

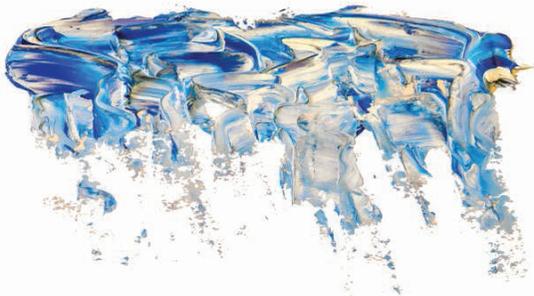


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# EDITORIAL

In this, the fifth issue of Bentham Digest, we chose to explore identity - a theme that has been captured in the pages to come in vastly diverse and compelling ways.

We were drawn to identity as a theme because of its philosophical versatility: it is one that can be pondered at both metaphysical and social levels.

On both of these levels, there has been a rise in questions about identity in the past century. As advancements in neuroscience and psychology have privileged us with newfound knowledge, the relationship between science and philosophy has become more important than ever before in answering questions concerning identity. And, in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, confusion about one's place in society has also been on the rise. As the structures of society have been rapidly changing, we have found liberation from traditional, and, at times, antiquated institutions.

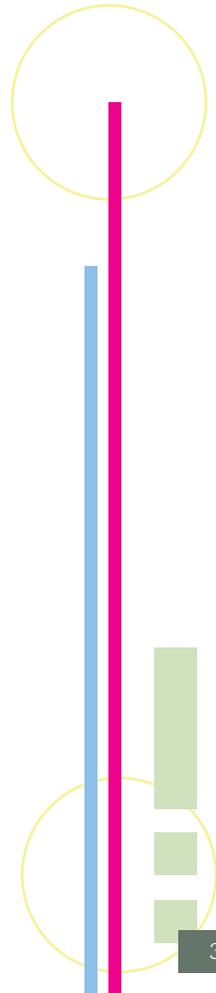
But we have also been forced to face new questions regarding our role in society, and the role of society in our lives.

The diversity of approaches to the questions regarding identity in this issue allude to both their personal nature and their universality. While some of the contributions are academic in nature, others are more reflective, some even taking the form of poetry or visual art. We hope this provides a holistic view of how those philosophically inclined are navigating questions of identity.

With this issue, Bentham Digest has begun to accept student submissions from outside of UCL, with the goal of making philosophical discourse more widely accessible to all regardless of institution and academic background.

We would like to thank all those who contributed submissions, as well as to Frances Chassler for additional artwork throughout the issue. We are also grateful to Eshka Chuck for her contributions to design, and assistance with creative direction.

- Ariana Razavi and Lanfranco Leone; Co Editors-in-Chief



# ETHICS OF IDENTITY:

## Hume and Buddha

By Keigo Shimada

My aim in this essay is to introduce two arguments for the no-self theory, one by David Hume, and another from Buddhism. The idea of personal identity has fascinated philosophers; but, traditionally, they seem to be more attracted to constitutive analysis (i.e. what condition constitutes personal identity?) than evidential analysis (i.e. is there personal identity? how does it exist?). Although this essay will take a less argumentative form, I hope it serves to answer the latter kind of questioning. After explaining two types of the no-self theory, I will explicate the difference between them, including between their normative implications.



Personal identity is the notion of the 'self' that persists through various changes. It is a highly intuitive idea: you would agree, not just grammatically but also philosophically, that you are, have been, and will be the same you. A no-self theory does not disagree with this intuitiveness. Instead, it reflectively casts doubt on the status of personal identity that we commonly assume. On the one hand, Hume's no-self theory starts with his empiricist Copy Principle. According to Hume, all of our mental objects could be exhaustively categorised into two groups: something we feel or perceive and something we imagine or think. And he thinks that the latter kind, faint ideas, must be properly derived from the former kind, vivid impressions. Let us imagine the taste of an apple. If you had eaten an apple before and were imaginative enough, you would find no problem imagining the taste. You would also be confident with the idea of the taste you just formed. Now, what would happen if you did not follow this causal procedure? Suppose now in front of you is an exotic fruit, which you have never seen in your life. Nonetheless, you tried hard to imagine the taste (without actually eating it), and eventually came up with one. Is that a genuine taste of that fruit? Surely not. So, the idea of the taste could be genuine only if you had experienced it, and obtained the corresponding impression; conversely, an idea formed without an appropriate impression is dubious.



For Hume, the idea of the self is like this exotic fruit. You have a faint idea of the self in your mind but you have never experienced it, nor its elements. Personal identity is thereby not genuine, or as Hume puts it, it is 'fictitious'. Also, Hume cautiously presents an additional argument for why our experience itself could not constitute personal identity. Personal identity is by definition persistent (unchanging), so it could not be the experience or 'bundle of perception', which changes every second. Given these two arguments, Hume concludes that personal identity does not really exist but only our 'fictitious' idea of it does. Perhaps, two questions would immediately arise. First, the validity of Hume's principle might be questioned. Could ideas be genuine, yet at the same time introspectively unobservable? Kant, for example, follows this strategy; he thinks the self is not inside experience or experience itself, but resides outside of it — what makes 'the bundle of perceptions' a bundle. Another concern is about the implication of 'fictitious' personal identity. If Hume's argument were right, does it undermine our beliefs about the 'self'? Or, are we normatively required to discredit them? This is the type of question we are interested in. Hume himself does not provide a clear answer. His Copy Principle states that sensory perception is phenomenologically primary to abstract entities like ideas, but he does not say much about how or why this is the case. On the other hand, Buddhism, which we will address now, seems to be explicit about this question.

