is to have a particular self-understanding or “sense of self”. This sense of self involves seeing experiences and actions as part of an intelligible whole. Sometimes this is expressed as having the capacity to tell a coherent story about ourselves – thus the label of “narrative”. Actions and experiences are yours in so far as they fit meaningfully into your life story. This is the glue that holds a person together, rather than the causal links to which the PCT appeals. To the PCT, a sense of self – while required for being something appropriate as the subject of judgements of responsibility and self-concern – is just a connection, or is composed of a set of connections, among many others. Further differences will emerge as we go on. First, though, it would help to see how the thought experiments are supposed to relate to the PCT.

### **3. Some Thought Experiments and the PCT**

Three well-known thought experiments will be the focus of my discussion, all of which feature extensively in the relevant sections of Ricoeur and Schechtman.

#### **(a) Transplants**

Transplant thought experiments begin with Locke’s case of the prince and the cobbler in the second edition of his Essay.

For should the Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince’s past Life, enter and inform the Body of a Cobler, as soon as deserted by his own Soul, every one sees, he would be the same Person with the Prince, accountable only for the Prince’s Actions: But who would say it was the same Man? (Locke, 1975, p. 340)

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<sup>1</sup> In the past, Schechtman’s view was an overtly narrative one (1996, 2005). Her current Person-Life View (2010, 2014) still has strong narrative elements, but is less straightforwardly a narrative theory.

Later versions also involve the ostensible transplant of one person into the body of another, but using mechanisms different from Locke's soul-swap. Bernard Williams and Sydney Shoemaker (Williams, 1970; Shoemaker, 1984) envisage a brain-state-transfer device which would scan all the information in one brain, clear another of its information and enter the stored information into the cleared brain. A different version is presented by Eric Olson (1997, p. 52) and a more detailed version of it by Schechtman (2014, pp. 151– 52), which involves the transplant of a cerebrum from one person into the "decerebrated" body of another. Although Parfit makes no explicit use of such cases in support of his theory, they are usually taken to support the PCT by damaging certain of its rivals – views that hold personal identity to be a matter of physical or organism continuity. If everyone sees that the person in the cobbler body is now the prince, then having the same body cannot be a requirement for being the same person.

### **(b) Teletransportation**

The Teletransporter is a machine which scans the exact state of every cell in someone's body, destroys the original body and sends the scanned information to a distant Replicator where an exact copy is created out of new matter. Parfit starts his discussion in *Reasons and Persons* with a fairly detailed description of such an example (Parfit, 1984, p. 199), presenting it as a possible form of long-distance travel. The precise role of the thought experiment is not clear: it seems to be offered more as an illustration of his view, as no argument is explicitly based on it and the description is clearly question-begging. He describes the person emerging from the Replicator on Mars as being himself, the person who entered the Teletransporter. While this is what the PCT implies about the case, he presents no demand at this stage that you should agree. In fact, he goes on to outline a development of the story: the Branch-Line Case, which on the face of things threatens the PCT. In this version, his original body is not destroyed, just damaged in such a way that it will die in a few days' time. A replica is still created on Mars, however. Intuitively, this will now be just that – a replica and not the original Parfit, who is still alive on Earth but will soon die. The psychological criterion does not distinguish between the two, however. And because there are two, it counter-intuitively implies that neither is Parfit, not even the dying Earthling. Parfit's promise is that he will go on to explain why we should not follow our intuitions in this regard and reject the PCT, but that we should change our intuitive views instead (Parfit, 1984, p. 201).

### **(c) Reduplication, or My Division**

Perhaps the most important thought experiment in Parfit's discussion is the one in which he envisages himself splitting into two (Parfit, 1984, pp. 245–73; 1995, pp. 41–44). We are asked to imagine a situation in which he is one of an identical triplet. In a strange accident, his body is fatally damaged, but his brain is untouched while the brains of both of his brothers are destroyed even though their bodies are otherwise undamaged. The Parfit in the example is such that, like some stroke patients, one hemisphere of his brain is capable of fully performing the functions of both hemispheres. Slightly more unusually, each of his hemispheres has this capacity. After the accident, his hemispheres are divided and

transplanted, one into each of his brothers' bodies. The result is two people, physically very like him and both psychologically continuous with him.

