

The Closest Continuer View Revisited

Marc Slors

Research Fellow of the Royal Netherlands
Academy of the Arts and Sciences

Many theories of personal identity allow for the metaphysical possibility of fission. In 1981 Nozick proposed a theory of personal identity called 'the closest continuer view' (CCV) that denies fission of persons but allows fission of human beings. CCV may thus appear to reduce 'person' to a nonmetaphysical, practical notion. Against this, I argue that CCV is an externalist metaphysical theory that purports to solve a problem that is insurmountable within the confines of an internalist metaphysics of personal identity.

1. Introduction

From the late 50's and early 60's onwards one of the main concerns in the debate over the metaphysics of personal identity was the fact that many theories of personal identity seemed to allow for the science fiction scenario of one person 'splitting up' into two (Williams 1956-7, Shoemaker 1963). This possibility, known as fission, is likely to clash with the metaphysical intuitions of most people, but it certainly clashes with our everyday legal and moral practice. Consider the following cases: When one person becomes two, who will own the original person's property, who will be married to the original person's spouse, who should we hold responsible for crimes committed by the original person, etc. etc. Rhetorical questions such as these make it absolutely clear that our practice is based on the assumption that one person can only continue as one person, not two or more. Hence the *problem* of fission.

The responses to this problem can be ordered into three groups: we can either (1) fission is accepted and our moral and legal practices are adjusted accordingly, (2) fission is rejected because it is incompatible with legal and moral practices, or (3) fission is rejected because it contradicts metaphysical intuitions.

Option (1) is Parfit's famous 'bite the bullet' position (Parfit, 1971, 1976, 1984). When the metaphysics of personal identity clashes with our

practices, this means we should revise our practices since they are based, apparently, on false beliefs.

On option (2) the concept of 'personal identity' derives its meaning primarily from our real (moral and legal) practices. This means that whenever a metaphysical rendering of personal identity appears to allow for possibilities that do not fit our practice, we should conclude that personal identity is not a concept fit to be analysed in this metaphysical way. One route to this position is resisting the thought-experiments that ground the metaphysical possibility of fission (see Wilkes 1988; Gale 1991; Parfit attributes this option to Wittgenstein (Parfit 1984, p. 273)). Other routes involve scrutiny of our practices (Black 2001; Hope 1994; Haksar 1991) and a (Kantian) emphasis on unity of agency (Korsgaard 1989).

According to option (3), the possibility of fission clashes not just with our practice, but also with our metaphysical intuitions. Thus we have reason to reconsider any theory of personal identity that allows for fission, in order to see what is metaphysically wrong with it. Many theories of personal identity have been proposed that either avoid fission completely or else that amend theories that do allow for fission with extra premisses so as to ban fission in the end. These theories vary from Cartesian dualist theories (e.g. Madell 1981; Swinburne 1984) to animalist theories (Wiggins 1980) that reject fission on a posteriori grounds to psychological continuity theories that reject fission a priori (Lewis 1976; Mills 1993).

In 1981 Robert Nozick proposed a theory of personal identity called 'the closest continuer view' (CCV after this). CCV rules out the possibility of one *person* splitting up into two while it allows for the possibility of one *human being* fissioning. It first accepts all metaphysical considerations that lead to the possibility of fission. But then it offers a rationale for choosing which one of the two (or more) resulting persons after fission is identical with the original person, excluding the other(s). This gives the impression that Nozick considers fission unacceptable on a priori grounds, but that the reasons for this are not of a metaphysical nature.

So, CCV *seems* to belong in category (2). In this paper, however, I shall argue that this is not correct and that CCV belongs in category (3). Nozick's theory is not a *practice*-inspired amendment of theories of personal identity that allow for fission when only *metaphysical* considerations are taken into account. Rather it is an *externalist* metaphysical theory that purports to solve a problem that is insurmountable within the confines of an *internalist* metaphysics of personal identity. Or so I shall argue.

The structure of this paper is as follows: In the next section, I shall outline the considerations leading up to the possibility of fission. In Section

3 I shall discuss the closest continuer view. Finally, in Section 4, I will discuss the main objection to CCV levelled by metaphysically minded philosophers, based on the so-called 'only X and Y principle'. These objections can be met by CCV. Showing how CCV does this makes clear why its opposition to fission is grounded not in practical considerations, but rather in an externalist metaphysics of personal identity.