Buddhism is a school of thought that emerged in today's India and Nepal around the 4th century BC, and has developed into vastly diverse doctrines ever since. The teaching of no-self (an-ātman in Sanskrit) is among few things that these Buddhist schools have in common. Anātman is an antithesis of its counterpart, ātman (lit. means 'breathing' like in German), which is a notion of persistent and unified self in orthodox Indian philosophy. But the conception of anātman too, varies radically among different Buddhist schools. Hence, in this essay, I shall focus on the idea of the Early Buddhism (such as in Sutta Nipāta), which is considered to contain the thought closest to the one of Buddha himself.

In Early Buddhism, transcendental elements were few, but the goal was the pragmatic elimination of obsessions (abhiniveśa), which were considered as the cause of various predicaments. This contains the obsession with the persistent self or personal identity (atma-graha). Gautama Buddha held that nothing (quite literally, but with one exception –this teaching of truth, dharma, itself!) stays the same; hence, if one falsely believes as it did, it will inevitably cause friction, that is, human suffering. Among various types of suffering he distinguished, suffering of death is a classic example. Insofar as being attached to the idea (of the permanence) of living, you would inevitably suffer greatly. For, all human beings are mortal, including you and your loved ones. 'Four noble truths', which is said to be Buddha's very first teaching, tells us four things: (1) life is suffering, (2) there is a cause for this suffering, (3) the cause could be terminated, (4) there is a way to achieve the termination. Importantly, suffering (duḥkha) in (1) is not of instantaneous physical pain, but rather, the state of the affair. As mentioned earlier, everything is impermanent, but we, also impermanent beings, want something permanent from our living. So, our being or existence is like faint daydreaming. In this respect, life is formally suffering for everyone, and we all have reason to alleviate it, regardless of contingent dispositions and feelings. Buddha thought that this suffering is caused by obsessions, or our ignorance of truth, and we can overcome it through correct thinking and acting in accordance with dharma. This ultimate peaceful state of mind is also known as nirvana. (note: this emphasis on knowledge, plus a pragmatic motivation, explains why some schools of Buddhism do not fit the profile of 'religion' in the western sense, in which faith plays a central role.)

Now, one observation with this crude account of Buddhism is its far-reaching scope compared to Hume: it is challenging the very concept of identity, that is, the persistent notion of objects. Consider the Humean argument again, which begins with his epistemological system.

For Hume and many other philosophers, the surrounding world and all other people in it, so to speak, are atomic elements of experience, or of 'I'. So, Hume's starting point is how a person perceives objects, as represented in his distinction between ideas and impressions. This results in his rejection of 'I' or of personal identity. In contrast, Buddhism is less individually-oriented but concerned more generally with the world itself, which is the phenomenon of impermanence (anitya). Since this world is independent from the gaze of 'I', personal identity for Buddhism is a form of impermanence like any other identities. Now, it might be argued that the idea of no-self has a special status along with impermanence in Buddhist systems (e.g. trilakṣaṇa). But at least in Early Buddhism, no-self seems to be derived from the observation of the impermanence: there could be no persistent self because nothing is persistent. To be clear, Buddhism too has an individually-oriented epistemological system. Buddha apparently used rhetoric somewhat similar to Hume's: by showing that each of the five constituents of human beings, such as 'sensation' and 'perception', are nonpersistent, he demonstrated these could not constitute a persistent self, though five of them together *prima facie* appear as one. But, for the same reason, this account is also instrumental or supplementary to the idea of impermanence.

Accordingly, this difference between the Humean and Buddhist no-self theory leads to their subsequent prescriptions about personal identity. On the one hand, Hume, a proponent of the 'I' understands personal identity as a uniquely epistemological phenomenon. In fact, he explicitly discusses how the faculty of imagination causes the idea of self. This would explain why he calls it 'fictitious' but does not prescribe any countermeasure against it. He lowers the status, but preserves the notion of personal identity as a mental phenomenon. On the other hand, Buddhism places the world before 'I', and our thoughts or beliefs contradictory to the world are false or mistaken. This generates a strong reason to discredit the notion of identity.



To summarise: both Hume and Buddhism identify (personal) identity as our device for attributing persistent names onto non-persistent objects. So, personal identity does not exist ontologically 'outside' us as the innate constitutions of objects per se, but exists in our understanding of the objects. Hume took this 'outside' in the epistemological/ phenomenological sense. Within the perception of 'I', ideas are something we derive from our sensory perceptions, impressions. Hence, personal identity does not exist as in impressions, but exists fictitiously in our ideas. On the other hand, Buddhism endorsed the metaphysical sense of this 'outside'. They acutely distinguish the world from how we think or perceive it (i.e. 'I'), and consider the former primary to the latter. Thus, persistent identity is a false misrepresentation of its true nature, impermanence. So, Hume's no-self theory is reductionist, whereas Buddhist's one is eliminativist about personal identity.

Lastly, I shall conclude this essay with a remark about the question of whether we have any reason to discredit personal identity or not. The observation of impermanence is a modest one, which appears empirically true. However, it seems to me that even if Buddhist accounts were sound, one still needs a certain predisposition in order to endorse and practice such a position. A person who already has the reason to eliminate suffering might give it a try. But, why should a blissful person enter the doctrine that tells her that her life is formally suffering? (Perhaps, this is a religious side of Buddhism: relief or salvation). Hume's modest no-self theory, in contrast, does not require any. Hume, who famously said that his philosophical contemplation vanishes outside his study, is completely theoretically-minded. Assuming we have no strong urge to enter the Buddhist doctrine, I, therefore, conclude that we are not normatively required to discredit identity on the basis of the no-self theory we explored, regardless of their truth. But, are those two options – believing bigotedly in persistent identity, or becoming a monk to renounce it– the only ones? If our discussion had some truth in it, I think it encourages us not to be obsessed with how things and persons are called or named. After all, identity is, and must be, our pragmatic tool to understand the dynamic world and people. Even if we are not disposed to the Buddhist enterprise, there should be no reason to favour suffering.

