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Universidad del Zulia
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Does Continuity of The Body Determine Personal Identity?

Gabriel Andrade
Ajman University, United Arab Emirates
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8053-072X

Abstract

Philosophers have long asked a fundamental metaphysical question: by what criterion can a person persist in her identity? The most common-sense criterion is the body, according to which, a person persists in her identity, if and only if the same body is preserved. Despite its intuitive appeal, this position brings forth many interesting philosophical questions. Some interesting thought experiments, such as the ship of Theseus, can shed light on the adequateness of the body criterion. Yet, other thought experiments, mostly derived from Derek Parfit's philosophy, invite further thought about the adequateness of the body as criterion for personal identity. This article examines these questions.

Keywords: Personal Identity; Body Criterion; Ship of Theseus; Derek Parfit

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1. The body criterion for personal identity: a commonsensical view

Philosophers commonly make a distinction between two types of identity (Wolfram, 1989: 209). The first type, "qualitative identity", is about the relationship between two entities that share the same qualities. Two football teammates wear uniform shirts. We may say that these shirts are qualitatively identical, although each teammate has a separate shirt.

The second type is "numerical identity", and it is a stronger relationship. An entity is numerically identical to another when they exhaustively share properties at the same time. In the case above, both shirts are not numerically identical, because one is worn by a player, and the other is worn by another player. In order for them to be numerically identical, everything we predicate of one, must also be predicated of the other. Joseph Ratzinger and Benedict XVI are numerically identical because, indeed, everything that we predicate of one, can be predicated of the other.

Numerical identity brings forth a philosophical problem, especially when we consider personal identity. Persons undergo changes, yet, they remain numerically the same throughout their existence. A boy may grow into an adult, but numerically the boy and the adult remain the same person in terms of numerical identity (as in the case of Ratzinger and Benedict XVI). The philosophical question is: by what criterion does one person remain numerically the same entity from one moment to the other? Or, alternatively, we may ask: how does a person retain her essence despite changes?

Common sense would tell us that the corporeal criterion is the most plausible approach. When we see some friend in the street, we do so by observing some physical characteristic. If, for example, we are summoned to a High School reunion, we will probably remember our classmates based on how our memories recall their physical features. If some friend from childhood had freckles and green eyes, twenty years later we will recognize her by spotting these same features. It is, indeed, the daily maneuver of face recognition.

In judicial systems (in which the recognition of persons is most important), the body criterion is standard. Let us suppose, for example, that a thief is captured by the police and taken to jail. When the victim is asked to identify the thief (amongst other suspects), how will she be able to do it? Most likely, she will do it by observing the physical attributes. In other words, the victim will identify the body of the thief with the body of one the suspects. She will not need to talk to one of the candidates to know about their thoughts, and thus identify the criminal. Just contemplating the body will be enough.

The body criterion for personal identity, then, postulates that a person in a given moment is the same person in a different moment, if and only if, conserves the same

body. Let us insist: this criterion permeates everyday life. Consider another example: a man commits a murder, and leaves his fingerprints in the scene of the crime. As it is known, fingerprints are unique, and so far, no two persons have the same fingerprints. Based on these fingerprints, the man is caught and taken to trial. In the trial, his lawyer claims that, indeed, the fingerprints match, but his client is not the murderer. According to the lawyer, his client is not the same person as the murderer because his soul (or his mind) was not embodied in the murderer's body at the time of the crime. Perhaps, some demon took his client's body, and committed the crime with that body.

In this case, the lawyer would be assuming that the criterion for personal identity is not the body, for in the case of his client, even if the murderer's body is the same as his client's, it is still not the same person. Would the jury accept this argument? Absolutely not. Common sense dictates that, if the murderer's fingerprints match the fingerprints of the defendant, the he should be declared guilty. Therefore, the body criterion for personal identity would prevail in the trial. In fact, every other modern institution having to do with personal identity, relies on a body criterion: ID cards, etc. If the body were not the criterion for personal identity, then there would be no need to include pictures in IDs.

