CHAPTER 2

REDUCTIONIST CONCEPTION OF PERSONHOOD:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF DEREK PARFIT’S REASONS AND PERSONS

The unexamined life is not worth living

Socrates (470 – 399 B.C)

Introduction

The contribution of Derek Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons* (1984) in the ongoing debate on accounts of personal identity can be seen in the immense reaction from different philosophers. It speaks volume for Parfit that both his critics and supporters alike agreed to the fact that his views are important. This is one of the main reasons why we will be dealing with Parfit. Another reason is the “strong reductionist” approach he advocates in support of the importance of “relation-R”; a psychological continuity and connectedness with the condition of “no-branching” and not personal identity *per se*. The scope of the study is to look at Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons* critically and try to examine it from different perspectives. This is important because in order have a better understanding of the concept of person, we cannot ignore the importance of what Parfit had said. Even though Parfit’s standpoint is considered radical, and even though it is difficult to accept that personal identity does not matter, it is interesting to see how he arrives at this conclusion.

Another important point is the connection he made between the problem of personal identity and value theory. How does a change in the view of personal identity bring about a radical change in value theories? The scope of the study will include the whole book of Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons*, and some critical comments on this book. We will concentrate on Parfit’s reductionist view here, which is considered “strong” reductionism. We will be focusing on Parfit’s reductionist account of personal identity, how he arrives at it through the various theories of action and rationality. The main point is to look at how he reduces the concept of person to “relation-R” and come to the conclusion that nothing else matters for survival.
Before we go into the details of Parfit’s view, it will help us to know what he discusses in the chapters, the main trend of his discussion and the general distinctions are as follows:

Part one – **Self-Defeating Theories**, comprises of chapters 1 to 5

- Chapters 1 to 4 – discuss the reasons why a theory is self-defeating.
- Chapter 3 – appeals to facts whose moral significance has been overlooked.

Part two – **Rationality and Time**, comprises of chapters 6 to 9

- Chapter 6 – appeals to a more complete description of what a theory assumes and implies.
- Chapter 7 – appeals to a weakness in the structure of a theory.
- Chapter 8 – appeals to the implications of a metaphysical conclusion – a conclusion about the most fundamental features of reality, or the universe.

Part three – **Personal Identity**, comprises of chapters 10 to 15

This is the most important part as it deals with the core matter of the book. The conventional way of looking at personal identity is challenged and a radical view is suggested. Its importance can be seen from the reactions of other thinkers.

Part four – **Future Generations**, comprises of chapters 16 to 19

Some people consider this part as the least important in the book. But there are some, like Larry S. Temkin\(^{120}\) who regard this part as one of the most profound works in contemporary philosophy. It is an important part as it questions our present actions that will affect future generations. This is the broad outline of the chapters, which are further divided into many sub-parts that deal with specific examples. We will not be able to mention all the examples, but we will pick some examples and try to follow them throughout.

At the end of part one and two, Parfit accepts that he is unable to find a perfect theory (for moral as well as rational) which will avoid all the pitfalls like, repugnant conclusion, absurd conclusion etc. He further states that, we need to reject the self-

\(^{120}\text{Temkin, 1997.}\)
interest theory because when it conflict with critical present aim theory, it fails to be rational. However, Parfit’s account of self interest theory being unacceptable in every case is true of most theories. Barring some universal maxims like, “Do unto others what you want others to do to you,” it is very difficult to find theories that will be acceptable in any and every circumstances. Human imagination being unbounded, it is near to impossible to find the perfect moral as well as rational theory.

Regarding part three, Parfit’s account of personal identity is radically different from the traditionally accepted account. It is very difficult to accept his claim that our body does not matter. If this is so, then we can say that continuity or connectedness does not matter but only survival in some form or the other matters. I believe that many people will cringe at this form of survival because this other person will take my place in all the relationships that I value. I don’t think that many people will want to survive like this, because it is as bad as being dead or worse. The only difference is that without my replica I will not have to worry about my reputation being marred because of what she may do after I die. At least I will be able to do things the way I want to be done and be sure that someone like me will not change it afterwards. Because even if my replica was psychologically connected to me till I die, the fact that she will have a different memory and experiences altogether the moment she exist underlies the fact that I will not be able to experience her experiences.

In part four, Parfit puts forth an important view on the actions and decisions we took now and its potential and presumable actual effects on the future generations. We can actually see it today with the global warming issues that started affecting us with severe weather conditions around the world. It is a fact that we need to be careful with nuclear waste as radio-active particles will remain active for thousands of years to come unless we find a way to dispose them of safely. Another discussion centers around what will be the morally acceptable answer on whether a life not worth living should be saved or not. Parfit holds that we benefit someone by helping to exist, like saving a drowning child. But he further says that not existing is also not that unfortunate. Can we say that we are not better off than those who are not born? This is a bit difficult to accept, because there must be something better about being born then not being born. The unborn life will not be better than the born lives. The aim of the book is to make us think deeper about what really matters, and I think Parfit succeed in his endeavor. Many more articles can be written on each and every point that he
discusses and it is indeed a great legacy. Even those who do not agree with him cannot ignore his arguments. The central concepts of *Reasons and Persons* as given by Parfit are,

> We have reasons for acting. We ought to act in certain ways, and some ways of acting are morally wrong. Some outcomes are good or bad, in a sense that has moral relevance: it is bad for example if people become paralyzed, and we ought, if we can, to prevent this…I shall also use the concept of what is in someone’s self-interest, or what would be best for this person…my last central concept is that of a person. Most of us think we understand what persons are. Part three claim that we do not…I try to challenge what we assume. Philosophers should not only interpret our beliefs; when they are false, they should change them.\(^{121}\)

Also, we will look into various commentator of Parfit’s account; we will concentrate mainly on thinkers like – Larry S. Temkin, Jonathan Dancy, Frank Jackson, Marya Schechtman etc. and bring out the objections they have against Parfit’s account.

### 2.1 Reductionist and Non-reductionist View on Personal Identity

Before we discuss Parfit’s view on personal identity, it is important that we should be clear about the distinction between reductionist and non-reductionist view on personal identity. There are different theories of personal identity that can also be considered as a reductionist approach. The particular reductionist theory that Parfit accepts is the psychological theory or criterion, which is also accepted by other psychological theorists like Sydney Shoemaker, David Lewis and John Perry.\(^{122}\) According to the psychological continuity theory of personal identity, “A person A at \(t_1\) is the same person as B at \(t_2\) if B is psychologically connected and/or continuous with A; that is, if there are direct connections of an appropriate sort between A’s psychological states and B’s, or if there exists overlapping chains of such connections.”\(^{123}\)

Further, different psychological theorists add conditions along with the above definition. For Parfit it is a “no-branching” condition – for B to be A at \(t_2\) there must

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\(^{121}\) Parfit, 1984: ix-x.


\(^{123}\) Campbell, 2000: 208-209.
not be another person C who exists at t2, and who is psychologically connected and/or continuous with A, but who is not B. The other main reductionist theories are the physical theories; the bodily theory held by such philosophers as Bernard Williams, Paul Snowdon, and Judith Jarvis Thomson,\(^{124}\) holds that a person is a body, and the continued existence of a person consists in the continued existence of a body. And the brain theory held by John Mackie holds that the continued existence of a person consists in the continued existence of a brain.\(^{125}\) However, there are some physical theorists who rejects reductionism, or at least to seriously doubt it.\(^{126}\) To a large degree this is because they do not accept or they doubt the impersonality thesis. In other words, the main difference between their position and the position of other physical theorists is largely a matter of their rejecting or doubting the impersonality thesis\(^{127}\).

Here, it is important to be clear that, contemporary philosophical discussion on the problem of personal identity is generally concerned with the question of re-identification; where the questioner presumably knows her history but is asking which of the beliefs, values, and desires that she seems to have are truly her own, expressive of who she is. The aim of contemporary discussion is the attempt to spell out the necessary and sufficient conditions for saying that a person at time t1 is the same person as a person at time t2, that is, to give criteria of personal identity over time which would enable us to answer the re-identification question. We can also see this attempt in Derek Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons*, in which he had given many examples to convince us that “a person’s existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events.”\(^{128}\) His argument is that apart from the series of interrelated events, nothing else matters. Personal identity is reduced to nothing more than the occurrence of physical and mental events which are interrelated. But some of his examples are difficult to accept, as they are too far from reality, like teleportation, fission, fusion, etc.

\(^{125}\) Mackie, 1980. Here, Rey, 1976, and Van Inwagen, 1990, also hold views that are somewhat akin to the brain view.
\(^{127}\) The impersonality theory says that, “the claim that the facts about a person's identity over time can be referred to without referring to persons.”(Campbell, 2000: 209).
\(^{128}\) Parfit, 1984: 211.
Here, the overall view of the book is mainly to convince us to change our view from non-reductionism to reductionism on the problem of personal identity. However, though the arguments are persuasive and most of the time convincing, it will be very difficult to accept his view in totality as Parfit himself accepts this could be the case. The reason is that, for centuries we are used to accepting the non-reductionist view of persons, so we will need sometime before we can adjust and accept the reductionist view advocated by Parfit. According to the reductionist view, the existence of a self, whether at an instant of time or throughout a period of time, is constituted by a sufficient number of relations of certain kinds holding between certain kinds of events. It is the holding of the relations between the distinct events that constitutes the existence of a self. It means that the mere occurrence of one of the events of the relevant kinds does not by itself suffice for the existence of a self. However, the various reductionist views differ with regard to the kinds of relations and the kinds of events that are in question. According to Harold Langsam,

Some Reductionist views hold that the relevant events are certain kinds of mental events, whereas others hold that the events in question are physical occurrences in the brain. The relevant relations generally include various kinds of physical and/or psychological continuity. But all Reductionists agree that there is nothing more to the existence of the self than the holding of certain kinds of relations between certain kinds of events. Whereas the Non-Reductionist holds that the existence of the self is constituted by a fact of a different kind.129

On the reductionist view, personal identity just consists in physical and psychological continuity. Swinburne is against this view, because then we do not have to worry whether we live or die. He says, “In itself surely such continuity has no value.”130 Swinburne believe that personal identity consist of a deep further fact, distinct from physical and psychological continuity. And, physical and psychological continuity have no value in themselves or alone. However, Parfit claims that psychological continuity cannot be discarded because without it we will have nothing. He believe that Swinburne will also accept the fact that psychological continuity holds an important place if deep further fact is there, but not psychological or physical continuity alone. Parfit says,

129 Langsam, 2001: 249.
130 As quoted in Parfit, 1984: 307.
While we are not Reductionists, the further fact seems like the sun, blazing in our mental sky. The continuities are, in comparison, merely like a day-time moon. But when we become Reductionists, the sun sets. The moon may now be brighter than everything else. It may dominate the sky.\(^{131}\)

In what Parfit calls the extreme claim, only the deep further fact gives me reason to be specially concerned about my future. In its absence, psychological continuity gives no such reason. He goes on to say that not only continuity, but connectedness matters in caring about one’s future. Even in cases where we have less connectedness, for example, me after forty years, I still care what will happen to me and also it has the same importance with what I care for myself about tomorrow. Even though my concern for myself forty years hence is not the same with my concern for tomorrow, both are important to me. Another reason for caring for our future for Parfit is that,

If we now care little about ourselves in the further future, our future selves are like future generations. We can affect them for the worse, and, because they do not now exist, they cannot defend themselves. Like future generations, future selves have no vote, so their interests need to be specially protected…we should claim that it is wrong to impose on anyone, including such a future self, the risk of such a death (like due to smoking). More generally, we should claim that great imprudence is morally wrong. We ought not to do to our future selves what it would be wrong to do to other people.\(^{132}\)

Parfit further suggests that if we change our view to reductionist, we should also change our moral views as well. For example, in case like abortion, non-reductionist claims that abortion at any time is wrong, because all parts of our lives – past, present, future – are equally important. But for the reductionist fertilized ovum can be aborted as it is not yet a human being, but it will be wrong to abort towards the end of pregnancy. There is a distinction between a human being and a person (self-conscious human being). In case of Desert or responsibility,\(^{133}\) the non-reductionist holds that the deep further fact carries with it the desert for past crimes. So, if there is no such fact, then there is no desert. Parfit says, “When some convict is now less closely connected to himself at the time of his crime, he deserves less punishment. If

\(^{131}\) Parfit, 1984: 309.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., pp. 319-20.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 324.
the connections are very weak, he may deserve none.”134 For example, if a ninety year old lady confesses that she had shop-lifted at the age of twenty. Even though it is a serious crime, she may not deserve to be punished now. In case of commitments, Parfit argues that weakening of connections or connectedness between two successive selves would reduce the strength of a commitment. “We can love, and believe we are committed to, someone who is dead. And the object of such love and commitment may be, not someone who is dead, but some living person’s earlier self.”135

According to the non-reductionist view, the deep further fact is also known as the “separateness of persons”. The fact that we are all different persons and have his/her own life to lead is accepted by all views about the nature of personal identity, but it is accepted as a deeper truth on the non-reductionist view. Also, according to the non-reductionist theory, as all persons are taken as separate there should be a distributive justice system that will distribute equally among all persons – equal happiness (Utilitarianism) – which give rise to Principle of Equality. However, for the Utilitarians, equality is a means and not a separate aim; they ignore the boundaries between lives as their attitude to sets of lives is like ours to single lives. Parfit goes on to give three suggestions to explain the Utilitarian views: -

- Firstly, Rawls had suggested that as the Utilitarian look at the society as one individual, they tend to ignore the fact that different people are affected in different ways. That is, for many Utilitarians the answers to moral questions are provided by the method of an Impartial Observer. An Impartial Observer identify himself/herself with all of the affected people, this lead him/her to ignore the fact that different lives are affected. As a result of this way of looking at people, just distribution is ignored. They cannot see the individuals that make up the society; in the process they ignore the most important part of the whole.
- Secondly, Gauthier suggest that Utilitarians must assume that mankind is a super-organism. That is, human beings have a single World Soul. There will be no separate individual soul, but every individual will have a common soul. We can see that it is very difficult to accept. So, both the views are rejected by Parfit.