The case is presented as a challenge to non-reductionist accounts of personal identity, which Parfit sees as the common sense view of identity. These take personal identity to be a matter of fact over and above physical or psychological continuity, and for them says Parfit, "identity is always what matters". The most important question is always, "Will that still be me?" However, in the case of My Division, there is no satisfactory answer to that question. We cannot say that both of the survivors are Parfit, because there are two of them and that conflicts with the necessity of identity. We cannot say he is the one rather than the other, because that would make identity arbitrary – neither has any claim to identity which the other does not have. And we cannot say he is neither, because if only one survives, that would be him. In this double case, then, we would be calling a double success a failure. What we have then is a reductio of the assumption that identity is always what matters: we have everything that matters in survival in both cases, but we cannot call it identity because identity demands uniqueness. Parfit suggests we must give up non-reductionism and the obsession with identity, and focus on issues of survival. In that case, we have two survival-descendants of Parfit. And he can now argue that the Branch-Line case does not threaten the PCT: the relationship between the dying Earthling and the Mars Replica, although not identity, is more like normal survival than death.

Although neither Schechtman nor Ricoeur are among the non-reductionists that Parfit has in mind, it is well worth noting that both of them share the non-reductionist belief that personal identity involves an irreducible phenomenological connection in the sense of self. This will be a central point of contention.

#### **4. Schechtman's Objections and Some Defences**

Unlike Ricoeur, who rejects all of the thought experiments outlined, Schechtman has a more measured attitude towards them. "I have some reservations about the use of fantastic thought experiments", she writes, a central one being "that it is not clear if we are truly able to imagine what we think we are imagining" (Schechtman, 2014, p. 154). Despite these reservations, she does not reject the method, but warns that "we must be careful both to spell out the cases on which we reflect in sufficient detail to allow us to make relatively informed decisions about what they tell us and to be modest in our conclusions" (2014, p. 154).

Schechtman thinks that thought experiments can be informative; it will nevertheless be worth looking at her reservations. However, first we need to consider another case she makes against the PCT in which they feature centrally. She contends that transplant arguments commit the PCT to accepting phenomenological connections as fundamental to identity conditions – a commitment that psychological theorists explicitly reject.

Locke argues for a psychological approach by asking us to reflect on hypothetical cases like that of the prince whose consciousness enters the body of a cobbler. In this case, he says, we

will judge that the person goes where the consciousness goes. Anticipating such a switch the prince would anticipate having future experience in the cobbler's body rather than in the one he now inhabits. It is the pains and pleasures of the cobbler body rather than the princely one that he will feel after the transfer takes place. It is this phenomenological connection to future experience that makes for personal identity on Locke's view. Psychological theorists use Lockean thought experiments to argue for a psychological approach and to this extent are obligated to include those features of Locke's account that follow from it. My claim is that they fail to do this. Overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness do not in themselves guarantee a phenomenological connection between persons at two different times, only a certain kind of likeness or continuity in the contents of consciousness. (Schechtman, 2013, pp. 47–48)

According to the PCT, while a continuing sense of self is important, the connections which form it are not required for a person to retain their identity. As long as there is continuity made up of overlapping connections like these ones, there can be identity. It is that which allows the theory to avoid the incoherence of which Locke was accused by Reid and to meet the intuition that you can survive massive psychological changes over time. If body-swap thought experiments were to commit the theory to a phenomenological connection, the danger of incoherence would be right back. Her narrative theory embraces phenomenological connections: those experiences and actions you understand to be yours as they fit in to your life story are, by that inclusion, yours.<sup>2</sup> This explains how you are responsible for them, something Locke demands and which the narrative theory can provide.

There is no need for concern, however, even for those who think that the psychological view gets its only support from these thought experiments. That is because a reliance on something like a phenomenological connection in this one argument does not commit the theory to its being fundamental in identity conditions. Something like a phenomenological connection does seem to be at work in Locke's thought experiment: he is relying on the prince anticipating the experiences in the cobbler-body to be his, just as the person in the cobbler body will remember the prince's past life as his. This is part of what he thinks will bring everyone to see that it is the prince in the cobbler-body. But why would relying on these features entrench phenomenological connections in the PCT? The PCT acknowledges a sense of self and can include it in its account, although not as necessary in every case of identity between persons. That seems to entitle the PCT to appeal to related features in a thought experiment, but it does not follow that this commits it to phenomenological connections.

The thought experiment works as a refuter of a general principle, the principle that it is necessary to be the same organism in order to be the same person. It presents a single case in which someone is intuitively clearly the same person – perhaps using a sense of self to make the case as clear as possible – in which we have a different organism but the same person. At

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<sup>2</sup> That is, the narrative theory that she was defending at the time. Her new Person-Life View, although not a straightforward narrative theory, also commits to phenomenological connections, as we shall see.

most that requires the sense of self to be a sufficient condition for identity; it comes nowhere close to making it necessary even if Locke might be guilty of implying this.<sup>3</sup> Insofar as thought experiments are like empirical experiments we should never expect more than this and sensible proponents of the PCT will not. As Schechtman indicated but uncharitably doubts of the psychological theorist, we must be modest in our conclusions. The role of the case is to undermine opponents who insist that identity of body or organism is required for personal identity, thereby offering only indirect support to the PCT.