1. CCV's Background: The Possibility of Fission

The closest continuer view, Nozick's theory of personal identity, is best understood against the background of a number of developments in the debate on personal identity in the 17th century, and in the 1960's and -70's. Three such developments have to be mentioned explicitly: (1) Problems surrounding personal identity following Locke's statement of a 'memory criterion', (2) the materialistic philosophy of mind by means of which philosophers such as Williams and Shoemaker attempted to handle these problems, and (3) the fact that as a result of this approach personal identity was no longer viewed as strict Leibnizian identity, but rather as 'personal continuation': a transitive relation of temporal succession between persons-at-a-point-in-time, or 'person-stages'. Let me say something about these three points before introducing CCV.

(1) In 1690 Locke came up with a psychology-based account of personal identity over time. Around the time Nozick developed his CCV, this account was generally interpreted as a memory-criterion (see, however, Schechtman 1990, 1994): What makes two 'person-stages' at different times stages of the same person, according to the Locke of the 1960's and '70's, is that the later stage is able to remember experiences had by the previous stage. Whether or not this position was meant as a full-fledged theory of diachronic personal identity is a matter under discussion. But we need not concern ourselves with that here. What is important is that the debate over personal identity in the past century sparked off when Locke's theory, interpreted as a memory-criterion with all the problems that came with it was given a fresh chance, mainly because contemporary materialism gave us a handle on some of the most vexing of these problems (see 2).

One of the implausible aspects of the 'theory' was that memory alone seems a bit meagre: when the connection between an experience and an experience-memory counts as co-constituting personal identity over time, why not count in the connections between intentions and the actions motivated by them? Or why not include the kind of connections that secure the fact that many times we stick to our beliefs and desires over large periods of time. Or, when we do change our minds, the kinds of connections that

connect various stages in a process of deliberated change? In short: various kinds of psychological connections over time were added to the memory criterion (mainly in the 1960's and '70's). At the same time, the idea that personal identity over time is constituted by *psychological connections* was adopted from Locke, though not universally.

Already in Locke's time the psychological criterion of personal identity was heavily criticised. Some of the problems uncovered, such as the criticism that memory itself presupposes personal identity,¹ were 'solved'² by invoking what was not available to Locke: a materialistic causal theory of memory. This allows for what we now refer to as 'body swaps': the possibility that persons change body without becoming someone else as in the Prince and Pauper fantasy. Many of the problems with the neo-Lockean views discussed in this paper follow from this possibility.

(2) What is crucial in Locke's body-swaps is that they need not be considered cases in which autonomous and substantial souls exchange bodies. Were that to be the case, the person is still tied to one 'vessel': the soul. But in Locke's example, and in those of the twentieth-century neo-Lockeans³ a person can change bodies when all the attitudes and psychological characteristics of a person are reinstated in another (numerically distinct) body or—as in Locke's example—body-soul complex.

Materialism was not insignificant in staging these thought experiments, which was why twentieth-century neo-Lockeans could fantasize way beyond simple Prince-and-Pauper cases. For, once the mind is a material brain in specific states, it can be manipulated, split-up, its states can be copied and instilled in another brain, it can be transplanted, etc.⁴ With these possibilities puzzle cases arise, one type of which I shall discuss shortly.

But first it is worth mentioning that the thought-experiment industry that was started by a psychological criterion of personal identity over time began to infect as well theories of personal identity that were in part or wholly based on spatio-temporal continuity of the body. Locke started the 'experiments', but materialism about the mind really let them flourish, and since the body is a material item as well, it fell prey to all kinds of imaginary experimenting in the literature. The reason I mention this is first of all that

¹ Butler 1736, Reid 1785.

² I put 'solved' in between scare quotes because I do not believe there is a real solution to this so-called circularity problem. See Slors 2001a for a nonmaterialist alternative.

³ E.g. Shoemaker, Lewis, Perry, Parfit. But we may also count in philosophers such as Noonan and Nozick if we don't think of ascribing import to the body as anti-Lockean.

⁴ For more on the connection between materialism or physicalism and thought-experiments in the personal identity debate, see Slors 2001b, pp. 28-35.