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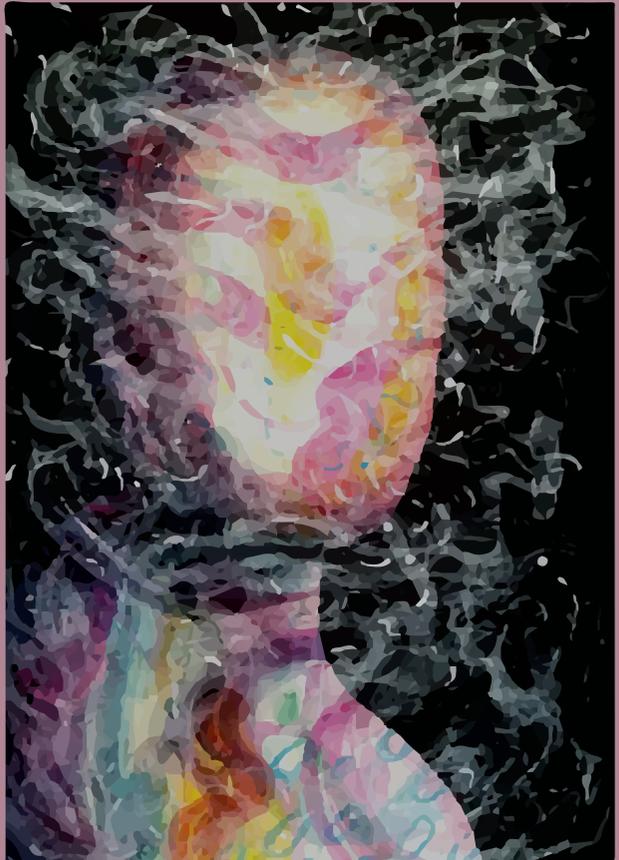
# THE SELFLESS SELF

By Maria Pavlou

**Make me a hollow reed, through which the pith of self hath been blown.**

Allow me to paint you a picture. Except not literally, because you'd just end up with a few stick figures and some incredibly basic shading. So it's the early 20th century. You and your family are sequestered in the Ottoman Empire, in the prison city of Akka, so called because, much like the Australia of the East, it was a place to dump the empire's most criminally inclined. The conditions range from gross to utter deprivation. At best there's no running water, at worst cholera and dysentery run rampant as famine rages, and you're forced to work in the most horrendous conditions. But thankfully for all the inhabitants of Akka, there lives a Man there in exile with His family, victims of religious persecution. Every day He prepares food for all the thousands hungry in the city. You line up, an obedient child, but you must bring back an extra portion for your sick father who is unable to lift his head from his pillow. But you've been caught out. They recognise you going back for seconds, and you're about to be reprimanded, until this Man intervenes. He knows about your father since He has taken it upon Himself to visit and care for all the sick in the city. From that day on He packs an extra portion for you to take every day. And when you and your siblings are sent away for a better life, His is the only Face at the docks to send you off. So many have shared similar stories about this Figure, named 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that He was dubbed the Father of the Poor. For 40 years He remained in Akka rallying people together and creating a community out of prisoners and exiles.

Abdu'l-Bahá would wash, clothe, and feed those in need with such humility and love that not only did He win the affections of the governors in each city He was exiled to, but the admiration of every soul who crossed His path. His utter self-effacement gave me the courage to do away with the pith of self. So this year, the Centenary of His passing, I decided to tackle the thing I dreaded most about coming back to London: my fear of people sleeping rough.



## The Selfless Self continued...

That's a terrible way of putting it, but let me explain. All the countries that I have ever lived in, for reasons ranging from beautiful to ridiculous, there have never been people who are homeless or who sleep rough. I wasn't even aware of this particular social phenomenon until my 15th year. And I didn't fully realise the extent of the problem until my 18th. And it took me until my 21st to do something about it. I approached the issue during my first year of university with the apprehension and frank confusion of a literal alien landing in London. An Englishman in New York, if you will.

Apprehension not due to the individuals I was encountering, but due to my surprising discomfort. I always thought that I was quite a progressive and accepting person, but my ego reared its ugly head when faced with the issue of homelessness. To avoid any discomfort, I followed suit with my fellow Londoners and did my best to ignore anyone who might present a challenge to the bubble I found myself in. As if it was their fault. Like they were lying in wait with a pin in hand, ready to pop my bubble of reality. And I became more and more confused as I saw that no one seemed to be doing anything to help then.

So, the starting point for this particular transformation was not promising. My love for Abdu'l-Bahá was often the only thing keeping me going as I dismantled the wall I had built between my ego and anything approaching discomfort, that icky feeling that makes you want to run in the other direction.

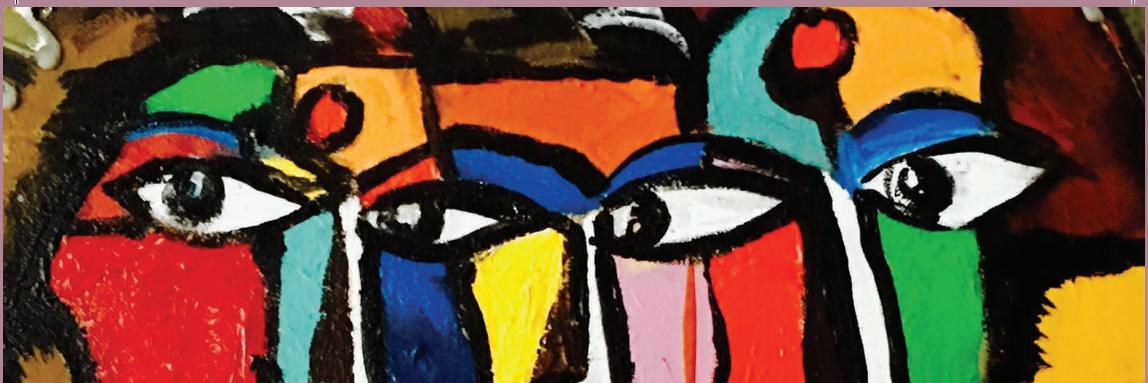
I first started off trying to read about the issue and I came across something that would forever change the way I approached people. Research by Van Zalk and Smith (2019) concluded that what homeless people were the most affected by was the fact that no one would look them in the eye. Rejection, and particularly being ignored, is the emotional equivalent to being punched in the stomach. It knocks the wind out of you and makes you question your own existence. Aristotle once asked, 'How do we know we exist?' Perhaps the only valid answer we have is 'Because we have an effect on the world around us.' We can interact with it, with people living in it, and we can create lasting changes.