134 Ibid., p. 326.
135 Ibid., p. 328.
• Thirdly, Utilitarians reject distributive principles because they believe in the reductionist view. This is suggested by Parfit, and he holds that if this is true, then this explanation supports the Utilitarian view and not undermines it.

Parfit goes on to say that, while considering moral questions, suggestion one is correct in the case of some Utilitarians who identifies with the affected person. But there are also cases where the observer is detached and do not identify with any of the affected person. At the same time, they do not overlook the distinction between people either. So, it is not clear why they reject the distributive principles. Suggestion two is more acceptable as an objection rather than an explanation of the Utilitarian view. It can be said that as mankind is not a super-organism, this view cannot be accepted and so the Utilitarians are wrong to reject distributive principles. Suggestion three is compatible with suggestion one as someone can both be an identifying observer and accept the reductionist view. But it conflicts with suggestion two, because suggestion two compares groups of people to a single person. This is the opposite of the reductionist view, as they compare a person’s history to that of a nation or a group of people. The difference is that, we consider nations like a reductionist, as we believe that a nation is nothing more than its citizens living together in its territory. But we consider persons like a non-reductionist, as we believe that our identity must be determinate. We believe that we are separately existing entity apart from our brain, body and experiences. But for Parfit, we need to change our views from non-reductionist to reductionist while considering both “nations” as well as “persons”. Thus, “we shall therefore say, ‘people are like nations’ if we are Reductionists about both. If we are Non-Reductionists about both, we shall instead say, “nations are like people.” The belief in super-organisms may be a Non-Reductionist view about nations.”136

Further, Parfit goes on to consider the Utilitarians believe that benefits and burdens can be freely weighed against each other even if they come to different people. He holds that someone’s burden cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else. The cases of loved ones are different, but not someone else i.e. strangers. On the other hand, if we believe that there can be less or even no claim to compensation in the same live of a person, than we are changing the claim of

136 Ibid., p. 332.
compensation in the direction towards the reductionist view. For example, if we believe that it will be wrong to burden a child now even if it is for his/her future benefits. The reason is that, the child’s relation to his/her future self is in the further future, compare with the relation the child shares with himself/herself now. So,

Compensation presupposes personal identity. On the Reductionist view, we believe that the fact of personal identity over time is less deep, or involves less. We may therefore claim that this fact has less moral importance. Since this fact is presupposed by compensation, we may claim that the fact of compensation is itself morally less important. Though it cannot be denied, the claim about Compensation may thus be given less weight.\textsuperscript{137}

So, on the reductionist view the existence of a person do not involve more than the occurrence of interrelated mental and physical events. People do exist, but they are not just a series of events or thoughts or actions. Instead people are thinkers and agents as we describe our lives by ascribing thoughts and actions to people. We are not an entity whose existence is separate from his brain, body or experiences. Our continued existence is not a deep further fact, which is all-or-nothing and also not different from the facts of physical and psychological continuity.

Parfit goes on to say that the change in view from non-reductionist to a reductionist gives rise to different moral claims as well. Focusing on experiences and not on person (subject of experiences) becomes more plausible. Because persons are like nations, we must try to minimize suffering whatever the distribution of equality or justice cost. Our main aim is to relieve suffering; neither persons nor lives are the morally significant units here. Further, for reductionist, personal identity does not involve the deep further fact. If so, there cannot be compensation over time as compensations are done keeping in mind the continuity and connectedness of the same person over a long period of time – in the same life. What is possible is simultaneous compensation like, “when the pain of exposing my face to a freezing wind is fully compensated by the sight of the sublime view from the mountain I have climbed.”\textsuperscript{138}

There are many changes we will have to make in our outlook, worldview and concerns if we are to shift from non-reductionist view to reductionist view. These

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp. 337-338.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 343.
changes could be disturbing for some people, but for Parfit they help broaden his concern and make him less concerned about his future, his death etc.

However, according to Sydney Shoemaker the discussion on the importance of personal identity between reductionist and non-reductionist is problematic. He says,

While Parfit seems to saddle reductionists with the burden of either justifying their special concern or admitting that it is irrational, we are told nothing about why personal identity would matter at all, or about why special concern would be justified at all, if non-reductionism were true – nothing, that is, except the unsatisfactory claim that on the non-reductionist view personal identity involves a ‘deep further fact’. Similarly, we are given nothing except this unsatisfactory claim in explanation of Parfit’s view that (non-consequentialist) notions of moral desert and commitment have a more unproblematic application of non-reductionism is true than if reductionism is true (here again Parfit finds ‘defensible’ both an ‘extreme’ claim which holds that these notions apply only if non-reductionism is true and a ‘moderate’ claim that allows them application if reductionism is true), and his view that distributive principles of justice have less weight if reductionism is true than if non-reductionism is true.139

Another problem with Parfit’s account of reductionism comes from Steve Matthews. He holds that, “the whole point of Parfit’s reductionism is that we should give up any deep investment in the concept of identity for a much weaker commitment to the concept of survival, a relation that never logically guarantees identity, and one that may hold in degree.”140

Here, it is important to keep in mind that, Parfit start by discussing theories of action (he called them moral theories) and theories of rationality. Before he gives his view on personal identity, he tries to find the perfect theory for moral and rationality to prepare the ground work for his type of personal identity. In order to find the best types of theories that will give us the best results, he goes on to reject one theory after another until he concludes that “theory X” is still illusive. He reduces the various moral theories and theories of rationality to nothing but as “self-defeating theories”. Personal identity is also reduced to “relation-R”, and so there is nothing to worry about in case of one’s impending death. The reason being there will be someone who

139 Shoemaker, 1997: 146.
is just like me, and who will be able to fulfill all my pending works etc. as she also has the same concern as me.

However, the reductionist approach in relation to person is a bit unsettling even if we can accept it in theories of moral and rationality. In case of “future generation”, Parfit’s reductionist approach is most interesting and acceptable. It is totally different from how we normally consider situations and take decisions. If we are to accept his approach, we may have to change a lot of what we think as the right way of looking at things. For example, by stopping a 15 year old girl from having a baby out of wedlock, we are stopping the baby from being born and have a life. For Parfit, it is better to live a life even if it is not worth living, then not lived at all. His position is worth considering even if we do not agree with his suggestions. Let us look into detail now how he employs his reductionist approach in dealing with various topics that he took up.

2.2 Self-Defeating Theories Rejected

According to Parfit, in order to answer “what do we have most reason to do?” we need to deal with different moral theories and theories about rationality that answers this question. However, he holds that even the most accepted and best known theories are in need either of development further, or extended, or rejected, or revised. He goes on to discuss the answers provided by self-defeating theories to show their weak points. A self-defeating theory is a theory that fails even in its own terms, and thus condemns itself. The difference between moral theories and theories about rationality lies in the fact that moral theories tells us to act morally and theories about rationality tells us to act rationally, and they provides us with different aims as well. That is, “The Self-interest Theory says – any outcome of our action should be best for us and should make our life as well as possible”\(^{141}\) – also referred to as S by Parfit. It is a theory of rationality and so we can discuss S without deciding between the different theories about self-interest. Some self-interest theories are:

1. Hedonistic Theory, which says, that what gives me most happiness is the best for me.

\(^{141}\) Parfit, 1984: 3.
2. Desire-Fulfillment Theory, which says, that what would best fulfill my desires throughout my life would be the best for me.

3. Objective List Theory, which says, that even if I want to have the good things and avoid the bad things, certain things are good or bad for me.

These three theories partly overlap, and they also claim that in order to decide for someone’s best future we should give equal weight to all the parts of the person’s future. But the main discussion is about the self-interest theory in general and not about a particular theory about self-interest. Parfit further argue that, it is also sometime possible that theory of rationality can tell us to act irrationally depending on the circumstances. For example, Kate is a writer and her strongest desire is that her book be as good as possible. In order to achieve this desire, she works so hard that it leaves her exhausted and depressed. Such kind of action he called “rationally irrational action”, because even if Kate knows that her action is irrational she is doing it rationally. And even if she regrets the consequences of her action partly, yet the irrationality of her action she can regard with complacency.

Parfit goes on to say that, in many cases the self-interest theory is indirectly self-defeating “when it is true of some person that, if he was never self-denying, this would be worse for him than if he had some other set of desires and dispositions. This would be a bad effect in S’s terms”¹⁴² and this often occurs. Here, by “never self-denying” he means “to never do what I believe will be worse for me”. Like helping someone because it will be best for me and not because of other desires such as love or sympathy. Here one can say that S does not fail in its own terms because S never tells us to be never self-denying. So, being never “self-denying” cannot be an objection to S. However, one can point out the important fact that S is a theory about practical rationality and not theoretical rationality. Also, the aim of a theory is to be true or be the best theory and not to be believed. Therefore, S never tells us to follow what it says, so it cannot be responsible for our failure in following it. By removing itself from the scene by causing no one to believe in itself, S cannot be failing in its own terms. S will still be true because if we gain by following S, we are thereby doing better for ourselves.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 28.
After putting forth a group of rational theories and pointing out what their problems are, Parfit moves on to examine a group of moral theories he called “Consequentialism”. It mainly says that “the best possible climate is the one that would make outcome best,” also referred to as C, and says that C is also indirectly self-defeating. There are different versions of C, but the central claim says that, there is one ultimate moral aim: that outcome is as good as possible. He points out that there are problems here too, that is, if we accept C and to fulfill C becomes our aim we will become pure do-gooders. This in turn will have a bad outcome, not from our actions but from our dispositions. For example, if we want someone to be dead, it is easy to believe that this will make things better, but this is not true. So, we can say that, just as S, C is also indirectly self-defeating when it is the case that if some or all of us become a purely do-gooder the outcome is worse than it would be if we had certain other motives. And this would be a bad effect in C’s terms. However, he points out that as there are few people who are pure do-gooders, there is less chance of this happening than S. Hence, the fact that some people have this disposition may not make the outcome worse as compare to S. Also, we can say that C does not fail in its own terms, because both theories (S and C) tell us not to have the dispositions that would have bad effects. Whether they actually occur is irrelevant.

Parfit goes on to point out that rationality and rightness cannot be inherited or transferred. In order to prove this point, he gives examples to refute the four claims: –

1. If it is rational for me to have some disposition, to act on this disposition cannot be irrational. He gives the example of “Schelling’s answer to Armed Robbery” to prove that there can be rational irrationality. As the example shows, in certain circumstances we have to act against our disposition in order to come out of the situation.

2. If I believe that it is rational to believe some act as rational, then this act is rational. He gives the example of “My Slavery” to prove that there can be irrational rationality. As seen in the example, sometimes we act against our rationality because we are fed up of the existing circumstances and we need a way out at any cause.

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143 Ibid., p. 25.
3. If I ought to have some disposition which will be wrong for me to lose, to act on this disposition cannot be wrong for me. He gives the example of “My Moral Corruption” to prove that this claim is not true. As seen in the example, in certain circumstances we are in a position where we have to act against our disposition. The reason is that acting on those dispositions will be wrong as the outcome will be worse than if we act against it.

4. If I ought to cause myself to believe that some act would be wrong, then this act cannot be wrong. He disagrees with this view as well and says that as “ought” applies “can”, if I believe some act to be wrong then the act could be wrong.