2. How do bodies preserve their identity?: the ship of Theseus

Under the body criterion, then, a person in a given time remains the same in another time, if and only if, preserves the same body. But, what exactly does "preserve the same body" mean? Material objects (of which the human body is one kind) go through some transformations, some of which do not alter identity. Yet other changes do alter identity.

A chair, for example, can undergo some transformations, and yet, it would still be the same chair. The cushion can be changed, it can be polished, and so on, but it would still remain the same. In this case, changes do not alter identity. But, consider a mass of clay. If we give the clay the shape of a statue, the object will cease to be a mere mass, and it will become a statue. In this case, transformations do alter identity.

Nevertheless, there are some cases where we may not be so sure if, indeed, the object's identity persists after some transformations. Derek Parfit (1984:203) exhorted to think about a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. This is a significant transformation. We must ask: is the caterpillar numerically identical to the butterfly? It appears so. If, indeed, the caterpillar is numerically identical to the butterfly, then how can it survive such significant changes? If, on the contrary, the caterpillar is not numerically identical to the butterfly, then in what precise moment did the caterpillar cease to exist, and the butterfly begin to exist?

Ancient philosophers wondered about this problem, and Plutarch told a story about it (Cuddy, 2011:5). Upon returning from Crete, the ship of Theseus was conserved by the Athenians. But, in order to preserve the ship. The Athenians had to replace its parts. There came a time, however, when all pieces of the ship were replaced, to the point that there were no original ones remaining. Ever since, philosophers have wondered: is it the same ship?

The parallel of the ship of Theseus with the human body is obvious. The number of atoms that make up the human body is vast. But, even with that size, metabolic function requires the body to recycle all atoms every ten years. In other words, a human body right now probably does not have the same atoms (probably, none) that it had ten years ago. Very much as with the ship of Theseus, we must ask: even if the totality of its parts has been replaced, is it still the same body? If, based on the body criterion, one person at a given moment remains the same at another moment, if and only if, conserves the same body; then we need to find out how, even with all its atoms replaced, the human body remains the same.

In order to address this issue, we must go back to the original question: is the ship of Theseus the same? If so, how can it remain the same despite the transformations? If not, when did the ship of Theseus cease to exist?

The most common intuition is that the ship remains the same, as long as some conditions are met. Generally, the appeal to the conservation of form is most common: even if the totality of the constituent original pieces have been replaces, the ship may still be the same if the new pieces are organized in such a way that the shape of the ship is preserved. Ever since Plato and Aristotle, philosophers have trusted the notion that form, above matter, is the definite criterion to determine the essence of entities. Thus, if an entity modifies its matter, it can still preserve its essence; but if the entity modifies its form, it is difficult to understand how it can preserve its essence and numerical identity.

The ship of Theseus has a particular form, given its dimension, design, the organization of its parts, and so on. If in the replacement of its parts, we conserve the same attributes that define shape, then we may affirm that it is still the same ship. If, on the contrary, the matter is preserved, but the form is altered, then we could no longer affirm that it is the same ship. For example, we could dismantle the ship of Theseus, and with the same pieces, a log cabin could be built. In that case, we would have a cabin made with the same pieces as the ship of Theseus. Would this cabin be identical to the ship of Theseus? Obviously not, and the criterion to reach this conclusion is simple: even if the original matter was preserved, form was not preserved. The cabin is made of the same pieces as the ship of Theseus, but these pieces are organized differently.

However, we should still wonder if the ship of Theseus could resist some changes in its form, and yet remain the same. Let us suppose that upon replacing the front part of the ship, the new part is lightly bigger, and perhaps its new design could be slightly different. Would it still be the same ship? It seems so: a minor alteration in size or design is not enough to claim that we no longer have the ship of Theseus. They would certainly be transformations, but they are not sufficiently big to alter the ship's identity.

But, what happens when these transformations in form accumulate? Suppose that every time a piece is replaced, the new piece is slightly larger. With these transformations, eventually, the ship of Theseus could resemble more a huge ship such as the Titanic. And of course, if the ship of Theseus ends up resembling the Titanic, then it would no longer be the ship of Theseus. Although many formal changes do not seem sufficient to alter the identity of the ship, the accumulation of these changes do seem sufficient to alter the identity. But then again, the difficulty comes up in trying to be precise as to when, exactly, the ship of Theseus ceased to exist and became something else.