Nozick's views on personal identity neither turn the person into a completely psychological being, nor into a pure corporeal thing—for Nozick both mind and body matter, even though mind matters more. Secondly, the root thought-experiment that is at the basis of many puzzles concerning personal identity applies to the body as well as to the mind: it is the possibility of fission.

(3) Before discussing fission, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that once a person is viewed as a material being—whether they be purely psychological beings, bodies, or composite body-minds (à la Merleau Ponty's "corps sujet")—a person is not a simple indivisible entity but a composite one, made up of a huge number of 'parts'. This has consequences for the *kind* 'person' and for the explanandum 'personal identity'. When a person is a simple indivisible entity, a Cartesian 'ego', say, identity over time is not hindered by the possibility of change over time. A Cartesian ego at a certain time is only the same ego as one existing a while ago when it has *all* its characteristics in common with that earlier one, i.e. when these two ego's are *strictly* identical in the Leibnizian sense. However, when a person is viewed as a composite being, as materialist positions do, strict identity over time is simply not to be had.

But if this is the case, can we still speak of personal identity? Strictly speaking not. However, the so-called 'complex view' on persons—"persons are composite, divisible entities"—allows for an alternative to strict identity that is close enough to real identity to stick to the deeply entrenched term 'personal identity'. In the course of a normal human life, we assume that the various 'person stages' that make up this one life, this one person, are connected in such a way as to secure the continued existence of one person. Opinions differ as to the exact nature of these connections, but that need not concern us here.

The most important point for now is that this loose use of the term 'personal identity' opens up the possibility of one person stage bearing the kind of connection that *normally* secures personal identity (in the non-strict sense of personal continuation) to *two or more* simultaneously existing later person stages. Here the transitivity of identity is seriously compromised; two later stages can only be identical to the previous stage if they are identical with each other, which they are not. This is where the fission thought experiments come into the discussion. Let me elaborate on them before introducing CCV.

The fission thought experiments claim to be examples of the above possibility of one person stage at an earlier time connected to *two* (or more) later person stages in the way person stages are connected in the course of

the life of a normal person. Of course, whether or not this is possible depends on one's views on what the relation is that normally connects various person stages so as to constitute the life of one person. At the time, the above mentioned psychological connections were thought to be of paramount importance. Bodily continuity was considered important as well by some. As to these psychological connections, it is important to note that it is not just the case the e.g. one person stage had an experience and another person stage a (qualitatively similar) memory of that experience. It is just as important that the memory and the experience are causally connected in the (epistemically) right way, so that the memory truly is a memory of the experience (instead of, say, a remarkable coincidence). With this background, we can move on to the experiments.

The idea is that one person splits up into two (or more) persons at some point in time. This can be 'done' (i.e. imagined) in various ways (note the role of materialism): One influential thought-experiment uses an imaginary machine that can record *all* the information about our bodies-and-minds at one point in time and then use this information to re-create a qualitatively identical body-and-mind at some other place (the information could be transported via radio, say). This is known as the teletransportation case (Parfit 1984, p199 ff.). Another experiment presupposes persons whose left and right brain hemispheres are more or less identical (an unusual, but real possibility). If the bundle of nerves that connects the hemispheres (the corpus callosum) is severed (as in real commissurotomy cases), we can imagine that one brain half is taken out of the original skull, placed into the head of another (say, qualitatively similar) body and connected in the right way to the lower brain and nerves of that second body. The result would be two qualitatively identical (or more or less identical, depending on one's views as to the bodily nature of personal identity) persons (Parfit 1984, pp. 245-8). As a last example, we can imagine two qualitatively identical bodies where the information stored in the brain of one person is completely and without loss being transferred to the other brain, whose contents have been erased, without distorting the original person's brain and mind (based on Williams 1970). Again, the result would be two persons that are at least psychologically continuous, as it is called, with the original person. On a psychological criterion of personal identity, this means that one person splits up into two.

Now the question is: how are the two persons that are the outcome of these experiments related to the one person that began them? In all cases, the claim is that the kind of relation that holds between a person and her two successors is such that should it have held between an initial person

stage and only *one* successor, we would have no trouble at all viewing this situation as one in which a single person continues to exist over time. Here's the problem: In the case of one successor, we speak of one person persisting through time, of personal identity. But when there are two successors, personal identity is out of the question; identity is a transitive relation and the resulting two persons are not identical, so that they cannot *both* be identical with the initial pre-fission stage. Yet they *both* bear a relation to the initial stage that, should the initial person not have split up, would have constituted personal identity. But how can *that* be? Should we not rather conclude that the kind of relation between the person stages in both cases are not identity-constituting after all in normal 'one successor cases'?