So, Parfit says,

These four claims assume that rationality and rightness can be inherited, or transferred. If it is rational or right for me either to cause myself to be disposed to act in some way, this act is rational or right. My examples show that this is not so. Rationality and rightness cannot be inherited in this way.144

Parfit goes on to discuss the practical problems we will face if everyone tries to do what will be better for himself, his family or those he loves. For example, if the sea is overfished, it will be better for each fisherman if he tries to catch more, but it will be worse for each if all do, known as the fishermen’s dilemma. Another example is the commuter’s dilemma, each reach their destination faster if he/she drives, but each goes slower if all drives than if all take buses. He says that we need more than laissez-faire economics – we need both politics and morality; otherwise the result will be worse for everyone unless we change something about ourselves and our everyday believes. The changes that we need could be of four kinds, they are: –

1. We might become trustworthy. Each might then promise to do A, on condition that the others make the same promise.
2. We might become reluctant to be free-riders – if each believes that many others will do A, he may then prefer to do his share.
3. We might become Kantians. Each would then do only what he could rationally will everyone to do. None could rationally will that all do E, each would therefore do A.

144 Ibid., p. 40. As the examples are too long to give in details here, just the outline is given.
4. We might become more altruistic. Given sufficient altruism, each would do A.\footnote{Parfit, 1984: 64. We can look up the detail explanations of the four points.}

For Parfit, the above four solutions or changes are moral solutions. They are also important psychological solutions as they solve many dilemmas. They do not need to be enforced, so they are better than political solutions. For example, in the case of bad samaritans, we can easily catch or fine them, while we can reward good samaritans. Political solutions are easier to bring about, but they cannot be brought about by a single person. It requires co-operation by a large number of people. Solution is a public good that benefits everyone whether or not he does his share in bringing it about. We need people who are really interested to bring about these solutions; we need contributors, as they often need moral reasons to do their share without complaining. Here comes the importance of moral solutions, as they are often the only attainable solutions. We need the moral motives in order to solve dilemmas, we already have these motives all we need is to make them stronger and more widely spread. So, we can say that,

One solution is…a conditional agreement. For this to be possible, it must first be true that we can all communicate. If we are purely self-interested, or never self-denying, the ability to communicate would seldom make a difference. In most large group, it would be pointless to promise that we shall make the altruistic choice, since it would be worse for each if he kept his promise.\footnote{Parfit, 1984: 65.}

So, he goes on to explain the above given four points of general changes that we need to bring in – trustworthy, reluctant to be free-riders, to become Kantians, and more altruistic.

Parfit goes on to say that, there are people who hold that any single altruistic choice makes no difference in cases where many people are involved. He argues that if my contribution would make no difference, I can rationally will that everyone does what I do and everyone do not contribute when they know that their contribution would make no difference. As others may also think like I do, it is important to be able to explain why we should contribute by appealing to the consequences of our acts. In order to do so, we need to avoid several mistakes in moral mathematics. The
first mistake in moral mathematics is the view called share-of-the-total-view. This view says – each produces his share of the total benefit. Parfit rejects this view and holds that, an act benefits someone if its consequence benefits someone most. Also, the act which benefits more people would be the one followed by the greater net sum of benefits minus losses. It will not make any difference if other people’s acts are parts of the cause of receiving these benefits and losses. So in case where I can help either A or B, where A will be helped by someone else if I don’t but B has no one else, I need to help B even if B stays farther from A and A’s life is in grave danger. If we follow the first mistake, we should save A as A’s life is in grave danger. But for Parfit, we need to see that our action benefit someone most.

The second mistake in moral mathematics says that – if some act is right or wrong because of its effects, the only relevant effects are the effects of this particular act. This assumption commits a mistake as it considers the effects as over determined. Our action will be still wrong if, say C and D together shoot and kill A. If we have a situation in which C and D simultaneously shoot and kill A where either shot would have killed A by itself. Here, the second mistake will say that neither C nor D did anything wrong alone, because they killed A together and so either one of them cannot be held guilty alone. However, Parfit argues that, even if one of them did not shoot A, A would have still died as one shot was enough to kill A. So, it is absurd to say that neither C nor D is guilty of killing A, as their action was wrong.

He further points out the importance of small chances as they may produce great benefit, and so we must not ignore them. For example, by voting in Indian general election my single vote may or may not bring about great differences in the result. But there is a small chance that it may bring about changes which will benefit the majority, so I need to vote. Therefore, when we are deciding what to do, we should ask what is subjectively right or what will make the best outcome given our beliefs. This (subjectively right) will most probably give the best outcome as others are also most likely to do the same. Parfit says, “If an altruist does not ignore very tiny chances, he will often have a moral reason to make a contribution. The expected benefit that he would give to others would be greater than the cost of his contribution.”147 Even though we can say that an “imperceptible benefit” is not a

147 Ibid., p. 74.
benefit, we cannot claim that a very small chance is not a chance. So, “The third mistake in moral mathematics is to ignore very small chances when they would either affect very many people, or would be taken very many times.”\textsuperscript{148} However, Frank Jackson has a problem with Parfit’s view on effects, particularly second mistake in moral mathematics. This is not acceptable to Jackson, because it implies that we should ignore the effects on other acts. Instead, we must include as possibly relevant all the effects of the act in question. Jackson goes on to say that, for the consequentialist,

An act is objectively right if it in fact makes things better – that is, benefits – and subjectively right if (roughly) it is likely by the light of the agent’s beliefs to make things better – that is, to benefit. Conversely, objective wrongness is a matter of actually harming, whereas subjective wrongness is a matter of being likely to harm according to the agent’s beliefs…it is only in the objective sense, or in the subjective sense in the special case where X knows that Y would still kill me, that X’s act of shooting is not wrong. The same goes for Y’s act of shooting, obviously. I conclude that consequentialists should make the Second Mistake.\textsuperscript{149}

Further, “the fourth and fifth mistakes are to ignore very small and imperceptible effects on very large number of people.”\textsuperscript{150} As these mistakes are similar, they are criticized with the same arguments. Here, the fifth mistake must be abandoned because we cannot accept the view that – an act cannot be either right or wrong, because of its effects on other people, if these effects are imperceptible. For example, if A torture B imperceptibly by turning a switch on, that leaves B in severe pain by the end of 2 hours, can we say that A does not do anything wrong? It will be absurd to say that, as the pain was imperceptible A did not do anything wrong by turning on the switch. So, the belief that imperceptible effects cannot be morally significant is a very serious mistake. We should not think that just because our acts make no one perceptibly worse off it cannot be wrong. The very fact that we act against someone itself is wrong even if the person does not realize it, the reason being, “Our acts may ‘together’ make these people very much worse off.”\textsuperscript{151}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[148] Ibid., p. 75.
\item[149] Jackson, 1997: 49-52.
\item[150] Parfit, 1984: 75.
\item[151] Ibid., p. 83.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The fourth mistake is equally serious, because if we believe that trivial effects can be morally ignored we need to change our views and our thoughts as well as actions as we no longer live in small society. We must not overlook our trivial or imperceptible effects our actions may give rise to. Just like the cases we discussed already, the commuter’s and fishermen’s dilemma, where their action affects others imperceptibly which is worse for everyone in the long run. Even if our present action may not harm anyone, it could still be wrong as we could be a part of larger community who is harming the community as a whole. For example, by not repairing my car's devices that purify the gas it emits, I am contributing to air pollution imperceptibly which is worse for everyone. Thus, we need to abandon these five mistakes committed by moral mathematics.

However, Kristin Shrader-Frechette holds that Parfit’s account of imperceptible harm is not simple even if he claimed it as simple. The main problem, for Shrader-Frechette is that,

By appealing to sets of acts, using idealized examples, avoiding talk of probability of harm, and reducing harm to pain, Parfit has made four simplifying moves. These moves have allowed his theory to be formulated in highly idealized terms. It is not obvious, however, that this simple theory can be interpreted in any but an extremely complex fashion, once it is applied to real-life ethical problems regarding allegedly imperceptible effects. This means that Parfit may have correct answers to the idealized moral questions he poses but that he may not be answering the realistic moral questions we most want and need answered.152

Another point is that, Parfit himself is not clear on what he meant by “imperceptible”. He gives the meaning as “effects on other people, if none of these could ever notice any difference”153. However, this is not acceptable as it is an obvious fact that agents are responsible for harmful effects which are not noticed by their victims, it seems like a mistake by Parfit.

Parfit return to the self-interest theory (S) that says a person is acting rationally if he advanced his interest himself, and also insist that reasons for acting cannot be time-relative. Here, Parfit is collecting materials to ultimately reject S and

153 Ibid., p. 59.
put forth a new theory. He is applying the reductionist approach to reject accepted moral and rational rules by convincingly arguing against them. And he goes on to point out that, the heart of the self-interest theory claim is to believe that, “the force of a reason extends over time. Since I shall have a reason to promote my future aims, I have a reason to do so now.” Here we can see that S is universal and applies to everyone, but it is not a collective code, rather it is a theory about individual rationality. As it is individually successful it cannot fail in its own terms or condemn itself. He further says that, according to common-sense morality (M), we have special obligations towards certain people – our children, parents, friends, colleagues, fellow-citizens etc. We believe that we ought to help them and save them from harm over helping strangers. However, this priority is not absolute. There are certain things which each of us ought to try and achieve – also known as our moral aim. And if we follow this moral theory successfully by doing all the actions possible for us, we will best achieve our moral aim. To achieve our moral aim is important, as “our morality is not a set of pointless rules, intended merely to test our obedience.”

Further, Parfit argues that we need to revise common-sense morality (M) as it must be collectively successful, unlike S which is a theory of individual rationality and so need not be successful at the collective level. But M cannot be directly collectively self-defeating because it needs to answer “what should we all do?” Most of us are often strongly disposed to do what common-sense morality requires us to do – to love and to care more for our parents, children, friends etc. We give more importance to the interest of our families and friends compared to some unknown person, even if the unknown person needs our help more. We need to revise M as it is directly self-defeating, because if M is successfully followed by everyone the outcome will be worse for everyone.

So, in the revised common-sense morality theory put forth by Parfit, we cannot follow what our dispositions tell us to do. We will have to go against what we think is the norm, like saving one’s own child instead of saving someone else’s three children, in an emergency situation where we cannot communicate by any means. By following my disposition the outcome of my action will be worse if everyone else do so too. In order to enlarge the theory of common-sense morality, Parfit tries to

155 Ibid., p. 106.
combine it with consequentialism in order to develop a unified theory about the nature of morality. In order to do so,

We would need both to consider many different kinds of acts and policies, and to consider how these would be related to such things as our emotions, needs, and abilities. Many questions would need to be answered. To be convincing, the Unified Theory must draw many distinctions, and make many different claims.\textsuperscript{156}

So, we can see that by developing a unified theory, Parfit hopes that the disagreement between consequentialism and common-sense morality may be removed. The ultimate aim is that, when we realized that our moral beliefs no longer disagree, we may be able to undermined moral skepticism.

At this stage, it is important to look at how Parfit’s view is interpreted by other thinkers about this particular topic. According to Parfit, S may be indirectly individually self-defeating, but not directly individually so. David Gauthier argues that, it is possible that someone may follow S successfully and yet his S-given aim is worse achieved than it might be. This shows that S could be directly individually self-defeating. That is, for Gauthier,

A person who has the disposition but is unable to affect having it can successfully follow S without thereby causing herself to be worse off, but she is worse off in virtue of having the disposition. This latter person may be rational; according to S, as Parfit understands it, she does have the supremely rational disposition. But she is cursed by her rationality.\textsuperscript{157}

For Gauthier, rationality is a curse only if irrationality is rewarded by accepting that rational irrationality is a possibility. Theory of rationality gives us aims which are to be used to find out what is to be rational, consider our dispositions, desires, and acts and use these rational tools to pursue rational aims. While for Parfit, dispositions, desires, and acts are rational only if they are directed at the aim, not if they are directed by it.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 114.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{157} Gauthier, 1997: 30.}
2.3 Challenges to Self-interest Theory; Rationality and Time

Parfit goes on to search for arguments that would challenge the self-interest theory (S). The main challenge for S comes from theory about rationality called ‘present-aim theory’ (P). One form of P called instrumental theory (IP) says, “What each of us has most reason to do is whatever would best fulfill his present desires.” Here, “desires” includes intentions, projects and other aims. A desire which is a mere means to fulfilling other desires, also called “derived desires”, are not included. Like the desire to go to the library to look at someone instead of reading a book. According to this first form of P, the stronger desire should be given greater weight in order to best fulfill them. The main concern with this type of P is the choice of means; it does not criticize the agent’s ends – what he desires. The second form of P is called deliberative theory (DP) and it says, we should do what we would want if we had undergone “ideal deliberation”, i.e., knowing relevant facts, thinking clearly, free from distorting influences, and not what we want at the time of acting without ideal deliberation. The third form of P is called critical present-aim theory (CP) that says, some desires are intrinsically irrational and do not provide good reasons for acting. Some desires are also rationally required – so someone would be irrational if he did not have these desires. If it survives a process of ideal deliberation, any desire provides reason for acting. For example, if I can destroy the world with a click of my finger and do so, it would be rational as no desire is intrinsically irrational, according to CP.