So, with these two thoughts in mind: "WWAD" (what would 'Abdu'l-Bahá do?) and "YE" (you exist) I set off with intention.

The first change I made was to start carrying around food at all times, since I couldn't give money. Snacks ranging from nuts to crisps to homemade baked goods, my tote bag was always full. Embarrassingly I got caught out sometimes and had nothing to give but a half-eaten bag of cashews.

Outside Russell Square station, a woman was sitting at the foot of the entrance and after I had meekly offered her the aforementioned bag, she told me to give them to the boy sitting across the street. It seems odd, but that was the moment I explicitly remember thinking that people who live on the street have formed their own community, and I envied them for their closeness, so rare in big cities like London.

Outside the entrance to the King's Cross tube station I met Ashley (by this point I had been doing the food thing awhile and I realise I needed to step it up and under the YE segment of my manifesto, if you will, I decided to add an action clause which stated that I would always ask people for their name and linger in the interaction instead of throwing food at the problem and leaving). So, I met Ashley and offered him the snacks that I had in my bag but he wasn't interested. I was stumped. This had never happened before. I had nothing to give. So, I just listened to him. And left. Later that night I came across an ad for a service which houses people in the colder months during the night so I gave them Ashley's details hoping I wasn't betraying some unwritten rule by doing so. They contacted me the next day to tell me that he refused the service. There are many incredibly valid reasons for him to do this but still I despaired, mostly at my inability to do anything. Upon reflection I realised this is also my ego rearing its head, proud to play the 'Mother Theresa' part.



Outside Arnos Grove station I met Eddie and his dog, Dilbo. I was just coming back from the supermarket up the road when I saw them. Bags full of flour and sugar, since I was making cookies for a picnic, I had nothing but some M&Ms to give. I often fall into the trap of thinking about what people need in trying to hit their five a day goal and don't consider the simple joys in life, like chocolate. When I offered Eddie the jangling bag of M and Ms, his face lit up with such contagious joy. As I was walking away, a man at the bus stop who had just seen the whole thing reflected an identical smile back at me. I like to think that man went on to do something beautiful for a stranger after that. On my way home, riding the high you get from selfless service, I thought WWAD (what would 'Abdu'l-Bahá do)? An idea sparked and I ran the rest of the way back, stumbled into the kitchen and started warming up some left-over biriyani, packed a bag full of food, grabbed some books off my shelf and ran out mouthing a silent prayer that Eddie was still where I had left him. Approaching the station, I saw him across the road. We sat together while he ate, and I described the books I had brought (finally finding an unwitting audience member to my bookish rants). I saw Eddie a couple of times after that joking that at least he enjoyed my cooking, discussing the books we were reading and introducing him to my other friends.

Outside my local Sainsburys sits John and his dog. John is hilarious; he has his name tattooed to the inside of his wrist ("for the shits and giggles" was his reply when I asked him why) and is always hustling. Whenever I ask him what he would like, he always answers with a cappuccino and strawberry trifle. But I still ask every time, just in case. He calls me darling, and he is incredibly charming.

And now we come to today. I was writing this piece on the tube to rehearsals and back. Getting a bit meta. I was walking home with a dozen eggs in hand and a bottle of mayonnaise when I saw someone at the traffic lights on the turn from my street. The light had just turned red as I walked onto the road and held up my hand to wave to the woman across the way. I offered her my eggs and mayonnaise (a strange pairing if ever there was one) and some snacks I had in my bag. We had a big giggle over the fact that her name is also Maria and over my terrible French as we attempted to communicate. She told me about her children (2 boys and 2 girls) and her divorce. I went home and filled up two bags, one with food the other some winter clothes. We hugged and cried and prayed together. And then we swapped numbers. No one has ever hugged me quite as well as Maria. Her children must be so loved. She called me again once she got home to say thank you. The purity of her heart cannot be measured nor fully encapsulated.

I may never see any of these people again, but the transience of our interactions does not undermine their effect. By living like 'Abdu'l-Bahá for just a few months I have learnt more about myself and the inherent oneness of humanity than in all the years I have previously lived solely theoretically.

So, this is what I leave you with, dear reader(s), go into the world with intention and do something which will uncover your noble soul.

# MOONCHILD

By Jasmine Chan

Walking

Without moonlit company  
Silver silhouette fades into stalking shadows  
Each step sucks the soul out of my sole

Sharing

Secrets to another kills art  
Only saved as nighttime falls to wake the moon  
Who keeps no promises, to bury your heart

Chasing

Trains of thoughts became  
Playing hide and seek with a restless child  
Every time, I am

One second short

Two breaths quick  
Three steps behind  
Henceforth, thoughts

Stayed up when I was down

Travelling in stanzas to the moon and back  
Albeit busy traffic of uncivilized and raw letters of poets in the world  
Rushing to come, as words to warm up my world

To belong is not to belong

So be lost in literature in liberal fashion  
The moon will guide me  
Lest I forget, why I write.