A minor transformation does not alter the identity of the ship, but ten million transformations in form (even if very light transformations) could very well alter it. Yet, if one light transformation does not alter the identity, then two light transformations will not do so, either. Neither will three, four… and we could go on to ten million transformations. Yet, it is absurd to think that ten million transformations in the form of an entity do not alter its numerical identity.

With this, we face a paradox, long ago reflected upon by Eubilides (Williamson 1996). Two of Eubilides' paradoxes are relevant when considering the alteration or the preservation of the numerical identity of the ship of Theseus. The first of this paradox is the so-called *sorites* paradox (from the Greek word meaning "heap"). A grain of sand does not make a heap, and it seems that one additional grain makes no difference between a heap and a non-heap. Thus, if another grain is added, it would still not be a heap. But, we could keep adding grains, until we reach one hundred million grains. Yet, we know that one hundred million grains do make a heap, so by adding grains to the initial one, there will be a time when we will indeed be in the presence of a heap.

Eubilides also considered a bald man: a man with the head full of hairs is obviously not bald. If we take away one single hair, he is still not bald. If we take away two hairs, he would still not be bald. But, if we keep going on, there will be a time when that man will indeed be bald. The paradox is about knowing at what precise moment the man begins to be bald. If, for example, we say that a man becomes bald when we remove 6592 hairs, then we must wonder why not 6591 or 6593, if indeed, one single hair does not make a difference between being bald and not being bald.

Derek Parfit (1984:232) realized the importance of this problem: "We know that the concept of a heap is vague, with vague borderlines. And when the Sorites Argument is applied to heaps, we are happy to solve the problem with a *stipulation:* an arbitrary decision about how to use the word 'heap'". The paradox is about the vagueness of terms. What does the word "bald" (or "heap") exactly mean? Is "bald" a reality, or just a mere convention of language that attempts to approximate reality, but it can never do so satisfactorily? Some philosophers (Williamson 1996) believe that, indeed, "bald" is only a vague word without a precise reference; if we really want to use precise language, we would avoid words such as "bald", and we would prefer to describe persons specifying how many hairs they have. Needless to say, this would make effective language use very difficult, for all languages have vague concepts. In the case of the ship of Theseus, for example, the word "same" seems to be vague, for the same reasons that "bald" is vague; yet we seem to be forced to use this word when making a reference to identity.

Some philosophers also recommend the use of diffuse logic (Pinkal, 2013: 160) as a solution to the *sorites* paradox. Traditional logic relies on the principle of the excluded middle (i.e., a proposition is either true or false). But, in diffuse logic, this principle is ignored, and the truth value assigned to a proposition could be intermediate. When describing John, we could say that he is slightly bald, moderately bald, very bald, completely bald, and so on.

Yet, this does not seem to take us very far, for we would still have to set the precise limit between being "moderately bald" and being "very bald". If we establish an intermediate category between these two terms, then we would have to establish yet another category between the two new terms, and so on *ad infinitum.*

Other philosophers do believe that there is an objective difference between being bald and being non-bald, but we just do not know the precise limit (Williamson, 2000). Perhaps this is the most persuasive alternative, but it seems to eliminate the prospects for a precise language.

Be that as it may, the sorites paradox has no easy solution. Perhaps we may just have to learn how to live with it. If so, then for the case of the ship of Theseus, we would not know precisely at what point the accumulation of changes in form alters the numerical identity of the ship.

We could attempt to solve this problem by proposing that the ship of Theseus would remain the same, if and only if, its transformations were only accidental, but not essential. Aristotle's metaphysics addresses this issue; in his view, essence is the set of attributes that define the entity, whereas accidents are the set of attributes whose transformations do not alter the numerical identity of the entity.

But this alternative does not take us very far, for it seems to be just circular. Even if we admit that numerical identity is preserved with accidental but not essential changes, we would still have to clarify where does the accidental change end, and where does the essential change begin. This distinction would precisely allow us to establish how the identity of the ship of Theseus is preserved.