Here, the claims made by the instrumental (IP) and the deliberative (DP) versions are of two kinds. 1) Desires cannot be intrinsically irrational, this is rejected by Parfit. 2) Whatever a person has most reason to do is the desires that he will have, if he knew all the relevant facts. Parfit rejects this point in its original version, but he did not totally reject it in the sense that he modified it. The modified version is the critical present-aim theory (CP), which is accepted by Parfit. The most serious threat to S comes from CP, by following CP whenever S conflicts with CP, S will be completely defeated. This will mean not acting on our own interests if it frustrates what we most want or value, even if we know all the facts relating to it and we are thinking clearly. If it is rational to follow either S or CP in cases where they conflicts,

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158 Parfit, 1984: 117.
this will be almost damaging for S. The reason is that, for Parfit, “a theory survives if we believe that it is rational to act upon it. A theory wins if it is the sole survival. We shall then believe that it is irrational not to act upon this theory. If a theory does not win, having to acknowledge undefeated rivals, it must qualify its claims.” As S is not the sole survival or winner in case where it conflicts with CP, S is challenged by CP. Also, S is challenged both by moral theories and CP, and we must be careful to compare S with both and not with one. Otherwise we may fail to notice when it steals arguments from the others.

Parfit further argue that reasoning is not concerned only with beliefs. Besides reasons for believing, there are reasons for acting, besides theoretical there is practical rationality too. As we cannot act without having some beliefs, our reasons for acting depend upon our reasons for believing. So, a desire may be irrational if it does not provide a reason for acting, but a desire is not wholly irrational if it provides some reason for acting. When someone acts in some way, his reason for acting is one of the features or facts that explains and also justifies his action. For example, I may help someone because he needs help or I promised so, not because I want to. Here, my reason is not my desire but the respect in which my aim is desirable, that is, worth desiring. My desire for reading a book becomes my reason, because reason may depend on desire. CP also claims that some desires or sets of desires are intrinsically irrational. So, “it is irrational to desire something that is in no respect worth desiring. It is even more irrational to desire something that is worth not desiring – worth avoiding.” Also, we can say that, to prefer the worse of two pains without any reason is irrational. Thus,

It is irrational to care less about future pains because they will be felt either only on a Tuesday, or more than a year in the future...the concern is not less because of some intrinsic difference in the object of concern...because of a property which is purely positional, and which draws an arbitrary line. These are...irrational.

Parfit moves on to the relation between S and P, and holds that they are both theories about rationality where S stands in a subtler relation to morality. However, morality and S still conflicts. We need to bring them together, because among reasons

159 Ibid., pp. 126-127.
160 Ibid., p.122.
161 Ibid., pp. 125-126.
for acting both moral and self-interested reasons are included. Therefore, we can ask which of these two reasons are stronger or have more weight. For Parfit this has no answer as there is no neutral scale to weigh these two reasons. But these questions are not nonsensical; we may find an answer without finding a neutral scale. Parfit caution us that, because of the fact that S has been dominant for a long time (more than 200 years), we may not be able to accept some of his arguments and think them implausible, but this is to be expected.

The first argument against S is that, when in conflict with morality, S tells us to give supreme weight to one’s own interest. One must be governed by the desire that life goes on as well as possible for oneself, whatever the cost to others – also called “bias in one’s own favor”. However, the first argument says that the “bias in one’s own favor” is not supremely rational as, “there is at least one desire that is not irrational, and is no less rational than the bias in one’s own favor. This is a desire to do what is in the interest of other people, when this is either morally admirable, or one’s moral duty.” Also called CP2. Here, the S-theorist’s first reply will be to appeal to CPS – that says one’s own interest is the supremely rational and other things are irrational. The S-theorist’s first reply can be rejected because it would not be less rational to care more about morality, the interest of other people, or various kinds of achievement than our own interest. Here, it is interesting to note that Philip Pettit and Michael Smith are of the view that, Parfit’s claim about S as being accepted for over 200 years and so will be difficult to accept CP over S, is a mistake. Because,

Hume transformed our way of thinking about practical rationality, and that transformation has culminated, over the past half-century, in the development and widespread acceptance of decision theory as a formal model of practical rationality. It is decision theory, unconstrained by the requirement that the rational agent’s desires answer to the specific value of furthering his own interests, that now enjoys the status Parfit claims for S over the last two millennia…Thus the endorsement of a CP-theory in preference to S – or even in preference to unconstrained decision theory – does not represent an ‘absurdly rash’ move. On the contrary, it is likely to seem a natural and reasonable initiative.163

162 Ibid., p. 131.
163 Pettit and Smith, 1997: 84.
The S-theorist’s second reply says – the bias in one’s own favor is not supremely rational. But what will best fulfill or enable you to fulfill all of your desires throughout your life, is what you have most reason to do and that is what is important. That is, “the force of any reason extends over time. You will have reasons later to try to fulfill your future desires. Since you will have these reasons, you have these reasons now. This is why you should reject the Present-aim Theory, which tells you to try to fulfill only your present desires.”

However, Parfit holds that the second reply is not acceptable as reasons can be relative in many senses – relative to an agent, and a time and place. Here, by claiming that some reason can be agent-relative, Parfit means that, this reason may or may not be a reason for other agents; and not that this particular reason “cannot” be a reason for other agents. We can see that, on the present-aim theory, one’s reason for acting is also a reason for other agent’s action if both have the same aim. So, according to neutralist moral theories, reasons for acting are both timeless and impersonal. For present-aim theory, reasons for acting are both time-relative and agent-relative; they are reasons for the agent at the time of acting. In case of self-interest theory, reasons are agent-relative, but not time-relative; though S rejects the requirement of impersonality, it requires temporal neutrality. Further, Parfit argues that,

If a person can have force only for one person, a reason can have force for a person only at one time. We should reject the claim that any reason’s force extends over time. We should therefore reject the S-theorist’s second reply to my first argument, which appeals to this claim. If he has no other reply, the S-theorist may have to return to his first reply. He may have to claim that the bias in one’s own favor is supremely rational. We should reject this claim. If the S-theorist has no other reply, we should reject S.

Parfit goes on to discuss the question on the desire-fulfillment theory that says, should I give equal weight to all of my desires, past, present and future when deciding what would be best for me? The S-theorist must claim that a rational agent should give equal weight to his present and future desires and not past desires. According to S, one should give equal weight to all of one’s present and future desires

164 Parfit, 1984: 137.
165 Ibid., p. 148.
166 Past desires means desires of a living person which were not conditional on their own persistence and not persisted.
– even to those futures that depends on changes in my value-judgments or ideals, a rational agent must give priority to the value or ideals he accepts now. However, in case of these reasons, the correct theory will be P and not S, as the force of these reasons does not extend over time. Our bias towards the near can be seen in the fact that we bring pleasures nearer and postpone pains when we plan for the future. This bias is concealed by another attitude to time called “bias towards the future”. This attitude applies clearly on events that are pleasant or painful in themselves and not to those that give us pride or shame etc. As looking forward to pleasure is more pleasant than backward, thought of such events affects us more. We normally do not override someone’s present desires to force him to do what will be best for him, as we respect the person’s autonomy. This is consistent with Parfit’s claim that, we should give equal weight to all parts of a person’s life and not give greater weight to his present desires.

Parfit’s main point here is that, “in explaining why time cannot have rational significance, the S-theorist cannot use the obvious and best argument. He cannot appeal to the fact that a pain is no less painful because it is less near. A pain is no less painful because it is someone else’s.”167 That is to say that an S-theorist cannot dismiss differences in timing just because they are not differences in painfulness. And they cannot dismiss differences on timing either because they are not differences in personal identity. The reason is that these different differences cannot show that one has rational significance which the other lacks. Also, “whether a pain is in the past or future is a mere difference in its relation to the present moment.”168 He goes on to discuss whether we can have desires about the past even though our language suggests we cannot. We can say that we want it to be true that some event did or did not happen.

However, it can be objected and said that desires are tied to acts. We can say that we cannot have a desire which is impossible to act upon, like our past, as we cannot affect the past. Parfit admits that desires are tied to acts; however there are some particular desires which cannot be fulfilled by anyone. For example, the Pythagoreans wanted the square root of two to be a rational number. As it is logically impossible that this desire be fulfilled, we can say that particular desires may not be

167 Parfit, 1984: 164.
168 Ibid., p. 167.
tied to acts. This remove ground for denying that we can have desires about the past. He claims that,

If we lack the bias towards the future, this would be better for us. This matches the plausible claim that it would be better for us if we lacked the bias towards the near. There is no ground here for criticizing only the latter bias. Both this attitudes to time are, on the whole, bad for us. Since I believe that this attitude is bad for us, I believe that we ought not to be biased towards the future. This belief does not beg the question about the rationality of this bias. On any plausible moral view, it would be better if we were all happier. This is the sense in which, if we could, we ought not to be biased towards the future. In giving us this bias, evolution denies us the best attitude to death.\footnote{Ibid., p. 177.}

Parfit suggest that the S-theorist may claim that our bias towards our future, in our own lives, is a mere product of evolution and so not morally justified. This claim seems to be justified by the asymmetry in our concern about our own and other people past lives. The S-theorist need to apply the same to my past or future operations – where I would prepare to suffer several hours yesterday than suffer for one hour later today – and say this is irrational to be relieved when our suffering is in the past, this is hard to believe for Parfit. He describes two views\footnote{The two views are – firstly, if time’s passage is an illusion, temporal neutrality cannot be irrational. This means that it is irrational to be relieved when our suffering is in the past. Secondly, if time’s passage is not an illusion, because time passes, past suffering cannot matter. This means that, a person will not be relieved when the suffering is over.} the S-theorist could defend and both include at least one claim that is hard to believe. This is the weakness in the self-interest theory. Its further weakness is that there is a choice between these views. “It may be irrational to be less concerned about the further future. But we cannot be sure of this while we are undecided on the reason why.”\footnote{Parfit, 1984: 186.}

Parfit further states that, for a self-interest theorist the bias towards the near is considered irrational and so must be condemn. However, in case where a self-interested man may pay the price of other’s self-interested acts, he regrets that they are self-interested and are biases in their own favor. But he does not regret this bias in himself. So we can say that, “truths about S at the interpersonal level apply to P at the inter-temporal level.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 187.} If we assume that a self-interested man does not regret his
bias, it means we are talking about his present bias – on which he always acts. So, we can see that it is not irrational as claimed by the S-theorist. Further, he holds that, reasons are relative both to agents and time of acting – this is true on all versions of P. According to P, to do something that I will undo later will be still rational. Therefore, P can be accused of inter-temporally self-defeating even within a single life.

Similarly, S can also be interpersonally or collectively self-defeating – as it is rational to do something which I will undo later, for S. Therefore, it would be better for a community of self-interested people to follow some form of morality rather than follow S. However, even when S is collectively self-defeating, it is still individually successful. S is a theory about individual rationality and so it still works in its own terms. For Parfit, an act must be that of a particular agent done at a particular time. Many claims about rationality are true only when applied to a person at a particular time. But if they are made to span either the relation between different people or the relation between a person at one time and himself/herself at other times, then they cease to be true. We can say that different people can have a set of rational inconsistent beliefs, but a single person cannot have it. An inconsistent belief may be rationally believed by a single person if he believes them at different times, but not at a single time otherwise it will be irrational. So, “when we are considering both theoretical and practical rationality, the relation between a person now and himself at other times is relevantly similar to the relation between different people.”\textsuperscript{173} This is similar to intransitive preferences; where three people prefer X to Y, Y to Z, and Z to X, without being irrational. This can also be true of a single person provided he has these preferences at different times.

Parfit concludes by saying that S can be best judged when it coincides with impartial benevolence. When what is better or good for the agent would be worse for others by a very large margin. In such cases, S insists that a rational agent must give supreme weight to his own self-interest, whatever the cost to others may be. We have to reject S as it is not prudence but egoism, because there are some desires which are more supremely rational than bias in one’s own favor, like the desire to benefit others, a scientist’s desire to make some fundamental discovery, a philosopher’s desire to make some intellectual advance etc. We can see that S is wrong in claiming that every

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., p. 191.
other desire is less rational than bias in one’s own favor. Because, the desires for achievements are no less rational than the bias in one’s own favor. If someone’s strongest desire is to achieve something, it will not be irrational to fulfill them even if he knows that his action is against his own self-interest. As the desire to benefit others is one such desire which is no less rational than bias in one’s own favor, we should reject S.