I mentioned that she has other reservations regarding thought experiments. Although she thinks body-swap or “transplant” cases can be informative, she writes:

It might be, for instance, that unforeseen pressures or developments would make it impossible to really treat transplant products of the sort described as if they were the original person. If that were the case, ... (we would have to) conclude that even though we might predict that a person could survive such a transplant it turns out that they actually cannot. (Schechtman, 2014, p. 154)

This is what she has in mind when she demands “sufficient detail” and suggests that we are not always imagining what we think we are imagining in a thought experiment. She says these are common charges against thought experiments. However, on the face of things, there is something odd about them. It is clear how the charge is meant to work: the scenario you are claiming to imagine does not meet the description offered and which would make it an appropriate counter-example. In our case, you say you are imagining a prince’s consciousness going in to the body of a cobbler (and are inclined to say that body now contains the prince), but what you actually imagine does not amount to that and so you have no counter-example to the animalist (or other) thesis. But how could it be that you are not imagining what you think you are imagining? If you are the author of the story, then you have just that – authority. And even if you are imagining a fiction authored by someone else, these days we understand readers as co-authors, so the situation is not that much different: if you think that you are imagining a prince’s consciousness going into a cobbler’s body, then you are doing just that. After all, it is your conceptual scheme that we are investigating and if the story makes sense there, that is enough.

How then could it be the case that what you are imagining is not what you think you are imagining – that it is not a body swap but something else or some facsimile you are conjuring up? One aspect of the charge seems to be that in order to properly imagine a body-swap, you would have to include a number of important details that are omitted in the description of the case and which might well affect your response to it, or make it impossible to respond. In *Real People* (1988, p. 11), Kathleen Wilkes distinguished between imagining how something occurs and imagining that it occurs. This understanding of the charge is that you fail to

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<sup>3</sup> Schechtman thinks his talk of “the same consciousness” is a commitment to a phenomenological connection – a person’s consciousness is not the same one in virtue of being made up of a particular set of memory and other connections, it just is the same one. But this would open him up to the very objections that he presses against immaterial substance as being that which provides for a person’s persistence.

imagine that a swap has occurred. Wilkes wrote that in the context of imagining that a person divides into two, we would need to have answers to the following sort of questions.

How often? Is it predictable? Or sometimes predictable and sometimes not, like dying? Can it be prevented? Just as obviously, the background society against which we set the phenomenon is now mysterious. Does it have such institutions as marriage? How could that work? Or universities? It would be difficult, to say the least, if universities doubled in size every few days, or weeks, or years. Are pregnant women debarred from splitting? The entire background here is incomprehensible. When we ask what we would say if this happened, who, now, are 'we'? (Wilkes, 1988, p. 11)

With a few relevant changes, the same questions could be demanded of someone claiming to imagine that a person swaps bodies. Schechtman indicates a shared concern with Wilkes when she talks of "pressures or developments (that) would make it impossible to really treat transplant products of the sort described as if they were the original person" (2014, p. 154). In *The Constitution of Selves* she wrote,

Insofar as we can imagine such a world at all, we must imagine it as very different from our own. Those in it would be left without any quick and reliable means of determining who they were dealing with, and it would be incredibly difficult – if possible at all – to maintain the kinds of social organizations that define our own culture. (Schechtman, 1996, p. 134)

The suggestion is that we have not imagined the phenomenon in question until all these details are filled in and if they were filled in, our concepts would no longer apply.

The questions are interesting ones, but involve great exaggeration and it is very hard to see how they are crucial to imagining that a body-swap or split has occurred. Why would you have to know how the imagined society coped with a body-swap (let alone with vast numbers of body-swaps) in order to make a judgement from your current perspective on who the person in the cobbler-body is? Applying your concepts to a situation does not require you to have learned to live with that situation, nor does it require you to believe that the people in the situation would agree with your judgements. Wilkes' "we" seems to refer to the people in the imagined situation. They may well face all kinds of practical difficulties in coping with its consequences, but those are not our problems – we are just who we are, the people considering the scenario with our current conceptual schemes.<sup>4</sup> A ready response suggests that our concepts do indeed apply – as Schechtman says, we predict that the person whose psychology is transferred will survive. If they are not treated as a transplanted person, that should surely raise a moral issue for us, but it is not clear that it raises a metaphysical one. Schechtman wrote in her earlier book,

The very concept of personhood involves a social dimension – to be a person is to be able to engage with others in particular ways. (1996, p. 133)

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<sup>4</sup> I present a more detailed response to the difficulties Schechtman and Wilkes present in Beck (2014).