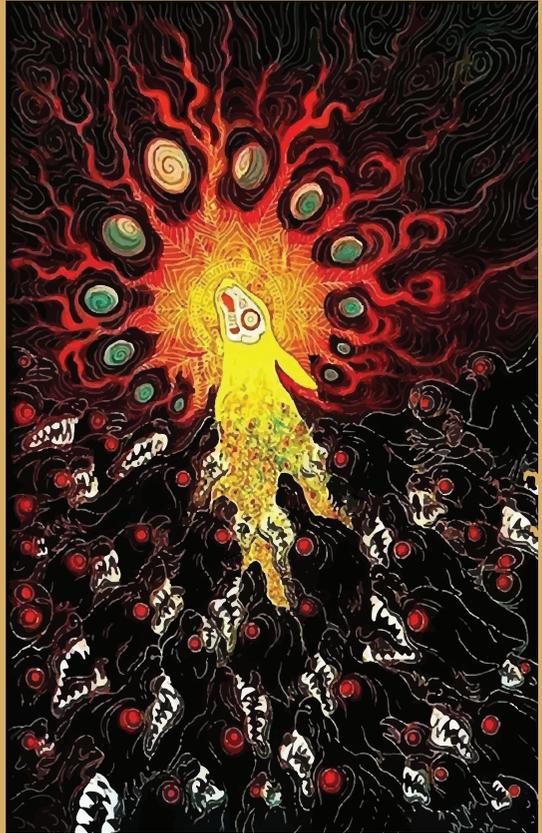


# OF FRIENDS AND FOE:

our natural need for enemies to strengthen group identity and what to do with it.

By Matteo Celli

If you think about it, the direction that Christianity has ended up taking is paradoxical given its original purposes. It started off as a globally unifying force driven by the principle of universal brotherhood, since we are all God's children, but eventually those who did not comply with its creed were considered children of the Devil instead. In the first chapter of *Authority and the Individual*, Philosopher Bertrand Russell uses this example to argue that a truly global cooperation such as a World State or universal religion would have many structural problems because of the lack of an external enemy to fear. Russell considers human need of enemies a "largely unconscious primitive ferocity". He traces this need back to the first forms of social cohesion in human history, which originated in loyalty to a certain group, i.e. the family, and was strengthened by fear of external enemies. Families grew until they became nations and empires, largely either because of war or because of alliances against common threats. This instinct, according to Russell, has survived civilisation despite religion, morality, politics, economics and education, as it is embedded in human nature.



<sup>1</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Authority and the individual* (Routledge Classics, 2010), p.8

<sup>2</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Authority and the individual* (Routledge Classics, 2010), p.14

<sup>3</sup>Umberto Eco, *Costruire il nemico*, Lecture at University of Bologna, 15 May 2008, published in 2020 as an insert to *La Repubblica* Newspaper. No English translation available.

<sup>4</sup>Umberto Eco, *Costruire il nemico*, Lecture at University of Bologna, 15 May 2008, published in 2020 as an insert to *La Repubblica* Newspaper. No English translation available.

Even without mentioning humanity's evolutionary history, Italian scholar Umberto Eco (known abroad for his novel *The Name of the Rose*) sees the need for enemies as vital to establishing identity. He even claims that the United States' national identity risked crumbling after the fall of the great Soviet enemy until the collective threat of Osama Bin Laden emerged. In a lecture he gave at Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna on 15 May 2008, later published as a short essay titled *Costruire il nemico* (EN: *Constructing the Enemy*) Eco analyses how dreadful and grotesque legends were created around various enemies throughout history and literature, often by people in power to reinforce their authority.

According to Eco, not only do enemies play an important role in defining our own identity, they can also serve as a negative benchmark by which to contrast our system of values. Therefore, in case there was no real enemy, it would be essential to make one up. A very interesting psychological mechanism that goes on in the process of constructing a fictitious enemy is that instead of seeing those who threaten us as strangers, we rather tend to see strangers as threats. Moreover, in many cases, we do not see as enemies those who actually threaten us, but categories that someone has interests in portraying as dangerous even if they are not. For example, Jewish people. "The Jew" is the quintessential example of a made-up enemy, targeted by bigoted hate since the Roman age, all throughout the Middle Ages, and virtually every historical period, culminating in Nazi Germany and still having a legacy in many contemporary conspiracy theories. The way medieval Christians portray Jews, according to Umberto Eco, has all the main characteristics of the artificial enemy: they are ugly, they stink, they speak in an unpleasant way, they have very strange customs decent people keep away from, and so on.



To keep people at bay, those in power need to find enemies that their subjects fear and loathe. Every totalitarian regime has had its enemies. Soviet Russia under stalinism purged the Traitors of the Revolution. Fascism in Italy had the "plutocratic democracies of the West" namely the allied forces, that became later on "judaic" after the alliance with Nazi Germany, whose attitude towards Jewish people is well-known. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains one of the greatest literary examples of this instrumentum regni in the very first chapter of the novel, when the protagonist Winston Smith must attend the "Two Minutes Hate". Emmanuel Goldstein, the traitor, the archenemy of the State, is displayed while he argues his hideous points, and gets insulted and yelled at by a fiercely hateful crowd. Goldstein is the perfect mixture of the two big enemies of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. His name and physiognomy are Jewish, and his story is identical to that of Lev Trotsky's (who, by the way, was himself of Jewish origin). Trotsky fled the USSR after his contrasting views with Stalin risked costing him his life. From that moment on he became the scapegoat for any problem, being accused of counter-revolutionary plots whenever necessary. The same is applied to Goldstein, whose seditious propaganda against omnipotent and benevolent ruler Big Brother is seen as the cause of all evils. Goldstein is ugly, looks old and silly, and has an unpleasant voice. He has all the external features an artificial enemy must have to prompt the necessary amount of contempt.