Another reason why we should reject S is that, as any reason’s force extends over different people’s lives, reasons can be agent relative. Here, Parfit argues that if reasons can be relative then they can also be relative to the agent at the time of acting. Also, I may have certain reasons for acting even though I do not have them now. Parfit holds that, we mistakenly accept S because;

1. People have the false belief of after-life or re-incarnation and so overlooked one objection to S as they assumed that morality and self interest always coincide.

2. Any rejected theory is not normally wholly mistaken. Just like Newton’s Law is partly correct, part of S is also possible, as it is a part of the wider theory, CP that should be accepted by everyone.

For Parfit, the best version among the present-aim theory is the critical version (CP). By accepting CP, it will be possible for us to claim that our strongest desire is to avoid acting wrongly. This is kept open whether to add to CP’s claim, so CP has to be accepted as there is only one acceptable theory and that is CP. Also, CP can give all the weight needed by moral reasons which the moral theorists believe that these reasons ought to have. Another reason to accept CP is that, every possible theory about rationality is different versions of CP. This is its strength, because when restated as different versions of CP, we can see clearly what is assumed by these different theories. However, Parfit holds that,

My main claim is that we should reject the version of CP that coincides with S. We should reject the assumption that compared with the bias in one's own favor; every other desire is less rational. Suppose that our desires and value-judgments are, both singly and as a set, not irrational. And suppose we know that what will best fulfill these desires will be against our own long-term self-interest. If this is so, it is irrational to follow S. It is irrational to do what is in our own self-interest when we
know that this will frustrate what, knowing the facts and thinking clearly, we most want or value.174

Thus, we can see that when CP coincides with S, we are to reject this version of CP. We can say that not all version of CP is acceptable. Nevertheless, other versions of CP are to be accepted.

However, Jonathan Dancy175 suggest that, what Parfit terms as self-defeating is actually more serious and amounts to self-refutation. The indirectly self-defeating claim of S (self-interest theory) and C (consequentialism) is done by the distinction between act and agent. But Dancy claims that this defense is unsuccessful, he gives reasons why he disagrees with Parfit. The main problem for Dancy lies in the aim of S which seems to be both rational and irrational. Parfit’s examples of “Schelling’s answer to armed robbery”176 and “Kate the writer”177 are two points that shows the aim of S as both rational and irrational. Dancy claim that, Schelling’s answer to armed robbery is unable to give an example of irrational action done by a rational agent. All it does is that, the intention of the first rational act was to have an irrational consequence, but the latter irrational acts are not the intended motives of the first act. Also, if Parfit’s claim that Schelling’s case is one of rational irrationality is accepted, this will simply say that to cause one to become irrational can be rational. In the case of Kate the writer, Parfit says that even if her actions are irrational, she herself is rational. The distinction between act and agent has been introduced here. Parfit claim that, Kate should work less hard and be happier, because overworking herself is irrational. But Dancy holds that, S needs to have a broader view in which Kate need not be irrational. This claim is more natural and also supports the “degree” of connectedness of one’s identity. The main problem with S remains, that its aim is both rational and irrational to pursue. So, neither the case of Schelling nor of Kate can defend S against this charge of contradiction.

174 Ibid., p. 194.
175 Dancy, 1997.
176 In this example, an armed robber held a family hostage and demand they give him the gold from the safe otherwise they all will die. As there was a risk that even after he gets the gold they will be killed, the father took a special drug that will make him irrational. He told the robber to kill the children as he love them very much, the robber ran away before the police arrive as he could not understand the irrational behavior of the father without either taking the gold or killing any of the family members. (Parfit, 1984: 12-13)
177 In this example, Kate is a writer and her strongest desire is that her book be as good as possible. Because of this desire, she finds her work rewarding. But she works so hard that she collapses with exhaustion and is depressed for some time. (Parfit, 1984: 6).
For Parfit, the central moral aim of C is that outcomes be as good as possible. Dancy’s charge is that, it both recommends and forbids a certain aim. The C-given aims are best achieved if we have other motives and not simply to achieve the C-given aims. Its aim is that outcome is as good as possible, but we are not to aim at this aim. Even if we take into account Parfit’s distinction between act and agent here, it is still impossible for C to commend us to do an action which it forbids. Because this distinction still leaves us with the same assessment of both agent and act. The idea of blameless wrongdoing is not acceptable. This can be seen in the example of “My Moral Corruption”, where it shows that “it is possible for an acceptable moral theory to cause us ourselves to do what the theory tells us is wrong.”\(^{178}\) The claim that C is damagingly self-defeating amounts to self-refutation, as there is a sense of a single aim which it tells us both to follow and not follow it at the same time. Dancy’s main point is that, trying to run the distinction between action/agent and outcome/motive distinction does not work. We should, instead, focus our moral evaluation on agent-in-acting, which prevent either distinction from getting a grip. The relevant qualities of both the action conceived as moral assessment, and those of the agent, are the same. This will leave no room for either blameless wrongdoing or blame-worthy right doing. It becomes clear now that, S says there is a single rational aim which is not rational to pursue, and C says there is a single moral aim which is immoral to aim at.

### 2.4 Parfit’s View on Personal Identity

After discussing and rejecting traditional moral and rationality theories, Parfit goes on to explaining beliefs about the nature of personal identity over time. He uses an imaginary situation to show that these cases bring out our beliefs most clearly and they also cover actual cases and our own lives. He argues that some of these beliefs are false and points out how and why these matters. After discussing the past debates on personal identity, mainly between physical and psychological continuity, Parfit says, “being destroyed and replicated is about as good as ordinary survival...However much I change, I shall still be alive if there will be some person living who will be me.”\(^{179}\) What is important is that a person must be self-conscious, aware of her identity and her continued existence over time. By the phrase “criterion of identity over time”, he means “what this identity necessarily involves, or consists in”, and not

\(^{178}\) Dancy, 1997: 14.
\(^{179}\) Parfit, 1984: 201,203.
an ambiguous sentence like “our way of telling whether some present object is identical with some past object”. For Parfit,

Personal identity is a transitive relation. If Bertie was one and the same person as the philosopher Russell, and Russell was one and the same person as the author of ‘Why I am not a Christian’, this author and Bertie must be the same person…Because identity is a transitive relation; the criterion of identity must be a transitive relation. Since strong connectedness is not transitive, it cannot be the criterion of identity…I am the same person as myself twenty years ago, though I am not now strongly connected to myself then.180

Here again, Parfit will be employing the reductionist approach to establish what personal identity consist of. His arguments are interesting but it is a bit difficult to accept his whole view, because science fictions are yet to come true and so not convincing enough at this point.

Parfit argues that what psychological continuity provides is as good as personal identity, even though it is not acceptable to many people. “On the Reductionist view, each person’s existence just involves the existence of a brain and body, the doing of certain deeds, the thinking of certain thoughts, the occurrence of certain experiences, and so on.”181 If a question is asked and one can know the answer of that question without actually answering, then Parfit called such question an “empty question”. So,

When we ask an empty question, there is only one fact or outcome that we are considering. Different answers to our question are merely different descriptions of this fact or outcome. This is why, without answering this empty question, we can know everything that there is to know…If we are Reductionists about personal identity…I can always ask, ‘Am I about to die? Will the resulting person be me?’ on the Reductionist View, in some cases there would be no answer. My question would be empty. The claim that I was about to die would be neither true nor false.182

In situations where I am about to die or will live for many more years, this will have rational and moral significance. The popular view is that, it is important that the one who lives is me by the end of this year; personal identity matters and our identity must

180 Ibid., p. 206.
181 Ibid., p. 211.
182 Ibid., p. 214.
be determinate. But Parfit claims that what matter is Relation R: psychological connectedness and/or continuity, with the right kind of cause which can be any cause. And this relation must not take a “branching” form, holding between one person and two different future people. Which of these we believe to be what matters is important as it will affect our views on emotions, attitudes to ageing and death as well as rationality and morality.

According to Joseph Butler, consciousness of a person presupposes his or her identity, and therefore cannot constitute personal identity. This is in objection to Locke’s memory theory. Parfit holds that some people may object to his theory and say such thing as,

> It is part of our concept of memory that we can remember only our own experiences. The continuity of memory therefore presupposes personal identity. The same is therefore true of your relation-R. You claim that personal identity just consists in the holding of Relation-R. This must be false if Relation-R itself presupposes personal identity.\(^{183}\)

In order to answer this objection, Parfit appeals to the concept of quasi-memory – memories that comes with a belief that unless they are delusions, they are about our own experiences. Our mental life consists of countless experiences including quasi-memories of earlier experiences. The overlapping strong connectedness shared by our quasi-memories and earlier experiences provide continuity of quasi-memory. This continuity, in part, creates the unity of each person’s life. The continuity of quasi-memory does not presuppose personal identity, but it may be part of what constitutes personal identity. It may be a part of what makes me now and myself at other times one and the same person along with other kinds of psychological continuity.

However, Nathan L. Oaklander\(^ {184}\) argues that Parfit’s attempted defense of the psychological account of identity against the charge of circularity is unsuccessful because the account ultimately rests on an analysis of the unity of consciousness. This analysis itself is considered either circular or otherwise inadequate. Thus, the problem is that Parfit defines personal identity in terms of quasi-memory which involves strong-connectedness or numerous direct quasi-memory relations. But such relations  

\(^{183}\) Ibid., p. 220.  
\(^{184}\) Oaklander, 1987.
are acceptable only if the simultaneous quasi-remembered experience belongs to the same person. The question is – how are simultaneous experiences to be unified into a single consciousness? So,

If Parfit appeals to our ordinary concept of awareness, then he cannot give an impersonal (non-circular) description of the unity of consciousness. On the other hand, if he introduces the concept of a q-awareness, then the existence of a single q-awareness of several experiences is not sufficient to account for the unity of consciousness, and without such an account, his analysis of personal identity over time is inadequate. I conclude, therefore, that Parfit’s version of the psychological criterion of personal identity either does not avoid Butler’s objection or does not account for the unity of a person’s life.185

Further according to Lawrence Locke,

The charge of circularity is often expressed in something like the following manner: There is no directly knowable difference between a real memory (where the person actually had the experience) and a merely apparent memory (where the person only believes that he had the experience). Since one can have apparent memories of other persons’ experiences, apparent memory cannot serve as a criterion of personal identity. This means that memory theories must rely on “real” memory. But for a person to really remember a past action, he must be the person who performed the action. To claim that a person’s memories are real memories then, we must first know that he is the same person who performed the action or who had the experience. Therefore, when we use memory criteria, we are presupposing personal identity.186

Locke further states that,

What is interesting about psychological connectedness, as opposed to continuity or identity, is that whereas those two relations are all-or-nothing, connectedness admits of degrees. Since what matters about persons through a weakening of direct relationships over time admits of degrees, Parfit is concerned that this should be reflected in moral thought.187

Some thinkers argue that, there exists two separate awarenesses in a person; one is the psychological continuity of our stream of consciousness and the other being

185 Ibid., p. 529.
186 Locke, 1990: 47.
187 Ibid., pp. 56-57.
continued existence of separately existing subjects of experiences. However, Parfit argues that this belief about our separately existing entities which is distinct from our brains and bodies should be rejected, just as we should reject our belief in the existence of water-nymphs or unicorns as we have no reason to believe they exist. Another example is the Cartesian Pure Ego. According to Parfit,

Because we ascribe thoughts to thinkers, it is true that thinkers exist. But thinkers are not separately existing entities. The existence of a thinker just involves the existence of his brain and body, the doing of his deeds, the thinking of his thoughts, and the occurrence of certain other physical and mental events. We could therefore redescribe any person’s life in impersonal terms. In explaining the unity of this life, we need not claim that it is the life of a particular person. We could describe what, at different times, was thought and felt and observed and done, and how these various events were interrelated. Persons would be mentioned here only in the descriptions of the content of many thoughts, desires, memories, and so on. Persons need not be claimed to be the thinkers of any of these thoughts.188

Here, we can see how Parfit reduce persons into some interrelated events and so can be describe in impersonal terms. A person is nothing more than the occurrences of certain physical and mental events. This is a bit unsettling, to be considered nothing more than interrelated events which has thoughts, memories, desires etc. is not something we are used to. Normally we take ourselves to be much more than interrelated events, beings that is superior to other creatures as we possess the ability to self-reflect.

Parfit further argues that the word “subjective” is misleading; because “subjective” truth may seem to imply that we are separately existing subjects of experiences. However, this is wrong as the use of the word “this” enables us to express “subjective” truths without believing in the separate existence of subjects of experiences. For Parfit, division/fission is as good as ordinary survival; in division/fission, however, the resulting persons would be two different people. In such case, neither will be me even if they both have my quasi-memory. Also, for him living as two people is better than death, as two cannot be equal to zero, and double survival is not the same as ordinary survival, and it is not death or anything like death at all. The only problem is that it does not fit the logic of identity. Whether any of the

surviving persons in division/fission are me or not does not matter, even if it does it matters only a little; because it is relation-R, and not personal identity, that matters.