Parfit was the only philosopher to answer "yes" here. He is a revisionist: when our intuitions lead to paradoxes, that is just too bad for our intuitions. What Parfit did was simply deny that personal identity is what matters to us in practical reasoning. This is what the fission experiments teach us. In these experiments identity fails to hold. But the kind of psychological connection that according to Parfit sustains personal identity under normal conditions is still intact. And that kind of connection is what matters to us, not identity. Identity is just the holding of this relation in the absence of fission, and since fission is absent in all actual cases, we mistakenly think that identity matters to us.

3. *The Closest Continuer View*

Parfit's revisionistic approach leaves a lot of questions unanswered, mainly questions about practical reasoning in fission cases: who of two fission-products (I use this disrespectful term for lack of a better one) will own the house of the original person? Who gets the pay check right after fission? Who is married to the original person's spouse? Etc. etc. These questions are very hard to answer, if they can be answered at all. Yet praxis would require an immediate answer. This is an extremely pressing reason to resist the possibility of fission.

Nozick's closest continuer view opts for a non-revisionary way of handling fission cases. It does resist the possibility of one person as a legal/moral entity splitting up into two beings with the same legal/moral status. But at the same time Nozick accepts the complex view, which seems to allow for fission metaphysically speaking. This may seem to place CCV in category (2) mentioned in the introduction. In order to argue why this is, in the end, not the case, more needs to be said about CCV.

The observation with which CCV starts is that in very many of the fission cases, it is simply not true that we consider the two fission products equally

tightly connected in a psychological and/or bodily sense to the original person. Consider the teletransportation case Parfit (1984, pp. 199-201) discusses. In it, a duplicate of a person is produced on Mars while the original person continues to live (for a couple of days only, but I'll get to that later on). In such a case we have a person who is psychologically continuous with the original person on Mars, and a person who is both psychologically and bodily continuous with the original person. This difference, Nozick insists, will strike most of us as intuitively relevant: the latter fission-product is much more closely connected to the original person than the person on Mars. We can only treat both later person stages as relevantly similarly connected to the original person when we forget our intuitions and go by a pre-established theory of personal identity or personal continuation that considers bodily continuity irrelevant. But this ignores the fact that many people will consider bodily continuity at least relevant enough to consider the fission product on Earth *a closer continuer* to the original person than the person on Mars.

When differences in closeness of continuation are recognized, and with it the practical need to determine which person is the continuer of the original person, it becomes rational in a practical sense to consider the closest continuer identical with the original person, while the less closer continuer is a newly-made person (that is qualitatively much like it's competitor). This is the core of CCV. But a number of qualifications are in order.

First of all, Nozick does not commit himself to rigid parameters that determine closeness of continuation. Instead he grants that intuitions may differ as to what closeness of continuation amounts to. CCV is a model that allows us to structure and handle the intuitions about personal identity we have acquired in normal circumstances when they are applied to abnormal science-fiction puzzle cases. Thus Nozick acknowledges that some people may think bodily continuity totally irrelevant to personal identity and hence consider both fission products in a teletransportation case *equally* close continuers (as e.g. Parfit does).

This brings us to the second qualification: what if a person splits up into two equally close continuers? Nozick concludes that in such a case neither can be identical with the original person (on pain of violating the transitivity of identity). He is thus willing to concede that there are cases in which person stages are connected in such a way that they *might have been* identical whereas they are *in fact* not identical. For, should the person on Earth die at the moment the Mars person comes into existence, the Mars person would have been identical with the original pre-teletransportation person.

Here we see the first glimpse of what makes CCV special and controversial: apparently, according to Nozick, the relation that holds between person stages only in a normal person's life can under certain exceptional circumstances be *insufficient* for personal identity. Apparently, then, the *circumstances* in which these relations hold matter to personal identity while they are *not* part of the intrinsic relations between person stages themselves. We shall soon see that this is crucial for CCV.