The argument here is that we may not realize how the counterfactual phenomenon being proposed may interfere with the engagements that are constitutive of the concept, and these details need to be thought through before any response to a scenario could count. While her claim in the quote is correct, however, it should not lead us anywhere near the conclusion that a thought experiment like Locke's cannot play its envisaged role. She illustrates her thinking in her discussion of fission cases in *Staying Alive* (2014, pp. 159–66). Parfit has argued that the intrinsic relationship between each survivor of fission contains all that matters in survival, and so here we have a double success rather than a failure. But Schechtman responds that we should not see things so simply.

Parfit's argument assumes that the only attributes that can matter to survival are intrinsic. At best the intrinsic features of the two fission products are each identical to the intrinsic features a unique survivor would have in the case where only one of the fission products survives. The relation of each survivor to his environment and other people is, however, drastically different from the relation a unique survivor would have to his environment and to other people. If fundamental person-specific relational properties are taken into account the relation of the fission products to the original person is not the same as the relation of the unique survivor. (2014, pp. 161–62)

Because we do not split like amoebas our entire cultural and social infrastructure – the infrastructure that supports personhood – is built around the unity of the loci with which we interact. If we encountered a single instance of doubling we undoubtedly would not know how to react, and if it became common we would become different sorts of beings with an entirely different (and to me not-yet-imaginable) social organization and another way of life ... Such beings might come to be, but they will probably not be persons. (2014, p. 164)

We can grant Schechtman that our usual social interactions would be upset in a society of splitters. But the move from a single case of splitting, to a whole society of splitters, to fission products not being persons is much too swift. Especially if it is meant to provide a reason for not taking thought experiments seriously, and the charge that we are not imagining what we think we are. The original thought experiment only requires one split to do its task. True, the social aspect is not taken very seriously by Parfit. But we can fill that in, suggesting how two person-lives continue, difficult though coping may be for the nearest and dearest of the splitter. We will still be talking about what are recognisably persons, even if we cannot talk of “the locus of concern”. That does not mean there are none, and the original problem can still be raised: the details simply go to making the scenario more easily imaginable. The points Wilkes and Schechtman make do not show how thought experiments cannot play the role of causing damage to the strong claims that theories opposed to the Psychological View make. There are other aspects to Schechtman's concern about thought experiments, however, and these will emerge as we discuss Ricoeur's objections.

## 5. Ricoeur's Objections: The Root of Inconceivability

Perhaps Ricoeur's discussion can provide the missing ingredients to make sense of the charge that we are not imagining what we think we are. Many of his comments echo aspects of Schechtman's, but they go further as well. His central charge is that all of the envisaged fictions violate what he calls the "terrestrial" or "corporeal" condition.

Insofar as the body as one's own is a dimension of oneself, ... imaginative variations around the corporeal condition are variations on the self and its selfhood. Furthermore, in virtue of the mediating function of the body as one's own in the structure of being in the world, the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 150)

Part of my selfhood is knowing my body as my own,<sup>5</sup> and how I experience the world through it. This makes the scenarios of the thought experiments inconceivable. In the case of teletransportation:

Are we capable of conceiving of ... variations such that the corporeal and terrestrial condition itself becomes a mere variable, a contingent variable, if the teletransported individual does not transport with himself some residual traits of this condition, without which he could no longer be said to act or to suffer, even if it were only the question of knowing if and how he is going to survive? (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 150–51)

This needs some spelling out, but seems to contain a crucial argument. His thinking goes along the following lines. Morality requires that I know that certain past and future experiences were and will be mine. To be an agent (and a sufferer), I must be able to be properly held responsible and to be counted upon to keep my promises (and so on), and that requires that I must know that the relevant experience or behaviour was mine. This includes knowledge that the bodily activity was, or will be, mine, in line with my characteristic, habitual behaviour, the behaviour by which I am recognized (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 148). But this required knowledge is missing in the thought experiments: they are all in principle undecidable. The last sentence of the quote points to this – the aspirant teletransportee cannot know if he will survive. Because the knowledge required for the possibility of agency is missing, the question of whether or not this is the same person – in the serious sense of continuing selfhood – cannot even arise. You cannot coherently conceive of selfhood under these conditions. The most that makes sense are questions of sameness – of how similar the person is. And that is decidedly not the issue.