Here, we can point out some problem with regard to Parfit’s account. Firstly, division/fission is still science fiction as we do not come across any scientist/doctor who had successfully achieved it yet. Secondly, we cannot apply what this fictional situation achieved to our day-to-day life, and conclude that something as important as personal identity is not important. If we accept Parfit’s view, we become something which is not at all complex and unimportant. It is not to say that we should take ourselves seriously, but surely we are much more than some interrelated events. Let us see what more Parfit says about relation-R.

According to Parfit, relation-R is a psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, with the right kind of cause and this cause could be any cause. For the reductionists,

There is nothing more to personal identity than the holding of relation R. In nearly all of the actual cases, R takes a one-one form. It holds between one presently existing person and one future person. When R takes a one-one form, we can use the language of identity. We can claim that this future person will be this present person.\textsuperscript{189}

It means that a future person will be me only if he/she is R-related to me. However it can be objected that, there is something more to identity than just relation-R. Personal identity consists in R holding uniquely between one present person and only one future person. So, identity must matter more than relation-R. Here, Parfit holds that, personal identity (PI) = R (relation R) + U (unique relation), if we assume that both R and PI has value, we can say that R without U would still have most of its value. If PI = R + U, PI matters only because of the presence of R. PI may have some extra value, but this value will be much less than the intrinsic value of R. It means that, in the absence of PI, the value of R will be much more in case where U fails to hold. So, we can say that relation-R provides the main connection of a person’s present with his/her future memory. It provides the main link that enables us to have the necessary connectedness or continuity with our past as well as future selves. It is more important than physical continuity as it enables us to have the mental or psychological link; also

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., p. 262.
it is stronger than identity as relation R cannot fail to hold because of a trivial
difference in the facts. Here, we can see the difference between Parfit and the other
reductionist thinkers. It is difficult for the other reductionist thinkers to accept Parfit’s
view, as it is too wide. The scope of relation-R is so wide that it can accommodate
any and every kind of cause. This can be problematic as it accepts not only the normal
causes, but any kind of causes will be considered as providing enough proof for
claiming personal identity.

Further, Parfit regard division/fission as better than ordinary survival as he
will have double the years to live and he could also fulfill to pursue two life-long
careers at the same time. However, he concedes that problems could arise if both want
to do the same easy work and avoid the same difficult job or love the same women
who want only a single companion. He further holds that, “what fundamentally
matters is whether I shall be R-related to at least one future person. It is relatively
trivial whether I shall also be R-related to some other person.” 190 In case of
division/fission, the resulting persons contain most of the ordinary implications of
identity, so my relation to each of the resulting person is as good as identity. Parfit
claimed that Wittgenstein and Buddha will also agree with his Reductionist view, he
said, “The Reductionist view is not merely part of one cultural tradition. It may be, as
I have claimed, the true view about all people at all times.” 191 As reductionist and
non-reductionist views differ on the nature of persons, they also disagree about the
nature of personal identity. A reductionist view holds that personal identity involves
only physical and psychological continuity – which can be described without claiming
that a person had experienced them. Also, what matters is not personal identity but the
certain kinds of connectedness and continuity that holds in one-one form.

On the other hand, non-reductionist view holds that personal identity is what
matters; it is not just physical and psychological continuity alone. It is a separate
further fact that must either hold completely or not at all in every case. So, they must
stand or fall together in case it is accepted or rejected by someone. Parfit rejects it so
all the claims falls together, and even though he himself find it difficult to accept the
reductionist view he hope to convince others as he convinced himself. However,

190 Ibid., p. 268.
191 Ibid., p. 273.
according to Brian Garret, Parfit’s argument against Fission is not convincing enough to undermine the self-interest theory of rationality. It does not possess any radical import, because if face with the choice between fission and death, virtually everyone will chose fission. Douglas Ehring holds that, Parfit’s claim that R-relation does not always coincide with identity is not acceptable by the co-habitationist. For them, there are two people sharing in common the pre-fission stage of a person. However, in the pre-fission stage the persons do not have any overlapping thoughts, even if these thoughts shared the same content. Thus, “the post-fission people cannot both remember the same pre-fission thought since any such thought will be contained in a stage which belongs to C₁ or C₂ but not both.”

For Parfit, changing his view from non-reductionist to reductionist liberated him from the fear that after his death his hopes, aspirations, etc. will die too. The reason is that, after changing his view he now believes that dying is not as bad as it is thought to be. The only difference is that there will be no more direct experiences which will be connected to his present experiences, say carrying out his earlier intentions, fulfilling his promises etc. But after changing his views he feels less scared or bad about his death, because describing it this way makes it less depressing. He feels as if he lives in the open air and not dark tunnel anymore. The arguments for reductionism have the effect of removing the glass wall between him and the others because, “this is merely the fact that, after a certain time, none of the experiences that will occur will be related, in certain ways, to my present experiences. Can this matter all that much?” For Parfit, personal identity does not matter, but sometimes coincides with what matters. He further argues that,

I believe that physical continuity is the least important element in a person’s continued existence. What we value, in ourselves and others, is not the continued existence of the same particular brains and bodies. What we value are the various relations between ourselves and others, whom and what we love, our ambitions, achievements, commitments, emotions, memories and several other psychological features. Some of us would also want ourselves or others to continue to have bodies that are very similar to our present bodies. But this is not wanting the same particular

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194 Ibid., p. 345.
bodies to continue to exist. I believe that, if there will later be some person who will be R-related to me as I am now, it matters very little whether this person has my present brain and body. I believe that what fundamentally matters is Relation-R, even if it does not have its normal cause. Thus it would not matter if my brain was replaced with an exact duplicate.196

This is the main claim that Parfit made in this section and as we already said, it will take a lot more than what is said here to convince others.

Parfit goes on to examine some of his thought experiments based mainly on science fiction and said that, in case of teletransportation his relation with his replica is relation-R without normal cause. However, this abnormality of the cause is of no importance for him. The reason is that, when we consider a case where artificial eyesight gives the same visual sensations that provide true beliefs about what can be seen to people who are blind. It will be foolish to reject these eyes because they are not normal cause of human sight. At the most someone will be disturbed by the appearance of such people, but that is trivial for the blind as long as he/she can have visual sensations. In the case of teletransportation, the replica will be just like the original in every way with normal brain and body. As it is not the cause that matters but the effects, so we can say that what matters fundamentally is relation-R with any cause.

Parfit further examines the world discuss by Nagel, where persons are constituted of series-persons. “In this community, everyone above the age of thirty enters a Scanning Replicator once in every year. This machine destroys a person’s brain and body, and produces a Replica who is R-related to this person, and who has a body that is exactly similar except that it has not aged or decayed.”197 Parfit argues that even in such a world, his claim will still be true because series-person never takes branching form. And say, my love for someone will be shifted to the next body or series-person of the same body. As loving someone is a process, mutual love involves a shared history and the Replica will have all the quasi-memories198 of our shared

196 Ibid, pp. 284-5
197 Ibid., p. 290.
198 Here, quasi-memory is different from memory in degree of clarity. In quasi-memory, there is a possibility that this particular memory is not mine. It could belong to a friend who told me about her visit to Rome in such minute detail that it stuck with me and sometimes I remember them as if it was my own memory. But when I realize that I have never been to Rome, then I realize that
history. Another case is of Williams, where he claims that to love a person is to love their body. Parfit rejects this view and say that people do not love someone’s body alone. Otherwise, at the death of one twin, the person’s love will be transferred to the other twins – without any grief – which does not happen. Thus, we love a person-type where there is no branching form.

However, Judith Jarvis Thomson\(^{199}\) holds that, there is a problem for those who claim that psychological connectedness is the mark of personal identity. The reason is that, they end up accepting the implausible view that tinkering with someone’s brain or feeding a drug to someone could result in a new person. There are three reasons why philosophers accept psychological connectedness as a mark of personal identity. Firstly, they think that body-switching must be possible as we can imagine it. However, it is not convincing enough that we can actually imagine switching our body with someone else. Secondly, it seems possible that people could exist without bodies at all, but this is also not acceptable. Thirdly, we want our mental life should go on and fulfils what I plan for my future. But if I am told that I will be dying tomorrow and someone who will be exactly like me will take up my life from tomorrow, it will not make me feel better at all. So, we can reject Parfit’s claim that personal identity is not what matters. Thus, “what I want is to go on leading a more or less full human life, and for that, this more or less well-functioning human body is exactly what I do need. If I could switch to another – a younger and healthier one – that would be splendid. But since I can’t, I do need this one.”\(^{200}\) Further, according to Marya Schechtman, “Parfit is attempting to give an identity criterion that does not employ facts about persons or their identities in its specification, because if such facts were included then this criterion would not provide an analysis of the appropriate sort.”\(^{201}\)

According to Schechtman, as a contemporary psychological-continuity theorist, Parfit has taken the goal of providing a non-circular identity criterion from

\(^{199}\) Thomson, 1997.
\(^{200}\) Ibid., p. 222.
\(^{201}\) Schechtman, 1990: 73.
the re-identification question, and the intuitions that support the psychological criterion over the bodily criterion from the self-knowledge question. She says,

The arguments that support a psychological criterion all rely on hypothetical puzzle cases, in which we are asked to imagine someone changed in certain ways, and then to observe our intuitions about whether or not the original person should be concerned about the future of the resultant person, held responsible for her actions, or take her beliefs to be her own. Issues of agency and self-knowledge are emphasized, and it is on the basis of these that we are being asked to judge questions of identity. The assumption is that when we concentrate on such questions we will judge that responsibility and concern (and hence identity) go with the psychology or consciousness rather than the body. These thought experiments, then, are taken to support the view that psychology rather than the body is the constitutive factor of identity, but the question is never raised as to what kind of thing it is the identity of which is at issue – the person taken as subject or as object. The intuitions we have in response to the thought experiments, I claim, come from our view of persons as subjects, but the methods that identity theorists use to turn these intuitions into a criterion of identity come from a view of persons as objects. Taking the fact that psychology is what turns out to be important in these cases, psychological-continuity theorists thus make the unwarranted assumption that sameness of psychology can be used to provide a non-circular criterion of identity of the sort which is given for objects. But such a criterion cannot focus on subjectivity; it is, by definition, to be objective, and must be capable of being spelled out without including the first-person perspective of a given individual. The pieces that make up a person’s psychology, must, to fulfill this purpose, be viewed to be as discrete and detachable as are the planks of a ship or the grains of sand in a heap. It is because psychological-continuity theorists are trying to force the insights gained from consideration of questions of self-knowledge and responsibility into the mold of questions of the persistence of material objects that they are forced to view psychological states as atomic, isolable, and in principle independent of the subject who experiences them – a view that I have argued to be highly implausible.202

Thus, from the above long quotations we can see that Schechtman give us the general overview of what Parfit is trying to do here. She argue that even though psychological continuity theorists are trying to present psychological states as

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202 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
independent of the subject who experience them, this is not acceptable as it is too improbable.

2.5 The Influence of Present Decisions on Future Generation; Is Reductionist View a Better Choice?

Every person has a distinctive necessary property, which are different for everyone. Parfit goes on to examine some of our present choices which will definitely needs to be changed if we are to become reductionist. He says, “You were conceived at a certain time. It is in fact true that, if you had not been conceived within a month of that time, you would never have existed.”203 – called time-dependence claim. So we can say that if both my parents had been married to someone else, then I would have not been born. Because the person who would be conceived by my mother would have a different gene from the one I have, there may be some similarity but it will not be me. This will be true even in case where my mother conceive a month later then when I was actually conceived. Here too the person will not have the exact gene that I have, and it means that there are cases where our identity is indeterminate. To ask whether this person will be me or not will be an empty question as there will be no “yes” or “no” answer.

Further, we are also morally responsible for the things we do and will do that may harm future generation or future people. Just because we do not know them now does not mean that we should not care about our actions. Our actions can also affect the identity of future people, who they are, as well as the number of future people. For example, if we try to stop a fourteen year old girl from having a child because the baby will have a bad start compare to the other child that will be born after some more years, it is the same as saying that the baby should not have been born. If she waited for some more years, it will not be the same baby anymore. So, we cannot say that it is worse for the baby to be born at that time. “Children conceived more than a month earlier or later would in fact be different children.”204 Even our choice of economic or social policies will influence what type of societies we will have in future. It will also influence who and what kind of people will be born and what kind of living standard will be maintained by the society.