The plot of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* eventually suggests, while remaining intentionally ambiguous about Goldstein's actual existence, that maybe there had never been such a person as Goldstein, and that he was made up to create stronger unity under Big Brother's Power and direct all the seditious individuals towards the Party's "Thought Police". Among the collective hysteria against Goldstein in the Two Minutes Hate, Winston Smith notices that he was unconsciously screaming at him as well. One of the most striking aspects of the Two Minutes Hate therefore is its power to reduce everyone, even those like Winston Smith who would not want to, to an invincible spiral of madness.

The psychological phenomenon described by Orwell seems to suggest that we have an innate instinct to fulfil our sense of belonging by finding enemies to suspect, if not hate. So, what shall we do with our instincts in order to be critical thinkers and not to be allured by demagogic scapegoating or become biased by prejudice? Bertrand Russell addresses the problem from a pacifist perspective, advocating for psychoanalysis to find a way to deviate our innate competitiveness towards non-harmful activities instead of war. But this solution gets us only halfway through the problem, because war is not the only consequence of these impulses.

We could, perhaps, pick the right enemies, like climate change, racism, homophobia, misogyny, nationalism and authoritarianism. This is already happening, and is indeed making people attempt to pave the way for a better society. In the past common enemies made people do great things: Italy was liberated by fascism because all the opposition parties, no matter their ideology, fought together for freedom against the dictatorship and Nazi occupation. But we cannot rely solely on a distinction between "good" and "bad" enemies, as the difference between them is often blurry. By choosing our enemies, we would also overlook the need to critically analyse the underlying problem of our tendency to build group identity by negative comparison.

<sup>5</sup>Umberto Eco, *Costruire il nemico*, Lecture at University of Bologna, 15 May 2008, published in 2020 as an insert to *La Repubblica* Newspaper. No English translation available.

<sup>6</sup>lit. "tool to govern", it is a latin collocation used by Tacitus, Machiavelli, and many others to describe how people in power exploited religion to strengthen their authority. Here I use it with a more general connotation, not necessarily applied to religion only.



# ART & PERSONAL REFLECTION

BY EDISON QIU

The above is a mixed-media, collage painting on the theme of cultural, familial conditioned identity. I drew upon symbols such as the Tian An Men Square in Beijing to signify control, which parallels the silhouette in the centre: a portrait of my father.

The composition is based on a CCP propaganda poster, and colours are traditionally Chinese Red and yellow. Given its context, the colour red shifts from prosperity and luck to sacrifice. This speaks volume on how aspects of Chinese culture are changed by political conjunctions.

The writing is done with a traditional Chinese calligraphy brush and black ink. The text itself recites Di Zi Gui based on Confucius' teachings on how to live virtuously and harmoniously in society. It is something that I was tasked to memorize from the very first day of primary school, one of many unpleasant experiences which I had soon repressed when my family moved to Australia.

This work is my exploration of the shaping of my past, through the influence of culture and family, and coming to terms with them. It is still a continuous battle trying to navigate between how to be myself, and fitting into a mould determined by the colour of my skin and my heritage.

<sup>1</sup>Quote from Shylock, the Jewish money-lender in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.



# ON THE NOTION OF BELONGING

By Ariana Razavi

Do we ever belong anywhere? Is the source of our motivation to “belong” simply satisfying our inherent inclination to seek out human connection? To belong implies something deeper, beyond surface level, something that almost taps at the very root of our nature, and links us to others.

Belonging is a subjective experience, and it is at the same time a deeply introspective one; that is informed by previous experiences as well as by inherent inclination. It is a phenomenon that is thus very difficult to comment on, because it is hard to distinguish which elements of the experience pertain to the human condition, and which simply to our own personal psyche.

Consider another element of belonging: it is not inconceivable to imagine, especially if the view of personal identity we subscribe to is one that is intrinsically linked to external perception and being “classed” in a certain group as opposed to one that views it in a more internal or introspective way, that the notion of belonging would extend in this way as well. That is, our sense of belonging would intensify, if not be completely born out of, external perception - others considering us to belong to a certain group. This is perhaps entering into a far more metapsychological question regarding whether internal identity is even possible without external perception, but it is one worth considering.

The notion of belonging has seemed to me, at least since I began to ponder it, to only exist in retrospect. We are so used to adapting to our ever-changing realities (and, dare I say it, identities) that we seem to exist in the string of various status quos. I find myself writing this and, though painful to admit, sympathising with Hume’s bundle-of-perceptions theory. Perhaps that is the very reason why we simply cannot quite belong anywhere, because identity itself is a non-constant. But I digress.

I have come to find that it is only during moments of transition from one status quo to another that we notice what the reality of the former really was. Allow me to part from metaphysical discussion if but for a moment and illustrate this. Growing up I was very hesitant to consider myself part of, or to belong to, any national group. This is because my parents are both immigrants, and I grew up in a place utterly separate from both my parents’ ethnic and national identities. It was only when I parted from the refusal to subscribe to any identities that I saw that I did belong to that society all along, though I avidly denied it throughout my days there. It seems counter-intuitive, yet perhaps the entire question of identity is such.

Ultimately, I do believe that we seek a sense of belonging in order to fulfil an inherent desire for identity, perhaps on a more metaphysical level than we consciously conceive of. It is human nature to desire closeness with others, and to seek a sense of purpose. These are what belonging gives to us, if we can ever truly achieve it.