The trick that the thought experimenters use to make their fictions appear conceivable is to substitute the brain for the whole person, and then to manipulate the brain to achieve the apparent scenario in which a fundamental requirement is undermined – where an "existential invariant becomes a variable" (p. 150). "Dream technology" is appealed to

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<sup>5</sup> Those parts of it, unlike my brain, that I experience: "In truth, the expression 'my brain' has no meaning, at least not directly" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 132).

which, when applied to a brain achieves the results of transplantation, reduplication or teletransportation of persons – but these are not persons at all. By substituting brains for persons, the situation becomes “impersonal”. “The question of selfhood”, he says, “has been eliminated as a matter of principle” (1992, p. 135). This is why Ricoeur labels them technological fictions, and why we can learn nothing about personal identity from them. On the other hand, literary fictions deal with persons, beings with selfhood, in that they respect the corporeal and terrestrial condition.<sup>6</sup>

Literary fictions differ fundamentally from technological fictions in that they remain imaginative variations on an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 150)

Flouting the corporeal condition in their thought experiments is a symptom of a general malaise in the reductionist camp, according to Ricoeur. They confuse issues of sameness and issues of selfhood (and replace the latter with the former). Selfhood involves not only sameness but also the notion that occurred in the account of agency above – that our experiences and bodies have, as part of their factual character, a “phenomenon of mine-ness” (1992, p. 132). “It is not the sameness of my body that constitutes its selfhood, but its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body it is” (1992, p. 129); “the body as one’s own is a dimension of oneself” (1992, p. 150). The reductionist attempts to set up the debate about personal identity in terms of neutral events, thereby leaving their ownership out and begging the question against non-reductionists. This is just what they continue to do in their thought experiments and why those are phenomenologically inconceivable.

## **6. Why That Does Not Establish Inconceivability**

Let me start my response to the charge of this version of the claim that we are not imagining what we think we are imagining by considering teletransportation. Ricoeur’s description is as follows:

an exact copy is made of my brain. This copy is transmitted by radio to a receiver placed on another planet, where a replicator reconstitutes an exact replica of me on the basis of this information, identical in the sense of exactly similar as to the organization and sequence of states of affairs and events ... [M]y brain and my body are destroyed during my space voyage. The question is whether I survived in my replica or whether I died. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 134)

He presents this as an illustration of a brain being substituted for the person and then manipulated. However, that is a misleading version of Parfit’s scenario.<sup>7</sup> Parfit’s scenario does not focus on the brain, but outlines how the information on the condition of every cell

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<sup>6</sup> Whether literary fictions always respect the corporeal condition and whether this distinction is a useful one are questions I raise in Beck (2006).

<sup>7</sup> In more ways than the one I am about to explain. For instance, Parfit’s version has the original cells destroyed as their states are recorded, not later, during the transmission. There is no duplication in his first description.

in my body is transmitted and then replicated – the entire body, even down to the cut on the lip from this morning’s shave (Parfit, 1984, p. 199). How is this then a case of the brain substituting for the person? And in what sense has the personal been elided? The individual who wakes up on Mars will have a sense of self, just as the aspirant traveller did: they will have a sense of being that self. They will have memories of experiences on Earth that will bear the feature of mineness: “the feeling of belonging ... to someone capable of describing himself or herself as their owner” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 136). They will be embedded in an easily recognizable social network, as they are in Parfit’s description. Everything that Ricoeur has suggested to be required for selfhood seems to be in place.

But perhaps this is not all that important. The central argument for inconceivability did not depend on the substitution of brain for person, it was based on the undecidability of identity questions in the scenarios. And this one is undecidable, says Ricoeur (1992, pp. 134–35). But is it undecidable? Parfit does not think so (just as Locke – as Ricoeur points out – did not think the prince and the cobbler was undecidable). People’s intuitive responses differ as to whether or not you survive the Teletransporter, but they do not think there is not an answer. Ricoeur cannot be dismissing these responses on the grounds of the inconceivability of the case – inconceivability cannot be the reason for undecidability – because his argument goes the other way: undecidability takes away agency and selfhood. To appeal to inconceivability here would be to beg the question: it is inconceivable (supposedly) because you cannot know whether you will survive, so it cannot be that you don’t know that because the situation is somehow inconceivable.

Ricoeur does have more to say, however, in pointing to the undecidability of teletransportation. He glosses his claim,

with respect to numerical identity, my replica is other than I; with respect to qualitative identity, it is indistinguishable from me, hence substitutable. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 135)

But this does not amount to undecidability. Many perfectly decidable cases are cases of qualitative, but not numerical, identity. The question is, why is it not numerical identity? What is it that makes my replica (by which he means the individual who emerges from the Replicator) not me? He needs a reason independent of his theory, or clear intuitive agreement, otherwise the suspicion of a begged question remains. Perhaps this is to be too demanding – maybe it is enough that against the background of his own theory the issue is undecidable. But even there, this is not clearly the case: as I have argued above, everything he says that is required for selfhood seems to be in place. Why then can you not know (as Parfit’s teletransportee is presented as knowing) that you will survive?