204 Ibid., p. 361.
Parfit goes on to argue that the choices we make today will either help to have a better or worse life for the future generation. However, someone may say that by telling the fourteen year old girl to wait till she is mature to have a baby, we are violating the baby’s right to exist as his/her right could not be fulfilled. But appealing to rights cannot wholly solve the non-identity problem, because in different outcomes, different people would be born. The main question of non-identity problem can be stated as – what is the moral reason to do or not to do a particular action which will affect future generation? The most we can say is that, if the fourteen year old girl had waited till she was mature enough to have a baby, she could have given to some other child a better start in life.

Further, Parfit holds that it will be wrong to choose a policy that will lower the standard of living of the future generation, but not worse, if the result is bad for any particular people. He holds that, if I cause someone to exist, I am not benefiting that person in anyway. This means that we need to change our moral views, as most of our moral views hold that our acts are good or bad for those people whom they affect. However, Parfit clarifies that his theory does not include our relations with our parents, pupils, patients, clients, etc. Instead it applies only to our general moral reason to benefit others and protect them from harm. We blame a person’s actions not for his actual but predictable effects. This is important, because if we agree with Parfit’s view, we will have to make lots of changes in our moral beliefs. This will make us look at the debate on abortion and euthanasia in a totally different perspective.

Further, Parfit holds that in order to solve the non-identity problem, we need to have an answer to questions like “can there be an over-population: too many people?”, “how many people should there be, in some country or the world, during a certain period?”, “when would there be too many people living?” etc. We cannot avoid these questions in a complete moral theory because our answer may have practical implications. Is it better to have a population that is smaller in quantity but with higher quality of life, or bigger in quantity but with lower quality of life? Someone can say that it does not matter whether the quality of life is good or bad, but a life lived is better than not lived. If we agree with this view, our conclusion will be something like –
For any possible population of at least ten billion people, all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence, if other things are equal, would be better, even though its members have lives that are barely worth living – called The Repugnant Conclusion.205

However, as the name suggest, Parfit regards this view as unacceptable. The main reason is that, “loss in the quality of life cannot always be morally outweighed by a sufficient gain in the quantity either of happiness or of whatever makes life worth living.”206 Someone may say that the principle includes the phrase “if other things are equal” which will never be fulfilled. So, the repugnant conclusion can be ignored. However, for Parfit, this conclusion is intrinsically unacceptable, and we should not try to avoid it by appealing to other moral principles. Instead, he holds that a new theory called “Theory X” is needed in order to be able to reject the repugnant conclusion.

In order to solve the non-identity problem and avoid the repugnant conclusion, Parfit takes up John Rawls’207 theory that says, “The best moral principles are those that it would be rational for us to choose as the principles to be followed in our society.”208 In other words, it is better to choose a society where we have less population with higher standard of living. But the problem with this theory is that, it is assumed that existence is granted, which is not true. Some writers suggest that we can assume that we do not know whether we will exist or not. But Parfit holds that this assumption cannot be true in the actual history of the world, maybe in different possible history. So, this moral reasoning cannot be accepted. Parfit goes on to say that, by causing someone to exist with a life worth living, we are benefiting this person. As a result, we have moral reason not to produce certain effects, even if they are bad for no one. However, we need to be able to have a convincing moral theory that will support our claim. In order to convince others, we need to show why causing someone to exist is good for the person and doing something bad that will not harm anyone will be still wrong. That is, we need a principle that will both solve the non-identity problem and avoids the repugnant conclusion. This theory called “Theory X” by Parfit is still elusive and the search goes on.

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205 Ibid., p. 388.
206 Ibid., p. 390.
208 Parfit, 1984: 392.
Parfit goes on to consider, “What are the relative values, during some period, of the quality of life and the quantity both of happiness and of whatever else makes life worth living? He took up some of the possible theories; wide total principle answer – in its impersonal and personal-affecting form, only quantity has value. On less extreme view – both quantity and quality have value. On this view, both the quantity and quality of happiness should be equally distributed to all the people involved. Another extreme view called the average principle view says – only quality has value. On this view, a loss in the quality of life can never be compensated or outweighed by a gain in the quantity of happiness or other things that makes life worth living. Parfit holds that the average principle view is also applicable in the larger question of how many people there should ever be in the history of the world, if it took a temporally neutral form. But it is not acceptable in its present form as it is too extreme. Because when we consider, say, a population of ten billion, it is important to remember that a loss in the quality of life can never be morally outweighed by a gain in quantity of life. Even if the total standard of living is very high, it will always be worse if more people are worse off. So, a theory needs to “have acceptable implications when applied to all the choices that we ever make, including those that affect both the identities and the number of future people.”

For Parfit, theory X in its simplest form should hold that, quality always has values – it would be bad if someone is worse off than he/she might have been. The value of quantity cannot be above some upper limit, at any given point of time – happiness has an upper limit. And, there is a disvalue in the quantity of suffering as well as whatever else that makes life miserable, so worth ending, there is no limit to this badness. However, theory X in its present form is not defensible as it comes to a ridiculous conclusion that says – if ten billion people have a quality of life same as the average quality of life of the world’s present population, there must be an imaginable population who have a worse life even if all its members have a much higher quality of life, because each lives have some intense suffering. The problem is that, for theory X, the goodness has an upper limit while the badness of life does not. So, with a larger population the badness will outweighed the goodness of the quality of life.

209 Ibid., p. 401.
210 Ibid., p. 405.
In order to avoid this ridiculous conclusion, Parfit points out that there is an important difference between personal and moral value. He says that,

What we call the value of a life is not its personal value – its value to the person whose life it is – but the value that this life contributes to the outcome. When we claim that some life has no value, this means that the living of this life does not make the outcome better. In other words, it would not have been worse in itself if the person with this life had never existed. If this would have been worse this would only be because of its effects on other people.\(^{211}\)

According to this distinction, the suffering in the life of the extra population in the imagined case is applicable only to the person who suffers. These sufferings are compensated by their personal happiness and other things that make their lives worth living. These personal values are different from moral values. As a result, the personal disvalue of these extra sufferings does not have moral disvalue, and does not make the outcome worse. By avoiding the ridiculous conclusion, there is a danger that theory X could be taken to come to an absurd conclusion which says – because there is a limit to happiness and no limit to suffering, we can say that in case of A and B that has the same number of population A is better. The reason being the timing of the existence of people in A is divided into many periods, and so the outcome of suffering is not as bad as in B where all the population exist at the same time. Thus, Parfit holds that as this simplified version of theory X leads to the absurd conclusion, in order to avoid this conclusion we need to abandon the asymmetry in the claim that positive value has limits and negative value has no limit. So, the search for theory X goes on.

Further, according to Parfit,

There is Mere Addition when there are extra people living, who have lives worth living, who affect no one else, and whose existence does not involve social injustice. When inequality is produced by Mere Addition, it does not make the outcome worse…we cannot plausibly claim that the extra people should never have existed, merely because, unknown to them, there are other people who are even better off.\(^{212}\)

He further holds that, our moral thoughts are about what we “ought” to do, and the different outcomes, that have moral relevance. Our beliefs about what we ought to do

\(^{211}\) Ibid., p. 408.

\(^{212}\) Ibid., p. 425.
in particular circumstances are influenced by our beliefs about the relative goodness or badness of the outcomes. We can accept the view that, twenty billion people with a very high quality of life would be better than many more people whose lives, though worth living, are gravely deprived. These lives will be not much better than a live not lived. However, it is better that we have many more people whose lives are not much above a live not lived, than have those with very high quality of life with limited number. Thus, we have a paradox here called “mere addition paradox” and the problem remains; to find a theory that will be applicable to all situations and acceptable at the same time. We need a theory that will avoid all the other conclusions like, repugnant or absurd. But it is extremely difficult to find a perfect theory, as human mind is fertile and so objections can never be over. So, the search for theory X goes on.

In concluding all the chapters, Parfit accepts that he failed to find a theory that can meet the requirements to solve the non-identity problem, avoid the repugnant conclusion, and solve the mere addition paradox. He argues that our reasons for action should be more impersonal as it will be better for everyone. Even though our acts taken singly are imperceptible, yet together they impose great harm on us and others. For example, pollution, congestion, depletion, inflation, over population etc. “Just as we need thieves to catch thieves, we need impersonal principles to avoid the bad effects of impersonality.” 213 On the reductionist view, persons exist only in ways nations exist, as persons are not fundamental but impersonal. Since there is no further fact, there is no need for special concern of our identity. For Parfit, “what matters is what makes us persons”. 214 It can be said that the unity of one’s live is a matter of degree, and not automatically ensured. We can affect our lives either by giving greater unity to express our values or fulfill our particular desires. We can choose how we want to live and be different from other people, and not just randomly and passively lived our lives. Relation-R makes us specially concern about our own future, even though it is not as strong as those provided by the further fact. To care less about some parts of our future is not irrational, as psychological connectedness is a matter of degree. Also, the classical self-interest theory must also be rejected. Instead, Parfit

213 Ibid., p. 444.
214 Ibid., p. 446.
says “I now care more about the lives of others. I welcome these effects. Metaphysics can produce the consolations of philosophy.”

According to Temkin, the part where Parfit discuss about the future generation contains one of the richest and most profound works in contemporary philosophy as the arguments are original and strike at the core of some of our deepest beliefs. He holds that the title of part four is misleading as the implications of the arguments are more about fundamental implications for moral theory rather than future generations, so he focus more on the former rather than the latter. He discusses the “repugnant conclusion” and the “mere addition paradox” given by Parfit and says that they give profound insight and so they can be considered as one of the most important arguments in contemporary philosophy. Also, “the Repugnant Conclusion forces us to rethink the nature and role of our moral ideals in relation to each other and our all-things-considered judgments…however much more we may care about one ideal relative to another, they play similar roles in all-things-considered judgments.”

Further, just as the repugnant conclusion reveals, as there are upper limits to equality in good situation, there can also be an upper limit to how good a situation can be regarding each of our moral ideals. That is, if we accept that numbers count regarding utility then we will also have to accept that they count regarding equality as well. Temkin goes on to give the main point of the mere addition paradox as “three beliefs that are inconsistent, and imply contradictions.” But even if rationality requires us to give up one of the three claims, each claim seems far more plausible than its denial when considered alone. However Temkin argues that, factors that are relevant and significant in comparing tennis players and those of chess players are not the same, and so we cannot compare a tennis player and a chess player by the same factors. Similarly, relevant and significant factors for comparing A and B regarding \( f \) may be different from those of B and C, or A and C, regarding \( f \). Thus, “knowing how A and B, and B and C, compare regarding \( f \) by itself tells us nothing about how A and C compare regarding \( f \).” The mere addition paradox seems genuinely paradoxical mainly because it compels us towards a view of moral principles which is incompatible with a view to which many seem committed.

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217 Ibid., p. 302.
218 Ibid., p. 306.
Temkin further argue that, if restricting the scope of moral principle or ideal in such a way that it is applicable in some situations but not in others, then we will have different principles which are relevant and significant in comparing alternative situations. This will mean that the notion of “all-things-considered better than” will become intransitive. The importance of transitivity is that it is supposed to help us chose between alternative. If X is better than Y, and Y is better than Z, I can safely choose X over Z. It helps us to choose by eliminating options, if it adds options then it’s not an acceptable form of transitivity. What the mere addition paradox forces us to do is to come to grips with the very nature of our moral ideals. If we accept the mere addition paradox and view the moral ideals as essentially comparative, or accept as having limited scope like Rawls, then we have to reject the transitivity of “all-things-considered better than.” This will have devastating consequences.

However, if we accept that moral ideals cannot be essentially comparative, then we will have to reject some of the most plausible of our deepest moral ideals like equality, person effecting principle and utility and maximin. We will also have to reject the common-sense agent-relative view that special relationships can give rise to relevant factors that rightly influence our all-things-considered judgments. This would have devastating practical consequences as well. Thus, Temkin holds that,

ultimately these arguments may challenge the very intelligibility of a fundamental approach to practical reasoning…they challenge us to rethink our views about the good, the nature and structure of moral ideals, and some of our deepest assumptions about practical reasoning. Perhaps our taking up the challenge will be Parfit’s greatest legacy to future generations.219

2.6 Consequences of Changing Moral Values

Parfit wants us to change our traditional world view from non-reductionism to reductionism, and so he now goes on to give an imagine world where there is no deception. In that world, if someone gains from being trustworthy, then others will also gain and not lose. For example, co-operative forms of industry or agriculture where mutually advantageous agreements are kept to create new benefits at no cost to others. But, if someone gains from being a threat-fulfiller, others may loss. If someone threaten me and I being a threat-ignorer ignore it, and the person fulfill the

219 Ibid., p. 335.
threat and kill me that would be worse for everyone. And if someone gains from being a threat-ignorer, it amounts to avoidance of a loss as being threatened by someone will not matter to the person. This gives rise to the moral implication that – it is better for everyone to become trustworthy. But it will be worse for all if everyone becomes a threat-fulfilling threat-ignorer. So,

If we all become transparently trustworthy, this would be better for everyone. We would rise above the Status Quo (where everyone is both transparent and never self-denying). If we all became transparently threat-fulfillers, this would not be better for everyone. It might be better for some people. These are the people who are naturally weak.²²⁰

Thus, Parfit concludes that, “in a world without deception, it would very probably be better for each of us if he ceased to be never self-denying in at least two ways. It would probably be better for each if he became, and remained, a trustworthy threat-ignorer.”²²¹ And this conclusion is accepted as rational for S (self-interest theory). That is, in cases where we know that we will not be able to act irrationally and where others also find that we will not be acting irrationally, S would tell us to change both our dispositions and beliefs about rationality. As a result, even if we still think irrational to do something that will be worse for oneself, one should believe that such acts are rational when they involve ignoring threats or keeping promises.