For now, then, we may assume that the preciseness about when the accumulation of changes in form alter the identity of the ship of Theseus, remains a mystery. Even if we accept that some changes do not alter the identity of the ship of Theseus, it does seem necessary that these changes be gradual. If, for example, in a period of ten minutes, all pieces are replaced, it does not seem legitimate to accept that it is still the same ship. Persistence of identity requires gradualism.

But then again, how gradual? Would the ship of Theseus retain its numerical identity if a piece were replaced every five years? What about one piece every year? One per week? One per minute? Once again, we face the sorites paradox. But, given the difficulty in addressing this paradox, for now, we can ignore this problem, and assume that gradualism is a necessary condition for the preservation of numerical identity.

Taking this into consideration, we may admit that, even with material changes, the ship of Theseus conserves its identity, as long as the changes are gradual. Indeed, up to the 17th Century, this was how the majority of philosophers attempted to solve the problem. However, in the 17th Century, Thomas Hobbes added a twist to the discussion (Tittle, 2016: 78), and made the problem more complex. Let us suppose that, as the pieces of the ship are being replaced, some sea captain stores the old pieces. And, once all original pieces of the ship have been replaced, the captain decides to assemble the old pieces, in exactly the same form as the original ship of Theseus. In this scenario, there would be two ships: one with the new pieces that gradually modified the old ones without altering its form, and another one with the original pieces organized in the form of the ship. Which of the two is the ship of Theseus?

Until now, we had admitted that the ship with the replaced parts could still be the ship of Theseus. But now, we have a ship with the same matter and the same form as the original ship. They cannot both be the ship of Theseus, as identity is ruled by transitivity: if A is identical to B, and B is identical to C, then A must be identical to C. Under this principle, if the ship with the replaced pieces is identical to the ship of Theseus, and the ship with the original pieces is also identical to the ship of Theseus, then the ship with the replaced pieces is identical to the ship with the original pieces. But, this is absurd. Both ships are clearly numerically different.

If both ships cannot be the ship of Theseus at the same time, then which one is? The ship with the original pieces has the same form and the same matter, and in that sense, it would seem to be a better candidate; whereas the other ship has the same form, but not the same matter. Yet, we could consider another condition that seems more relevant: spatiotemporal continuity.

In order for the ship of Theseus to preserve its numerical identity, its transformations must be gradual, it must preserve its form, and we may now add a third condition: it must preserve its existence throughout time and space. In other words, there must be no interruptions in its existence. Under this criterion, the ship with the original pieces would still not be the ship of Theseus, because even if preserves the original form and matter, it did not maintain spatiotemporal continuity.

Peter Van Inwagen (1995: 138) presents a persuasive example. Suppose a child builds a tower with blocks, and his father accidentally destroys it. The boy loudly cries because his original tower was destroyed, and the father, in desperation, reconstructs it, in the same form and with the same block as the child did. Would the child be playing now with the same tower he built? It does not seem to be the case. Even though it has the same form and the same matter, that particular tower ceased to exist, and then the father built a new one. Inasmuch as it ceased to exist, spatiotemporal continuity was lost, and as a result, numerical identity has not been preserved.

Appealing to spatiotemporal continuity, however, presents an additional problem. It does not seem absolutely clear that spatiotemporal continuity is more relevant than the preservation of form and matter. Our intuitions about it are not altogether clear, and we may have doubts about which of the ships is actually the ship of Theseus. Indeed, we may question the relevance of spatiotemporal continuity when it comes to identity.

Consider, for example, a bicycle that is exhibited in a store window. A person buys the bicycle, and then, in order to take it home, she must dismantle the parts and put them in a box. Once home, the person takes the parts from the box, reassembles the bicycle, and now rides it. Is this bicycle the same as the one that the person bought in the store? If we appeal to spatiotemporal continuity, then no, the bicycle the person is riding is not the identical to the one she bought at the store. For, the bicycle ceased to exist the moments its parts were dismantled. When its parts were reassembled, it would no longer be the same bicycle, because there was a period of interruption in its existence.