He has one more direct comment on the subject, in a footnote:

One may well, however, object to the very construction of the imaginary case that, if the replica of my brain were a complete replica, it would have to contain, in addition to the traces of my past history, the mark of my history to come woven out of chance encounters.

But this condition would indeed appear to violate the rules of what is conceivable: from the time of the separation of myself and my replica, our histories distinguish us and make us unsubstitutable. The very notion of replica is in danger of losing all meaning. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 136 n24)

But this does not really provide a satisfactory answer. If it turns simply on the word “replica” implying that there is a non-identical original, then other terms could be used which do not. Parfit’s usage is to make the point that the matter composing the body is not the same matter as that on Earth – the usual bodily continuity that we have is being disrupted. But this does not disrupt the features that Ricoeur suggests it does – the newly constituted body will have not only traces of my past history, but also “the mark of my history to come woven out of chance encounters”. Ricoeur insists that myself and my replica have separate existences, but that is clear only in his description: my body is destroyed during the transmission of the information and thus exists alongside the replica-to-be for a while. On Parfit’s account, my body is destroyed as the information about it is stored: there is no reduplication in simple teletransportation, and thus no obvious “separation”.

In the Branch-Line Case, there is separation. It may well be that he is looking ahead to the Branch-Line Case when he makes his point about numerical identity. However, that does not by itself imply anything for the decidability of the Simple Case. Nor does it actually make the Branch-Line Case undecidable. In the Branch-Line Case, Ricoeur’s talk of the phenomenon of mineness has a firm hold: the dying Earthling’s experiences and body have a relation to me that the Mars person’s do not have, even though those are very similar. Because of this, the Mars person is a replica in Ricoeur’s sense – numerically non-identical. Parfit suggests that things should not be seen in these terms and that the relation between the dying Earthling and the Mars person is much like normal survival. However, the counter-intuition is very strong, as Schechtman is quick to point out in her discussion of the case, and it turns on the points that Ricoeur raises here. Nevertheless, the reductionist PCT does not have to go with Parfit on this. After all, there is no continuity between the dying Earthling and the Mars person, in the sense that a cut on the lip of the former will neither cause a cut nor a pain in the latter. It can accept that there are two distinct persons here, both fully formed selves with a shared past. To meet the counterintuition and retain its consistency, it only needs to acknowledge that while psychological continuity is always necessary for identity, it may not always be sufficient.<sup>8</sup> It does not need to accept the irreducibility of personal identity.

It might be worth a return to Schechtman at this point, and the issues she raises related to the inadequacy of reductionism when it comes to the Branch-Line Case. It may help to make Ricoeur’s worries clearer, although I will suggest that it gets no further in making a case against the Psychological View.

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<sup>8</sup> More needs to be said about what would make its criterion of identity sufficient. I make a suggestion in Beck (2015). There are other ways available as well, such as Daniel Kolak’s arguments that fission does not destroy identity (Kolak, 2008).

Schechtman points out that, although there is psychological continuity and connectedness between the dying Earthling who emerges from the Transmitter and the person on Mars and thus enough to count as survival on the Psychological View, this will not seem like survival to the dying Earthling.

This suggests that there is a deep connection between the person who steps into the Teletransportation booth on Earth and the dying Earthling that does not exist between that person and the replica on Mars, and that absent this deeper connection there does not seem to be a basis for the person on Earth to feel egoistic concern for the future of the replica, nor for the replica to be held responsible for what the original traveler has done. (Schechtman, 2014, p. 36)

There is thus a deep metaphysical fact about the identity between the dying Earthling and the would-be traveller, an irreducible subjectivity of the kind to which Ricoeur is committed, that reductionist connections are simply unable to capture, or so she contends (Schechtman, 2014, p. 34).

I have pointed out above how the reductionist view can meet the intuition that the dying Earthling is the original and the Mars person a replica. What is at issue really is whether or not this identity is the deep metaphysical fact that Ricoeur and Schechtman think it is. I do not think the Teletransporter and its complications are meant to play a crucial role in Parfit's case against this – that is the task of his Combined Spectrum and My Division, to which I will return below. However, I do think that considering the Tele-transporter and the Branch-Line Case in the light of Schechtman's own view can lead us to further question the depth of the metaphysical fact about the unity of a person.