Further, Parfit goes on to say that, in case where morality conflicts with self-interest, we do not always choose the latter. There are many cases where a person chooses to do which is morally right even if he/she feels it to be worse for him/her, and this belief cannot be more damaging to morality. Sidgwick holds that in case of morality conflicting with self-interest, we cannot have more reason to follow either. Because to follow one does not mean that to follow the other is irrational, but it is “non-rational”. However, for Parfit, in case of conflict, we are naturally inclined to do that which will best achieve our present aims. We have reasons to follow one and not the other. If the conflict between S and P (present-aim theory) end in draw, then it is more damaging to S. The reason is that S needs to be stronger and more critical in its claim. It is important for S to claim that, it would be irrational for me to do what would best achieve my present aims when I know that this will be worse for me. If

²²⁰ Parfit, 1984: 459.
²²¹ Ibid., p. 460.
this is irrational then I will do that which will be better for me. But if neither act will
be irrational, I will do what will best achieve my present aims, and this applies to all
human being. In other words,

when our desire to act rationally, or to avoid irrationality, does not tell either way, we
shall be more likely to try to do what will best achieve what, at the time, we most
want or value. This is why, in its conflict with the Self-interest Theory, what is
theoretically a draw is, for the Present-aim Theory, in practice victory.222

Parfit further claims that,

Compared with the bias in one’s own favor, there are several other desires or patterns
of concern that are no less rational. And I conclude that, if someone has one of these
desires, it would be no less rational for him to act upon it, even if he knows that this
will be against his own self-interest.223

According to Bentham, “what each person has most reason to do is what will
make him as happy as possible…rested on Hedonistic version of psychological
egoism: the claim that what each person most wants, or would most want in a cool
hour, is to be as happy as possible.”224 But Parfit argues that sometimes we desire to
achieve something which we know are not irrational but at the same time will make
us less happy and give less happiness to others as well. Like, the desire of a scientist
to make some fundamental discovery or a philosopher’s desire to make intellectual
advance of some kind. So, Bentham’s view is rejected, because a discovery of science
or philosophy is a struggle for the scientist or philosopher and it do not always make
other people happy either. So, Parfit claims that, “if we believe that other desires are
no less rational than the bias in one’s own favor, we must in the end reject the Self-
interest Theory.”225 It is implausible to claim that to fulfill all my desires is in my
interests.

Parfit and Thomas Nagel agree in being a Reductionist, they do not think that
personal identity involves the “deep further fact”. But, while Parfit holds that what is
important is Relation R: psychological continuity and connectedness, for Nagel what
is important is personal identity. As he believes that he is his brain, what

222 Ibid., pp. 463-464.
223 Ibid., p. 464.
224 As quoted in Parfit, 1984: 464.
225 Parfit, 1984: 467.
fundamentally matters for him is the continued existence of his brain. For Nagel, when we refer to “I” we are referring to our brain. But for Parfit, even though a person is an entity that has a brain, body, and different experiences, my use of the word “I” refers to myself, a particular person or subject of experience. So, I am not my brain. Another difference is that, for Parfit psychological connectedness is a matter of degree; the less the degree of connectedness are, the less the reward/punishment are. But the continuous existence of our brain throughout our lives is not a matter of degree. Thus, even though persons are not separately existing entities, persons exist. A person is an entity that is distinct from his/her brain, body, and various experiences. And “I” refers to myself, a particular person, or subject of experiences, and I am not my brain.

Parfit further says that,

When we decide that a person is not a separately existing entity, we are not forced to conclude that a person must be either his brain or his whole body. Though nations are not separately existing entities, we are not forced to conclude that a nation must be either its government, or its citizens, or its territory, or all three. A nation is none of these three. And we can refer to nations. Similarly, we are not forced to conclude that a person is his brain, or his whole body. And we can refer to persons...when we use ‘I’ we are trying to refer, not to our brains, but to ourselves. Our brains have one property that we mistakenly believe ourselves to have; but this is not enough to show that, when we try to refer to ourselves, we fail.  

Parfit also rejects Nagel’s view that the word “I” refers to whatever explains my psychological continuity. And as Nagel believes that a person’s brain is necessary for his/her continued existence, “I” refers to one’s brain. This is rejected on the basis that; for example, if I undergo an operation where the surgeon removes the cells in my brain one by one inserting another one in the old one’s place, in one case. In another case, the surgeon removes all the cells together and put whole new cells. Here, Nagel will say that I survive in the first case, because while one cell was removed from my brain other parts were connected to my body. But in the second case, I do not survive because the whole of my brain was taken out from my body. Nagel himself find a bit hard to accept this view, this means that either identity does not matter or we are not our brain. Parfit holds that, in both the cases I will survive as long as I am

\[\text{226 Ibid., pp. 472-473.}\]
psychologically continuous and connected. Even in case of division or fission, by accepting the claim that I am my brain, it will mean that as my brain is divided it supports two lives and so support more abundantly than before. Otherwise, we can claim that identity is not what matter, and in division/fission the resulting persons will have what matters. As long as they have what fundamentally matters for survival, psychological connectedness and/or continuity, with any cause. It means that there are different ways at looking at the issue of identity, and we need not reject Nagel’s view.

Here, Parfit’s claim can be stated as,

Since personal identity over time just consists in the holding of certain other relations, what matters is not identity but some of these other relations. And the logic of identity does not always coincide with what matters. When what matters take a branching form, or holds to intermediate degrees, judgments of identity cannot plausibly be made to correspond with what matters. In these cases we should…simply describe the ways in which, and the degrees to which, these others relations hold. We should then try to decide how much, in different ways, these relations matter.227

Further, Parfit goes on to say that, we are morally responsible for our actions and policies we took today, to the future generations who are not born yet. The reason is that our policies about, say nuclear waste, is morally important because it will affect future generation. These effects are predictable now as the radio-active wastes will remain dangerous for thousands of years to come. However, we can say that, the importance or needs of future generation cannot compel the present generation to make more than certain kinds of sacrifice – it is not morally required. It is more important that the principle of fair distribution is applied – the benefits are fairly shared between different generations. It is therefore important for us to remember that, our actions have permanent effects that could be hazardous for the future generations. Like the destruction of a species, or much of our environment, or the irreplaceable parts of our cultural heritage. We need to be morally aware of these facts and take decisions accordingly, so as not to be termed irrational by future generations.

Parfit further suggest that, we benefit someone by causing the person’s existence. However, it is not bad for possible people if they never become actual people. We are fortunate to exist, but if we were not born it will not be our

227 Ibid., p. 478.
misfortune. If I am saved the moment my life started; I cannot say it does not benefit me to start. This will be like saying – by saving a drowning child I do not benefit the child. And to cause someone to exist is a special case, because if the person has a life worth living then it gives him/her a peculiar benefit. There are different views on what makes someone’s life go best: hedonistic theories say, “What would be best for someone is what would make his life happiest.” Desire-fulfillment theories say, “What would be best for someone is what, throughout his life, would best fulfill his desires.” Objective list theories say, “Certain things are good or bad for us, whether or not we want to have the good things, or to avoid the bad things.”

Parfit further holds that, pain and pleasure have a common relation to our desires. The use of pain has rational and moral significance as all pains are unwanted, the greater the pain the more it is unwanted. Similarly, the more the pleasure is the more it is wanted. It is also important to consider the desires and preferences a person would have in various alternative given to him/her. It could be the cases that some alternative life would have been better for a person, even if the person never regrets that he/she had chosen his/her present life. For Parfit,

What is good for someone is neither just what Hedonists claim, nor just what is claimed by Objective List Theorists. We might believe that if we had either of these, without the other, what we had would have little or no value. We might claim, for example, that what is good or bad for someone is to have knowledge, to be engaged in rational activity, to experience mutual love, and to be aware of beauty, while strongly wanting just these things. On this view, each side in this disagreement saw only half the truth. Each put forward as sufficient something that was only necessary. Pleasure with many other kinds of object has no value. And, if they are entirely devoid of pleasure, there is no value in knowledge, rational activity, love, or the awareness of beauty. What is of value, or is good for someone, is to have both; to be engaged in these activities, and to strongly wanting to be so engaged.

Conclusion

After all the discussions are over, what stands out clear is the fact that Parfit’s account on personal identity is too strong to accept as a whole. His brand of reductionism is too strong to accept from a normal person’s point of view; as this

228 All of these quotes are found in, Parfit, 1984: 493.
229 Ibid., p. 502.
account is the foundation of all the other theories he propounded, it is very crucial whether we agree with him or not. One reason for being skeptical about his position is that the many often deceptively convincing examples he provides are mainly science fictions, like - teletransportation, division/fission, etc. The problem with such examples is that they do not happen normally in our day-to-day life till now. So, even though they are interesting, it is very difficult to accept that it will happen in reality during our lifetime. From all these examples, Parfit goes on to reduced the importance of personal identity to nothing more than “relation-R” and claim that only “relation-R” matters, and not personal identity.

Here, we can say that we agree with the way he argues against the traditional view on the importance of personal identity. That is, the continuity of either only body or only brain as a necessary and sufficient condition to claim a person’s identity over time. However, it is difficult to accept that nothing else matters apart from “relation-R”. If we accept this view, the consequence can be very different from what we know for our moral life, and ultimately for society. If I know that a person who will exist five years from now may not be this body, but someone whom I am connected through “relation-R”, then I may not be very worried about the outcome of my wrong action now. At the same time I may not go out of my comfort zone to do good things either, as the outcome of this good work will be reaped by some other body-person. This fact itself makes Parfit’s theory difficult to accept as a whole.

Further, even if we accept the unimportance of bodily continuity in personal identity, it becomes very difficult to go to the extent of saying any kind of psychological continuity or connectedness is the same as normal or ordinary survival. It will be very difficult to, for instance, accept my mother’s replica as the same with my mother. Even if they are psychologically connected, the fact remains that the replica did not give birth to me. This is not to say that Parfit’s imagined cases are not acceptable at all. They enable us to cross the realm of the given and show us what could have happen in different circumstances and times. But it becomes very difficult to change the beliefs that have been accepted for so many generations.

Also, I think part-three of Reasons and Persons provide the basis of all the theories in the whole book and so is the most important part. The change in views on personal identity will have repercussions in all the other views put forth in the other
chapters. Whether it is his views on moral theories, theories on future generations, or theories of rationality, all depend upon his theory of personal identity. We cannot say that our view on personal identity will not affect views on other theories. Another important point is that, just by becoming a reductionist, I do not believe that we will become more relaxed about matters of survival. This is because the imagined case given by Parfit happens very rarely; most probably we may never come across such kinds of situations. Like my clone or replica that will take over my life after I died. Even in case they do come true, it will take some more persuasion, discussion, arguments etc. to influence other people. Similarly, it is a bit difficult to accept case like “teletransportation”, even if my replica did fulfill my plans it will be of little comfort to me as I will not be there to enjoy the success.

We must be clear here that we are not rejecting Parfit’s view entirely, but the notion of “relation-R” is a bit difficult to accept. The repercussions on our moral responsibility could be very different from what we know now if we accept this “strong” reductionist view. We want to put forth a milder version, something like P.F Strawson’s “concept of person” which is a primitive concept and is different from body or brain. We are not clear yet on how exactly we should go about developing this concept, but one thing is for sure that the relationship between personal identity and moral responsibility will not be radically altered. What we believe our identity consists in will ultimately influence how we look at our moral responsibility. Therefore, we would try and come up with a suggestion that will take us nearer to what “ought” to be the kind of relationship shared by personal identity and moral responsibility. This is our ultimate aim and we will be looking from different perspective in the remaining chapters. In the next chapter we will be dealing with the relationship shared between personhood and moral responsibility. It is important to move on to this topic because the role of moral responsibility in shaping our personal identity cannot be over-emphasized. What kind of a person we are is the result of nature and nurture, and without one the other cannot complete us. So, we will now look into the role of moral responsibility in our lives and how we decide the importance of these moral laws/rules will also be looked into in details.