Some philosophers may be willing to accept this conclusion, but it is very counterintuitive, and indeed, most people reject it. According to this intuition, spatiotemporal continuity is not a requisite for spatiotemporal continuity. Yet, if we

go back to the example of the tower and the blocks, intuition seems to indicate that, in that case, spatiotemporal continuity is indeed relevant. What makes one case different from the other? It is hard to tell, and indeed, in philosophical discussions, this seems to remain a mystery.

There may yet be another way to approach the puzzle of the ship of Theseus. It seems strange that a ship that preserves the same matter and form would not be identical to the original ship of Theseus. But, perhaps it could be identical, as long as there are no other candidates. Under this condition, if the ship's parts are stored and reassembled in the original form, it would be identical to the original ship of Theseus, provided there is no other ship that preserves the original form and maintains spatiotemporal continuity.

This proposed solution, known as the "closest continuer theory", was formulated by Robert Nozick (1981). Some philosophers embrace it, yet it too seems counterintuitive. In this view, identity would not depend on the intrinsic properties of the entity. It depends on the inexistence of another entity. Suppose we decide the ship with spatiotemporal continuity but without the original parts, is actually the same as the ship of Theseus. And then suppose, that ship is suddenly consumed by fire. Would that allow us to say, then, that inasmuch as now there is no other contender, the other ship (the one with the original parts but without spatiotemporal continuity) is now identical to the ship of Theseus, although it previously was not? It does not seem plausible. The numerical identity of an entity seems to depend on the intrinsic properties of that entity, and not on the existence or inexistence of another entity.

With so many difficulties deciding how the ship of Theseus remains the same, some other philosophers have even proposed a radical solution: entities do not survive changes. So far, our discussion has been about how to distinguish essence and accidents. But, we could hold the view that there is no difference between essence and accidents, but instead, the essence covers the whole of an entity's attributes. This position is frequently called "mereological essentialism" (Chisholm, 2002).

In this view, any change alters the numerical identity, because an entity's identity is made up of the totality of its parts. Thus, at the very moment that one of the parts of the ship of Theseus was replaced, it ceased to exist, and a new ship began its existence. This, of course, would not happen only with the ship of Theseus, but with any other object that suffers any change.

This is very counterintuitive. We routinely assume that entities do survive despite changes. But, as previously mentioned, some philosophers do subscribe this view. Roderick Chisholm, for example, was aware that in our everyday lives, mereological essentialism is extremely hard to accept. But Chisholm believed a distinction should

be made between the plain meaning of identity, and the philosophical one. In common parlance, we may all assume that when one of the parts of the ship of Theseus is removed, it still remains the original ship of Theseus. But, if we are to perform a formal philosophical analysis, Chisholm believed we should embrace mereological essentialism.

Be that as it may, the jury is still out about how a material object preserves its identity, if at all. The body criterion for personal identity is very problematic, because the human body functions very much as the ship of Theseus. We assume that the body preserves its numerical identity despite changes, but we are unable to offer a specific criterion about how this is possible. Perhaps this problematic aspect of the body criterion should be reason enough to reject it. Yet, even if we optimally solve the problem of the ship of Theseus, and somehow manage to affirm that the human body remains numerically the same despite some changes, there are still some thought experiments that raise doubts about the appropriateness of the body as criterion for personal identity.

3. Brain transplants

As with the ship of Theseus, the human body totally replaces its constituent parts. It maintains spatiotemporal continuity, but these transformations do seem to alter its form, inasmuch as the form of a ten year old boy's body is different from that of an adult; nevertheless, we may assume that these changes are not sufficiently drastic so as to alter the identity of the body. And, inasmuch as the identity of the body is not altered by those changes, then we may assume that the person remains the same, as long as we assume the body criterion for personal identity.