But first I have to mention another kind of example in which neither of the continuers in a fission case can be considered identical with the original person. It is not always true, according to Nozick, that the closest continuer is identical with the original person. For various reasons the closest continuer may not be connected in a close enough manner. As an example of such a case we may imagine a teletransportation case in which two replica's are sent to different planets while the original person (body + mind) is destroyed and where the radio transmission of the data was flawed so that both continuers are very unlike the original person. We do not have to worry too much here about when person stages are closely enough connected to be identical (in the absence of a closer continuer). Again, CCV is a model of handling intuitions, and in cases such as these we can fill in details by inserting our own.

The closest continuer view comes in two versions, a local and a global one. Take Parfit's teletransportation case again, with one slight change: the time in which both the Earth person and the Mars person live simultaneously is substantially longer, say one month. During that time, the Mars person changes significantly due to his new environment, to all sorts of biographical events etc. At the time of the death of the Earth person, the Mars person, who will continue to live for another sixty years, has changed so dramatically that it is no longer qualitatively similar enough to the original person at the time of fission to count as his continuer. On the local version of CCV, this means that when the Earth person dies, the original person dies since there is no continuer left that is close enough.

On the global version, however, there is a bias in favour of longevity. We should keep in mind that should the Earth person have died at the time of fission or shortly after it, the Mars person would have become the continuer of the original person. In that case, then, it is the *original* person who goes through all the changes on Mars so that he is still the original person after all these changes. The Mars person is still 'psychologically continuous', as it is called, with the original person (and 'causally continuous' at least with regard to her body). The global version of CCV holds that the longevity of the Mars person outweighs the bodily continuation with the original person

of the Earth person when it comes to determining closeness of continuation. So on this version of CCV, in this scenario, the Mars person will be identical with the original person because, as Nozick puts it (1981: 43) “it seems so unfair for a person to be doomed by an echo of his former self.”

CCV may appear to respect all our intuitions regarding personal identity. But that impression is slightly misleading. CCV has consequences that appear counter-intuitive. Take teletransportation again. A person is teletransported to Mars, but, as in Parfit’s original example, the original person is not destroyed on Earth, he remains alive. However, due to the procedure, he has now acquired a heart condition that only gives him a few days to live. In such a case, according to CCV, the Earth person after the fission procedure is the original person, not the Mars person, because he and not the Mars person is the closest continuer. But what happens after the Earth person dies? When we suppose that the timespan in which both persons live is relatively short and that nothing dramatic happens to the Mars person, then the Mars person becomes the closest continuer. And that, according to CCV, means that the Mars person becomes identical with the original person, whereas he was not identical with that person before. But how can the Mars person suddenly become identical with the original person when neither the original person, nor the Mars person changes in any respect (what changes is the passing away of the Earth person)?

The question is merely rhetorical. The counterintuitive idea that whether or not y at time t_2 is a stage of the same person as x at t_1 is dependent on factors other than merely facts internal to x and y is explicitly endorsed by Nozick. In fact it is the hallmark of CCV. The principle rejected here was later dubbed ‘the only x and y principle’ (Noonan 1989; see the next section). And this rejection is the most central contribution of CCV to the personal identity debate.

Is CCV an attempt to limit the influence of metaphysics on our theorizing about personal identity by letting the practical demand for the all-or-nothingness of personal identity (i.e. the impossibility of fission) trump metaphysical conclusions? Or are CCV’s demand to identify only one ‘fission-product’ as the real continuer of the original person, and its allowing for the ‘transfer of identity’ in cases where the closest continuer dies, metaphysically motivated? Nozick does not discuss this question, so that it is hard to answer it through textual exegesis. This doesn’t mean that the question is unanswerable. For, as I shall argue in the next section, the core thesis of CCV—the rejection of the ‘only x and y principle’—is only *not* susceptible to the criticism from friends of the principle when CCV is

interpreted as an externalist metaphysical position. The strongest interpretation of CCV, then, is one in which it is a metaphysical solution to a metaphysical problem, not an appeal for practical constraints on metaphysics.

4. The 'Only \underline{x} and \underline{y} Principle'

At the heart of CCV is the rejection of the only x and y principle, the principle according to which the question whether y at t_2 is identical with x at t_1 depends on (intrinsic) facts about x , y and their (intrinsic) relations over time *only*. CCV is about managing intuitions. Nozick does not claim to be able to save every intuition in every puzzle case, he 'only' claims that CCV can save more intuitions than any of its competitor theories. So, when most intuitions can be saved by giving up on one other intuition, this should be done, according to Nozick. And the intuition he gives up is the only x and y principle.