# ON LOSING A SELF THAT NEVER EXISTED

By Walter Schutjens

The fashioning of a self or an identity seems today mostly a topic of discussion for sober reflection on the banality of a post-modern age, the artificiality of online existence, or ineffectuality of 'not being true to yourself'. These are often set against the backdrop of a lament in the loss of the subject or of identity, one that is tangible, neatly orders relations between subject and object, and is immanently present and assured of itself. One that lives constantly both ahead and within itself and wills the wills that will his beliefs, and then eventually will act on them. Or more assuredly, a homunculus that is neatly seated behind the screen of phenomenal consciousness somewhere in the middle of the brain with his hands on the wheel.

It may then be surprising that one of the most influential accounts of the concept of the self in the analytic tradition, sees the self as having no metaphysical basis or indeed reality beyond the process of a purposive unification of the will. Claiming the self to be non-existent and as far as it answers to our common-sense and rationally necessitated conceptions of our 'self', self-deluded. This deliverer of this contentious philosophy, which has earned him an equal following in academia and public life, is Daniel Dennett. He, in pressing materialist reductionism to its furthest reach, sees the self as a useful illusion, fallen into a form of dogmatism and false consciousness of how it perceives itself. What will interest me here is the question of how Dennett would react to this dogmatism being challenged. In other words, if he conceives of the self as a construction, what would it mean to deconstruct it? Can you lose a self that never existed?



Dennett's work concerns mostly the philosophy of mind, and so he builds his philosophical position of the self in response to various analytic movements that dominated the 20th century in this field. This began with the advent of physicalism, the ontologically monist position that rejected cartesian dualism brought forth by logical positivists such as Carnap and Neurath. They first posed the challenge of how we can conceive of the mental, or the inner life of the self, that simultaneously fashions it, within a framework of physical facts. There were various answers to this, behaviourism which sought to externalize the self to its acts, identity theory which equated the self with certain physical states removed from time. Most influential was the rise of functionalism which didn't seek to define identity in terms of its fundamental constitution, say in a mental state, but through how it related to other mental states or its through functioning in the world. Dennett takes aspects of these movements in defending his stance which is termed 'eliminative materialism' to best understand how it relates to his notion of self, this theory should be contrasted with a 'non-reductive physicalist' conception of identity.

A non-reductive physicalist conception of identity claims that the self is the result of a privileged relation a subject has to phenomenal experience, one where our conscious experiences or 'qualia' have features that are infallible, unanalysable and importantly, wholly private. These then supervene on the physical states of the brain to give us a non-reductive account of consciousness, and by extension the self. Dennett however terms such beliefs 'folk psychology' or otherwise the manner in which we think about our selfhood in 'everyday terms'. Dennett believes that in doing so we often fall into error, as ascribing intentional states to others, or understanding their behaviour through an inference to the belief they might hold, is semantically messy. He believes that with the advent of scientific understanding such mental states no longer need to be described in a secondary 'folk psychological' manner, and that their fundamental ontology can in principle be displaced by a descriptive scientific account.

If Dennett's claims are true, this sets up an interesting possibility for the loss of not only the ontological basis of the self as is theoretically demonstrated, but also the lived conception of the self that we all share. One of the defining features of our subjectivity is privileged epistemic access to our beliefs, meaning you out of everyone around you currently holds the most knowledge about your own mental states. Or as Dennett puts it 'If I know better than you what I am up to, it is only because I have spent more time with myself'. What would occur however if this were no longer true, if your actions were more accurately predicted by others than by yourself? This idea isn't wholly alien to us, our behaviour can already be approximated to incredibly high accuracy with new technology such as big data, it is functioning from the premise of predicting mass behaviour but in its design being more and more tailored to understanding the individual.

The key folk psychological function of ascribing a belief we held as a motivator of our own actions, which is after all only a rough approximation of the actual causal complexity of a mental state, would then become redundant. And that feature of the self that had privileged epistemic access to the rationale or motivation of the subject acting in the world would fall away. A basic function of selfhood would then be fully externalized, the freedom experienced in the dialectic between internal spontaneity and external necessity would be abolished. The shift in the phenomenology of selfhood need not happen due to a belief of the subject in the impossibility of free-will, it would just alter their functional relations to the world. This is where Dennett's eliminative materialism stands quite close to functionalism, if the use of big data is more effective in predicting our own behaviour, then whatever epistemic access we felt we had to our own beliefs will be sacrificed. This means for humanity a grand fall from the high pedestal of humanism, and dissolving its corresponding human/nature dichotomy back into the mechanistic laws of nature.

# Thus Spake

By Anson Clark

The words of the mage  
Inhaled, seeped into the blood.  
Sweated out of the skin.  
Roughly-strewn mingle of nostalgia, hopes,  
And dreams; jumbled flotsam  
Like the content of the woman's home  
Bobbing on the surface of the flood waters,  
Gushing over the banks of the sorrow gnawed  
River. Words which catch out flaws.

*Possessed by a trap. Go back, it's a trap.  
Possessed by a trap, It's a flowery trick.  
Your body shaking, it's a trap.*

The Magician stood there on the mountain top bellowing,  
"I'll do my best to keep the vampires at bay.  
I'll do my best to generate light from the movement  
Of darkness to darkness. I'll hold the keys to heaven  
And hell, which clash together like slabs of steel.  
I'll exclaim love in the minefield of darkness.  
Where there is an absence of light, I will strike a  
Match and my love will explode."

*Possessed by a trap. Go back, it's a trap.  
Possessed by a trap, It's a flowery trick.  
Your body shaking, it's a trap.*

The group of anchored wanderers below  
Gasped for air, astonished, seemingly purified.  
"The flower used to be perfect, it will be perfect  
Again in the future... but it is debased now", the  
Conjurer proclaimed.

*Possessed by a trap. Go back, it's a trap.  
Possessed by a trap, It's a flowery trick.  
Your body shaking, it's a trap.*

And then a lone dissenter whispered, "But the flower  
I see before me now is perfect. I'm sure of it.  
Alas, the magus is possessed by far better words."