But, even if we reject mereological essentialism, and accept that the body, just as any other material object, is capable of retaining its identity despite changes, there are still other problems to take into account. Consider, for example, organ transplantation. We have already assumed that, even is the ship of Theseus replaces its parts, it may still retain its identity. The same thing happens with the replacement of atoms in the human body. What about the replacement, not just of atoms, but of organs? It seems like the replacement of organs is more significant than the mere replacement of atoms as part of metabolism; yet, organ transplants do not seem to alter the identity. A person that loses a limb does not cease in its existence. If Peter has defective kidneys, and receives a transplant from his brother, he will still be Peter, even with his brother's kidney. The same can be said of many other types of transplants: lung, heart, skin, liver, etc.

But, what about brain transplants? This is surely the realm of science fiction, but up to relatively recent times, kidney transplants were also fictional. We should not rule out that, in the not-too-distant future, brain transplants will be available. By considering brain transplants, we may put to test our intuitions about the reliability of the body as a criterion for personal identity.

Sydney Shoemaker (2003: 43) was the first philosopher to think about the implications of brain transplants. Suppose Mr. Brown and Mr. Robinson both have a brain tumor, and they undergo surgery to remove the tumors. Both brains must be extracted from the respective skulls. Unfortunately, the surgeon has a lapse, and puts Brown's brain in Robinson's skull, and Robinson's brain in Brown's skull. As a result, one of the two persons dies, but the person with Robinson's body and Brown's head survives. For convenience's sake, let us call this person Brownson. The question is, who is Brownson? Which of the two persons (Brown and Robinson) is Brownson numerically identical to?

If we follow the body criterion if identity, then Brownson is identical to Robinson, as almost every original organ belonging to Robinson is present in that body. Granted, the brain is Brown's, but that is only one organ, compared to the many others that originally belonged to Robinson. When considering the ship of Theseus, we assumed that as long as spatiotemporal continuity is preserved, the identity of the material object is not altered. In that case, Robinson's body underwent a minor substitution, but it is still the same body, and therefore, Brownson is Robinson.

Yet, upon recovering from the surgery, if we ask Brownson who he is, what will he reply? He will surely answer that he is Brown. If we ask him about details of his life, he will talk about Brown's infancy. We now know that consciousness is hosted in the brain. And even if Brownson may have almost all organs of Robinson's body, he still has Brown's consciousness. Brownson has the same stomach as Robinson, and for that reason, Brownson's digestion is the same as Robinson's. But, Brownson has Brown's brain, and therefore, his mind is the same as Brown's.

Is the stomach as relevant as the brain when it comes to the preservation of personal identity? Is digestion as crucial as consciousness, when it comes to criteria for personal identity? Intuition steps in and indicates that it is not. It seems that, even if Brownson has almost all organs of Robinson's body, Brownson is still Brown. For, inasmuch as he has Brown's brain, Brownson has Brown's mind. Digestion is not as relevant as consciousness when determining a criterion for personal identity.

Faced with the challenge of this thought experiment, the defender of the body criterion for personal identity may be willing to modify her views. Now, the criterion for personal identity is not the body itself, but rather, just the brain. One person will preserve her numerical personal identity, if and only if, she conserves the same brain.

But, further thought experiments may even put this criterion in doubt. Bernard Williams (1976: 79) proposed thinking about the following situation: due to some science-fiction technology, the whole of Brown's brain is emulated in an artificial brain. Brown dies, but his brain's information has been stored in the artificial brain. Then, Robinson undergoes a surgery, and accidentally, all his memories go away. The surgeon tries to come up with a solution: he takes Brown's memories stored in the artificial brain, and implants them in Robinson's brain. Again, let us call this person Brownson. Who would Brownson be?

If we allow the slight modification previously mentioned and accept the brain as the sole criterion for personal identity, we would conclude that inasmuch as Brownson retains Robinson's brain, then Brownson is Robinson. But then again, upon asking Brownson who he is, he will surely reply he is Brown, and will elicit memories of Brown. This seems to prove that, indeed, the brain cannot be optimally considered the criterion of personal identity. For, in this case, the person has the brain of Robinson, but he would behave and think as Brown.