Unsurprisingly, the most serious attack on CCV consists of the claim that the only x and y principle cannot be given up on pain of accepting absurd consequences. If that is indeed the case, the principle is not just an intuition, but really and *argument* against CCV. Let me discuss two views on the principle that treat it as such. Later on I shall argue that CCV can be defended against these views, thereby showing clearly its externalist, metaphysical nature.

One view on which the principle is defended as one with argumentative force is David Wiggins's. It was published one year before CCV's conclusive statement in 1981, but directed at a proto version of CCV Wiggins calls 'the best candidate approach'. The argument Wiggins sees in the principle can best be illustrated by a parallel to a fission case, derived from the story of the ship of Theseus.

In the story of the ship of Theseus, one plank is removed and a new one inserted in its place. Over the course of time this happens with every plank of the whole ship until in the end the whole ship is made of new planks, i.e. until no plank in the ship is identical with a plank in the original ship. Yet we are not inclined to think this is a completely different ship from Theseus's. In fact it still is Theseus's ship because the change happened gradually (compare: in about seven years all the cells in your body will be renewed, but this does not mean you have acquired a different body).

But now the story is altered slightly so as to produce a competitor for continuation. The old planks of the ship are cast away. But they are collected and in the end reassembled so as to form, once again, the 'original ship'. That is, it would have been the original ship in an unproblematic way

if it weren't for the fact that the ship of Theseus is still sailing around as the ship of Theseus (now with new planks). So, we have a situation in which two ships compete for being the closest continuer to Theseus's original ship: one ship which has undergone a slow process of rejuvenation and another that consists of all original materials. The first one of these is fairly obviously the closest continuer since it is spatio-temporally continuous with the original ship, whereas the second ship is only a continuation of the original ship with a spatio-temporal intermittance. Nevertheless, should the first ship be burned when the latter one is reassembled, the latter one would have been the ship of Theseus.

So, there are three relevant possible worlds: (1) The old planks are merely cast away and not reassembled while the original ship is rejuvenated plank by plank. Let us call the original ship t . Let us call the rejuvenated continuer j . It is close enough to t and has no competitor. Therefore, $j = t$. (2) The rejuvenation proceeds as in (1) but the old planks are reassembled so as to construct another competitor for continuation of t . Let us call the rejuvenated boat in this possible world j' and the new assembly of old planks o . Since j' is a closer continuer of t than o , $j' = t$. (3) The ship of theseus is dismantled plank by plank, after which it ceases to exist. But the planks are reassembled so as to form the ship of Theseus once again. We may call the newly assembled ship of old planks o' . Since o' has no competitor for being the continuation of t , and since it is close enough to t (it has the same form and consists of the numerically same materials), we may say that $o' = t$.

Now compare worlds (2) and (3). In specific, compare o to o' . Is there a difference? Both ships are made of reassembled old planks of t . Intrinsically there is no difference whatsoever. Yet, and this is Wiggins's point, o and o' have to be completely different ships if CCV holds. For, on CCV $o = t$ and $o' \neq t$, therefore $o \neq o'$. And that is absurd: where is the difference between the ships?

(Note that CCV is implicitly placed in category (2) of the introduction: There is a difference in the ways o and o' will be treated, given the difference in the presence/absence of t . Wiggins will certainly not deny that. And so apparently Wiggins's point is: a difference in the ways in which o and o' are treated cannot amount to a real, metaphysical difference between them. Wiggins's argument, then, consists of placing CCV in category (2), and appealing to the intuition that all category (2) theories must be false, since it is absurd to think that nonmetaphysical properties such as how o is treated contribute to what o is.)

The fact that this argument—in my minimalized rendering of it—end with a rhetorical question—where is the difference between o and o' ?—is an

indication that the argumentative force hinges on intuition. Wiggins does not deny this (1980, p. 95). And that is the weakness of this counterargument. Nozick seems to agree that rejecting the only x and y principle is counterintuitive, but insists we should reject it anyway because doing so *saves* an immense number of other intuitions. What Wiggins does not show is that CCV is inconsistent or incoherent. CCV is consistent and coherent in handling this example: whether or not the reassembled ship is identical with t depends on whether it has a competitor continuer that is closer to t . And so, there is a significant difference between o and o' .