Schechtman's account of the deep unity is to be captured in her "Person Life View". To be a person is to live a person life and you are the same person as long as this person life persists. We are to understand person life as a cluster concept, with three contributing continuities to the cluster. There are the psychological continuities of Parfit's view, but there are also biological continuities highlighted by animalists like Olson, and there are the all-important social continuities that featured in her objections in the previous section. It is crucial to living a person life that others recognize you and treat you as the same person: without this, you cannot "pick up the threads of the person life". Being a cluster concept, not all of the continuities need to be present in a particular case, although their interaction is the usual position. In the case of severe dementia, there will not be psychological continuity, but there will be continuity of organism and there will be social continuity in the way that family members will still care for the person and continue in many ways to treat them as the person they knew and loved. Their person life will continue. In the case of a cerebrum transplant, we would not have organism continuity, but would have psychological continuity and should there be social continuity as well – the cerebrum recipient is seen and treated as the donor – they would pick up the threads of the person life and would survive. Deep unity is thus retained.

On the Person Life View, because there are all three continuities between the dying Earthling and the person who entered the booth, the person life would continue there, following our intuitions about the identity of those involved. But now consider a society like that envisaged originally in Parfit's teletransportation, where teletransportation is common and is viewed by the society as a normal form of travel.<sup>9</sup> Those using it are viewed as travellers and so person lives are continued through it. Because there are both psychological and social continuities, that is enough for survival according to the theory, even though biological continuity is absent. Add to the example that accidents become relatively common with the cheaper companies offering the service, and society copes with that – relatives care for the dying Earthlings during their last few days, but do not change their views about the travellers. Relationships are tricky for those few days, but the damaged Earthlings never take more than a few days to go. The threads of person lives are thus picked up by the Mars people – the would-be travellers' lives that is, and perhaps to some extent those of the dying Earthlings. But what then has happened to the deep metaphysical fact? There does not appear to be any difference between the situation of a dying Earthling here and the one in the original Branch-Line Case: even the extrinsic features that Schechtman insists make the difference that Parfit did not acknowledge in his My Division argument are in place. What must be in question is the depth of the unity, even following the Person Life View. Of course, that does not commit Ricoeur to acknowledging any difficulty – but it remains true that nothing he says about the phenomenon of mineness is missing in the case, other than its supposedly irreducible unity.

## **7. Transplants and Decidability**

Another type of thought experiment that is not obviously undecidable, and which is not treated by those who make use of it as being so, is the transplant one like that of Locke. Ricoeur places them with the others. The prince and the cobbler, he says, is "imperfectly described". Locke responds to the scenario that the prince survives in the cobbler's body, but that is because he glosses over some crucial details which make the case undecidable:

It is not in Locke but in his successors that the situation created by the hypothesis of transplanting one and the same soul into another body began to appear more undetermined rather than simply paradoxical, that is, contrary to common sense. For how could the prince's memory not affect the cobbler's body, his voice, his gestures, and his poses? And how could one situate the expression of the habitual character of the cobbler in relation to that of the prince's memory? What has become problematic after Locke, and which was not so for him, is the possibility of distinguishing between two criteria of identity: the identity termed mental and that termed corporeal, as though the expression of memory were not itself a bodily phenomenon. (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 126 n14)

The point of the prince and the cobbler, as well as most transplant thought experiments, is to separate usually concomitant psychological and physical continuity, in an attempt to show that physical continuity is not a requirement for personal identity. As the quote suggests,

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<sup>9</sup> The example comes from my 2015 paper, where I present a more detailed response to Schechtman's arguments that the reductionist Psychological View cannot account for the special concern we have for our future selves.

Ricoeur thinks the very attempt to separate them is mired in inconceivability: the relationship between the mental and the corporeal is too complex to be severed.

Ricoeur is, of course, correct that the mental and the corporeal are complexly related. His acknowledgement of the insights of Ryle is a reminder not only of the importance of dispositions in understanding the mind, but also that those are dispositions to physical behaviour. The meaning of much mental talk simply cannot be separated from talk about physical behaviour. However, that does not mean that those mental phenomena and that behaviour are the same thing. In talking about the mental, we are talking about what lies behind the behaviour, regardless of Ryle and Wittgenstein's dismissal of the place of inner processes. And that emerges in Ricoeur's own words: the expression of memory is indeed a bodily phenomenon, but that does not mean that memory is one. Add to this the thought that it is not only analytic philosophers who think that there may be room to separate mental from physical continuity. A vast number of people across cultures and times have thought that they could conceive of such a thing, and Locke points to such religious beliefs as illustrating the same idea as his fiction.<sup>10</sup> An account of the meaning of mind talk needs to accommodate this, and in doing so makes space for the separation of the two criteria. Memory may need to be expressed through the body, but that does not make it a requirement that it be this body.

But does Ricoeur not have a point that memories need to be expressed in habitual ways – that mental happenings are only recognized as mine because of the way that I express them in behaviour recognizable as mine? This suggests that the cobbler body could not express the prince's thoughts, as it does not have the behavioural marks of the prince's character. That seems to be a red herring, however, and one that is standardly avoided in thought-experiment literature.<sup>11</sup> By making the donor and the recipient of the consciousness very similar – Parfit uses identical twins in one case and an exactly similar body in another – the problem is anything but obvious. If Locke had presented the case of the Cobbler and the Cobbler's Twin, Ricoeur's complaint would have no traction.