4. Enter Derek Parfit

Parfit (1995: 179) has pointed out that he first became interested in discussions of personal identity, as a result of David Wiggin's *Identity and Spatiotemporal Continuity* (1967). In that book, cases of split brain patients are discussed. As it is well known, the brain is made up of two hemispheres. It is popularly believed that each hemisphere is in charge of particular cognitive functions. This is true to a certain extent. For example, the left hemisphere controls processes having to do with linear reasoning, language, and mathematical abilities. The right hemisphere is in charge of face recognition, language tone, and creativity. Indeed, it has been proven that, whenever one of the hemispheres is either injured or removed, some of the skills that derive from that particular hemisphere, are altered.

But it is also true that in the common understanding of people, this division has been exaggerated. Surprisingly, the loss or injury of a hemisphere can be alleviated or even totally replaced by the other hemisphere. Indeed, some patients have had part of one hemisphere removed, and yet, they seem to retain most of their conscious mind.

This sets up an intriguing possibility for the future: brain fission. Again, very much as in Shoemaker's examples, this may all be science fiction, but we should not assume it is in the distant future. If, today, some patients are capable of living and preserving their consciousness with only a portion of their brain, then maybe in the future the will be able to survive with only one hemisphere. If this becomes a reality,

then brains could theoretically be divided in two, and yet, keep functioning.

Parfit had been paying attention to metaphysical problems of fission in some of his works. He was intrigued by amoebas. As part of asexual reproduction, amoebas go through fission, and one single amoeba becomes two that are qualitatively identical. Of course, they could not be numerically identical, but Parfit wondered which of the two new amoebas is numerically identical to the original one.

The same question could be asked about brains. Again, suppose Brownson is a person, and for some strange reason, his brain is split in two, and each half is put in two different bodies. As a result, we would have two new persons (let us just call them A and B). Which one of them is identical to Brownson? Both of them would report Brownson's memories, cognitive abilities, and so on.

Any choice (either A or B) would be arbitrary. There is nothing intrinsic to either the fight hemisphere or the left hemisphere, to privilege one person over the other, when deciding who the continuer of Brownson is. We could decide that Brownson is A and B at the same time. But, we come back to the same difficulty we encountered when considering the ship of Theseus. The transitivity principle of identity does not allow us to assume that Brownson is both A and B. Let us recall that, according to the transitivity principle, if A is identical to C, and B is identical to C, then A is identical to B. In this case, A would be identical to Brownson; B would be identical to Brownson, therefore, A and B are identical. But this clearly cannot be the case. After the brain fission, A and B are separate persons. Even if they may share the same mental contents, they are not numerically identical, for not everything that can be predicated about A, can be predicated about B. At least in terms of spatial localizing, they hold different properties.

We could also argue that, after the brain fission, neither A nor B is identical to Brownson. After the fission, they become new persons, and somehow, Brownson ceases to exist. This would solve the problem of arbitrariness when deciding who is identical to Brownson. But then, a new problem arises. If we decide that, after the fission, neither A nor B is Brownson, then we would be denying that, were Brownson to lose one of his hemispheres, he would cease to exist. As previously mentioned, brain fission today is still theoretical, but it is nevertheless true that some patients lose part of one of their hemisphere, and yet, remain the same person. If we claim that if Brownson loses one of his brain hemispheres, he would retain Brownson's mind, but he would no longer be Brownson. This, again, is very counterintuitive.

We could come around this problem by arguing that if Brownson loses half of his brain, he remains the same person. But, if upon dividing his brain, each half is placed in two different bodies, then none of the resulting persons (A and B) are

identical to Brownson. In this manner, the identity of the brain is preserved if only one of the halves survives. If both halves survive, then none of them would be identical to the original brain. In other words, one half brain would be identical to the original, as long as there is no rival half brain that may claim continuity to the original brain.

Again, Robert Nozick's "closest continuer theory" (Nozick, 1978) may offer a solution to this problem. Let's recall that according to this theory, a person may conserve identity despite changes, as long as it is the closest continuer; i.e., there must be no other contenders to be considered as continuer of identity.

In this view, going back to the early example of bran fission, Brownson would be neither A nor B. But, if in the brain fission, the left hemisphere somehow was lost and A would not have come to exist, then B would indeed be Brownson. This identity relationship would be preserved if and only if, there is no other rival candidate legitimately claiming to be Brownson.