Noonan sees this problem and tries to remedy it by attempting to dig up more argument in the principle, not just intuition. For this purpose he uses Geach's notion of 'mere Cambridge change'. Mere Cambridge change happens to an object or property when a proposition about it changes in truth value without anything intrinsic happening to the object or property itself. Thus, suppose you are the second fastest runner on Earth. Without your being aware of it, the fastest runner on Earth dies. So suddenly you become the fastest runner on Earth. But essentially nothing about you, this person, changes. This is mere Cambridge change.

The difference between worlds (2) and (3) according to Noonan is such that with respect to o and o' , we can say that a change from world (2) to (3) amounts to a mere Cambridge change with respect to o . Thus, o' cannot *really* differ from o , it can only differ in a mere Cambridge way. Thus, to say that $o \neq o'$ is absurd.

Whether or not there is a real argument here is a matter that is not settled immediately. But we might forgo that question by asking whether the change in identity in, say, the teletransportation case is a mere Cambridge change in the insignificant sense Geach used the term. For a change of identity, even if it is just a change in how one is *regarded* by others and by oneself, is not insignificant at all when we take into account the fact that a person is a social entity and that personhood has social dimensions. With the passing away of the Earth person, the Mars person suddenly owns a condo, say, is married to a woman he fancied but someone else was married to, etc. etc. Things change for him, and they change dramatically. Is this mere Cambridge change? Not in the sense that it is *mere* Cambridge change. This is significant change. But it is *like* Cambridge change in that the change is brought about by something external to the object that changes and is not even directly causally related to it.

The idea, however, that so-called relational changes (changes in the relations an object bears to other objects and properties), amount to real, socially and causally significant changes is at present no longer considered

strange.⁵ Think of yourself being elected head of a committee. The change is relational, not intrinsic. But it is significant: you have acquired causal powers you did not have before: because you are from now on *regarded* in a specific manner, what you say as head of the committee has effects that the same words uttered by you would lack should you not have been so elected.

So, *not all relational change is mere Cambridge change*. And it is clear from Nozick's writings that he does not consider what goes on in the teletransportation identity change is a mere Cambridge change. Nor should he. The consequences are more than significant (once again, here we see Nozick's pragmatic attitude on this issue). What Noonan ignores are the social dimensions of personhood.

But that can be intentional. Noonan's reason for ignoring social dimensions, insofar as they can be reconstructed, reflect the intuition that really is behind the fierce opposition against CCV. He explicitly approaches persons from a metaphysical, ontological angle. The debate over criteria of personal identity over time is a debate not over how we know that *y* at *t*₂ is identical to *x* at *t*₁, but over what it takes, ontologically or metaphysically, for this transtemporal identity to hold. Noonan stresses this point more than once. As such the point merely says correctly that the issue of personal identity is not a merely epistemological issue. Why should this rule out social dimensions, dimensions of how people are regarded and consequently treated (by themselves as well as others)? Well, how can events that are external to (and initially not even causally related to) either or both of two person stages determine *ontologically or metaphysically* whether or not these stages are part of the continued existence of one person?

(Note here that, again, the impression is given that CCV belongs in category (2) of the introduction. External events cannot be of metaphysical influence, according to Noonan. Deeming such events relevant, as CCV does, then, means that one is putting non-metaphysical constraints on a metaphysics of personal identity. Like Wiggins appears to do, Noonan implicitly places CCV, incorrectly as I shall argue, in category (2).)

Noonan's argument may look like a simple reaffirmation of the only *x* and *y* principle. But it goes deeper. It uncovers a contestable intuition behind the principle: when the diachronic identity relation between *x* and *y* is of a metaphysical nature, external events have nothing to do with it. Put differently: If a relation such as 'being temporal stages of the same person' is metaphysical, it involves only properties internal to the relata.

⁵ The idea that not all relational change is mere Cambridge change is elaborately and very vividly expressed in Baker 1995.