## **8. Reduplication and Decidability**

Ricoeur also highlights Parfit's My Division thought experiment as an instance of undecidability. Here there are clearer grounds for the claim – Parfit draws his conclusion that “identity is not what matters” from his thinking that the question of identity in this case is an empty one. Ricoeur sees a familiar pattern: Parfit confuses *idem* and *ipse* again, sameness and selfhood, thereby producing a “paradox of sameness”. For Parfit to reach his conclusion

it was necessary to maintain as equivalent the question Am I going to survive? and the question Will there be a person who will be the same person as I? (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 136)

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<sup>10</sup> “And thus we may be able without any difficulty to conceive, the same Person at the Resurrection, though in a Body not exactly in make or parts the same which he had here” (Locke, 1975, p. 340).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the sensible discussion in Williams (1970, pp. 161–63).

In the ensuing fiction, Parfit inevitably violates the corporeal condition. Once again, though, I do not think his concerns hit their target. That is primarily because the case is not undecidable in such a way that it violates the condition: that is, that the person concerned does not know if they will survive. They do know that: the resulting people will have full selfhood complete with “the feeling of belonging – of memories in particular – to someone capable of designating himself or herself as their owner” (1992: 136). They will both have the primitive certainty of being the same self, though this may be shaken when they meet each other. They will survive, but they will not survive uniquely. Both of them will see experiences and body up to the time of fission as mine. They will both feel, and will both be, responsible for pre-fission behaviour. What is undecidable is which one the original divider will be, if they must be one, because neither has any claim that the other does not share. Thus Parfit’s argument that we cannot use the term “identity” because that implies uniqueness, despite the presence of everything that can matter in survival.

The question of selfhood has not been eliminated, unless one demands that selfhood implies uniqueness in the way that the term identity does – and that there can be only one individual who can designate themselves as the owner of an earlier experience. But that is precisely the assumption to which Parfit is presenting a *reductio ad absurdum*. On the assumption that mineness is factually unique, then one of the survivors will have it and the other will not, despite there being no other difference between them. The other being’s sense of self towards the pre-fission individual will be just as strong and will feel just the same, yet will somehow be false and mistaken. But that is hard to swallow, and this is what Parfit is highlighting. It is not a violation of the criterion of corporeality but a *reductio* of it, or at least this aspect of it.

## **9. Concluding**

Although many of my points have been negative ones since they arise in defence of a theory, I think that there are a number of positives that emerge from this contact between two very different views and traditions. One is that Ricoeur’s understanding of what a person is is an insightful and important one, and one which the analytic discussion can learn from. Experiences and bodies belong to someone, and it must be to “someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body (or experience) it is”. This helps to capture the importance of agency to self or personhood. Agency should be highlighted in a way that Parfit’s version of the PCT does not do, but which is easily done given the psychological resources which are the focus of the PCT. A person must be something capable of being the appropriate subject of moral judgments and attitudes of self-concern. It is the persistence of such a thing that a theory of personal identity must account for.

We also can learn that moral identity and personal identity, although related, should not be seen as coinciding. I presented this as one version of the PCT at the start, but it is not universally held by psychological theorists, and the theory improves by including it. Ricoeur’s argument that the requirements of morality mean that I must know that past experiences were and future experiences will be mine is too strong. It does not have to be the case that I must know past experiences to be mine for them to be mine, nor that they

are not mine if this is not the case. Morality only requires of agents that they are the sorts of things capable of seeing experiences as their own. The difficulties of the demand for mineness start emerging in the examples discussed above, especially with regard to My Division. And they are also evident elsewhere. There can be many actions of yours for which you are not responsible – non-autonomous ones being the most obvious. Pathological cases provide graphic illustrations of the gap. People who suffer from thought-insertion have the experience as if others are using their minds – someone else’s thoughts occur in their mind (Mullins and Spence, 2003). These thoughts have no place in their sense of self: exactly what they lack is the feature of mineness. But they are their thoughts, nevertheless, no matter how alien they feel. The sense of self that the narrative theory makes central is crucial in being a person – you have to have one to be a person – but it is not a good guide to the limits or identity of the person.

Schechtman gets closer to getting things right in her new theory in *Staying Alive*. She gives up the link between moral identity and personal identity that dominated her earlier views, but she retains too strong a reliance on the notion of mineness and its uniqueness, to the detriment of her theory. But that is a story for another day<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I have gestured at that story here, and do so in more detail in Beck (2015).

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