We should raise the same criticism that we came up, when discussing this theory in the case of the ship of Theseus. The implication of the closest continuer theory is that the criterion of identity does not lay on the intrinsic properties of the object, but rather, on the extrinsic ones. This is very counter intuitive, as the continuity of a person's existence should not depend on whether another person exists. Under Nozick's theory, if Brownson's brain is split in two, then all A has to do in order to survive as Brownson, is to kill B. It is very strange that an act of killing can somehow determine that some entity retains its numerical identity. Again, whether or not an entity continues to exist, depends on the intrinsic properties of that entity, and not on whether or not an additional entity exists.

Parfit (1984: 273) originally wondered how brain fissions would alter personal identity, because he wanted to first question any criterion of personal identity based on the body. Shoemaker had already raised doubts about the suitability of the body as a criterion. It was then thought that perhaps the brain could serve as a criterion. But, Parfit's introduction of the cases of amoebas (and as an extension, brain fissions) shattered any hope that the brain should also be considered a warrant of personal identity. All the major difficulties in answering who would be the continuer of a brain split in two, raised the prospect that, perhaps, neither the body nor the brain can be optimal criteria for personal identity.

Indeed, ever since Locke, many philosophers doubted that the body could be used as a criterion for personal identity. Locke famously argued that if the minds of a clobber and a prince were swapped, their personal identities would no longer be determined by their bodies. The person that would wake up one day with the body of the prince, but the mind of the cobbler, would still be the cobbler. The mind, and not

the body, is the real criterion of personal identity.

It would seem that Parfit's challenge of the body criterion was actually a reaffirmation of Locke's original views. For, if the body is not the best criterion for personal identity, then what is? It seems we would only be left with the mind. But perhaps the most famous of all Parfit's thought experiments and arguments is a rebuttal of the criterion for personal identity based on the mind (Parfit, 1984: 199).

Suppose, as in the *Star Trek* universe, that someone is teletransported to another galaxy. In this procedure, the person enters a booth, her entire body would be reproduced in another galaxy, and the original body would be painlessly destroyed. According to the body criterion, the person coming out in the other galaxy would not be identical to the one who went into the booth, because spatiotemporal continuity was lost. But, according to the mind criterion, it would indeed be the same person, as the mental contents are identical.

Yet, Parfit adds a twist to this scenario: suppose instead of reproducing one, the teletransporter reproduces two bodies in the faraway galaxy. Who is identical to the person that existed before going inside the booth? Parfit's thought experiment is yet another variant of the brain fission scenario. This time, it is not one brain that is split and becomes two, but rather, one mind that is reproduced, and now becomes two.

As with the body criterion, Parfit put his finger on the difficulties of the mind as a criterion for personal identity. Ultimately, he believed that the very notion of personal identity is at best incoherent, precisely because of all the troubles we through in trying to define it and pinpoint a criterion for it. To a certain extent, Parfit arrived at a conclusion not altogether dissimilar from the "mereological essentialism" previously discussed when considering the ship of Theseus. Parfit was insistent that personal identity does not persist throughout time, and in fact, there is no such thing as a self, just a bundle of impressions and thoughts.

This is how Parfit concluded that "identity doesn't matter". A person should not be concerned with her existence in the future, because alas, that person in the future will not be identical to the person now. For survival, identity does not matter. Only psychological continuity does.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the body criterion of personal identity is perhaps the most commonsensical one, and that is why most modern nations use picture ID cards. Part of Parfit's greatness as a philosopher was to challenge common sense with his ingenious arguments and thought experiments. And, precisely, for the case of pictures, he would have argued that, when I take a look at a picture of my national ID card taken a couple of years ago, the person represented in the picture is not truly me. I may have psychological continuity with that person, but I am not identical to him.

If that person in the past is not identical to my current self in the present, then by the same token, my current self will not be identical to the person that will have my same national ID number in the future. That being the case, then I should be more concerned about the welfare of the greatest number of people in the present, than about the welfare of the person with my same national ID number in the future. For this very reason, Parfit (1984: 127) believed egoism is an irrational ethical doctrine, and he developed this view at length throughout his work.

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