But why should we accept this contestable intuition? One answer is that we should accept it if ‘metaphysical’ is interpreted as ‘natural’ or ‘physical’. When two stages of a stone, say, at different times are stages of the same stone, this fact can in no way be determined by factors that are (causally) external to the stone. And when ‘person’ is like a natural kind term, as animalists like Wiggins hold who consider the term ‘person’ equivalent to ‘human being’, this ought to apply to persons too. So, the combined argumentative force of Wiggins’s and Noonan’s point is that metaphysical relations such as personal identity involve only internal properties of the relata when ‘metaphysical’ is interpreted as ‘natural’ or ‘physical’, which is precisely what e.g. Wiggins’s animalism does.

But this argumentative force can be countered. Persons are at least not merely natural kinds—they are social kinds as well. And when the metaphysics of personhood accommodates this fact, Noonan’s intuition that metaphysical relations between person stages that constitute personal identity involve merely internal properties of the stages *must* be challenged. If who I am, not just as a human being but as a (deserving, responsible, accountable) person, is co-determined by a network of social interactions *and* the range of *potential* social interactions available to me due to my social *status*, then spelling out who I am involves mentioning items and events that are external to me and not even causally connected to me. And if that is the case, the same goes for spelling out the relations that make various temporal stages of me stages of the same person. The metaphysics of personhood involves the social world as well as the natural world and hence the same goes for the metaphysics of personal identity.

And so, it is at least open to the defender of CCV to claim that the only *x* and *y* principle in the present context is mistaken. But I am interested here not so much in defending Nozick as in unearthing the deep difference between Nozick’s CCV and positions based on the only *x* and *y* principle. It is my claim that in view of the above analysis, this difference can best be represented as a difference between an internalist and an externalist metaphysical approach to personhood and personal identity.

I’d like to draw a parallel here with the internalism/externalism difference as it is applied to mental content. Externalism about mental content such as it was first developed in Putnam’s famous twin Earth argument (Putnam 1975) involves the modal claim that two physically/naturally identical persons can nevertheless be in mental states with different contents, depending on their surroundings. In putnam’s example, twin Earth is exactly like Earth except that what functions as water does on our Earth is in fact constituted by a different chemical substance on twin Earth; not H₂O

but XYZ. An Earth person can then be physically identical with a twin-Earth person when both are thinking “there is a glass of water in front of me”, while she is wrong and the twin-Earth person right. This is the case since by “water” she means “the stuff present at the ‘baptizing ceremony’, when it was first dubbed ‘water’, i.e. H₂O” and the twin-Earth person “the stuff present at the ‘baptizing ceremony’, when it was first dubbed ‘water’, i.e. XYZ” (Putnam calls XYZ ‘twater’, but for the example there is no obstacle for assuming that on twin-Earth they call XYZ ‘water’). There is XYZ in the glass, so only the twin-Earth person has a mental state whose content is true; the Earth person’s content is false. The content of the thought “there is water in the glass in front of me”, then, is co-determined by factors that are external to the subject and possibly not even causally connected to it (the Earth person is not causally connected to the meaning-giving procedure on twin Earth). Mental content, as it is called, is a *wide* property (which means that it is co-determined by factors external to the subject who has the mental state at issue) not a *narrow* one (where a narrow property is one that is determined completely by factors internal to the subject).

Parallel to externalism about mental content, Nozick’s CCV can be called an externalist view on personal identity: whether *y* at *t*₂ is identical to *x* at *t*₁ depends on the one hand (i) on there being the appropriate connections between properties internal to *x* and *y* but on the other hand (ii) on the absence of a rival *z* at *t*₂ that is a closer continuer of *x* at *t*₁. Lemma (ii) turns *y*’s property of being identical with *x* into a *wide* property. The plausibility of this claim is derived from the acknowledgement that a person is not merely a natural kind, but at least also a ‘social kind’. By contrast, the metaphysics of personal identity of both Noonan and Wiggins (and a host of others) turns the identity of *y* with *x* into a *narrow* property, i.e. a property that is wholly determined by facts internal to *x* and *y*.

The strongest interpretation of CCV, then, is as an externalist view on personal identity. In fact, since on any other interpretation the arguments by Wiggins and Noonan falsify CCV, this is the only really feasible interpretation. And this interpretation turns CCV into a theory that is motivated by the conviction that ‘person’ is a broad term and that ‘personal identity’ has broad necessary and sufficient conditions. This is a metaphysical conviction. The impression that CCV is about practical constraints on metaphysical theories, then, is mistaken.

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