The shiniest words limber on the tips of flames.

His story's trap.

# HUMANITY'S CRISIS OF IDENTITY

By Saskia Portman



How does the standard 'educated', 'rational', 'scientific' person view themselves and the rest of Mankind? The answer I suspect most people would give is that Mankind is a speck in a vast purposeless cosmos, one of many creatures who are nothing special. God is a mere delusion, a flight of fancy who used to comfort us but whom we now know is non-existent. Do what you like. Life is meaningless and pointless. Oblivion is coming soon.

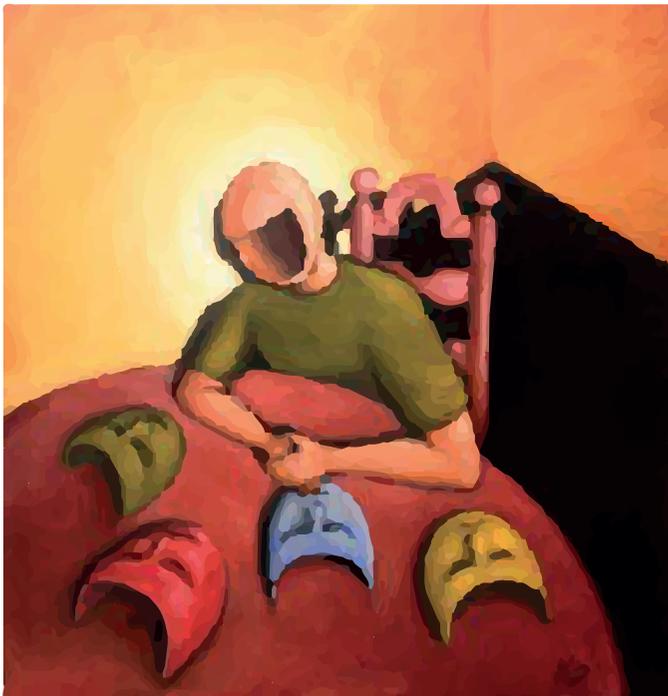
Does this sound familiar? Whether implicitly or explicitly, this, approximately, is the worldview that we have had rammed down our throats by the high priests of our secular culture, reductive-materialist atheist scientists. To question this sacrosanct doctrine is an act of secular blasphemy.

There is a particular pride, I think, inherent in this conception of the cosmos; a sort of proud defiance of being clever enough to have found the 'truth' and to live it out despite its terror. We have no need to be molly-cuddled with religious delusion. This worldview is best summed up by Iain McGhilcrest:

'Ultimately, we have come to believe that, whatever I or anyone else may say – really – when the chips are down, when the rhetoric fades, and we have stopped trying to cheer ourselves up by believing in sentimental ideas such as virtue, love and courage, the possibility of truly unselfish behaviour, or a realm of spiritual value – really, we are nothing but blind mechanisms, the dupes of our equally blind genes, with no choice but to play out the sorry farce that the force of evolution, so much bigger and greater than we are, dictates. But at least now we have the dignity of knowing that we are not deceiving ourselves.'

It would be foolish to dismiss this sort of intellectual background as mere white noise. As all philosophy does, it underpins and influences every aspect of society. Therefore, we must ask ourselves what this worldview does to Man's mind and to the world. Both are profoundly intertwined. Both are in a state of despair. The despair of both has the same cause: a profound spiritual crisis. A spiritual crisis born out in the ecological catastrophe and in an epidemic of depression and suicide.

The mental health crisis and the ecological crisis are the two biggest problems of our time, and they cannot be fixed by the very thing that caused them, our worldview, or to put it another way, our philosophy.



The reductionist-materialist atheist scientific worldview dismisses and depresses Man. Then, in perhaps the greatest act of irony ever, it even admonishes him for his miserable mind and his decimated planet and, assured of its correctness, sets about providing him with a cure – be it in climate-saving technology or anti-depressants. But the very thing that creates a problem cannot solve it.

It is important to note that moving away from the reductionist-materialist atheist worldview is not a wilful act of delusion because the truth is too hard to stomach. It is to understand that a paradigm, in some ways successful but in other ways most definitely incomplete in its understanding of the cosmos, needs to be overhauled. Contrary to the coolly detached self-image of modern Mankind, we are not as objective as we think.

The materialist paradigm demands that we dismiss vital elements of human experience. It requires us to dismiss our own consciousness because the hard problem of consciousness is intractable in the materialist paradigm, and to dismiss the common (yes, common) phenomenon of mystical experiences. It requires us to adopt a multiverse theory in order to explain the strange fitted-ness of our universe for life – and in the words of eminent philosopher Mary Midgely, ‘what the hell am I supposed to think about that?’ It also requires us to forget or dismiss that the universe appears to be created with intent, intelligence (and dare I use such a sentimental term) love. It requires us to dismiss our understanding of the cosmos to chance, rather than exploring the possibility that our minds having something in common with some superior being. It requires us to dismiss God as a useless evolutionary concept, the only adaption that apparently serves no function.



The materialist paradigm clearly has failings; to change it would not merely be an act of wishful thinking. The philosophers, and laymen alike, must turn themselves to this question not only out of a desire for truth but out of a necessity for truth in life.

Richard Tarnas remarked that the philosophy that dominated the twentieth century resembled nothing more than an obsessive-compulsive repeatedly tying and re-tying his shoe. In the great questions of life, all the mainstream really has had to offer is existential acceptance or existential defiance; proffering living an 'authentic life' as a consolation prize. That may suffice (and it is questionable whether it does suffice) for a person, but not for Mankind. Man has had everything taken from him, and philosophers wonder why they cannot bear to go on, why they are suicidal and nihilistic in their dealings with the outside world. They wonder why they have chosen to destroy themselves, for that is what the ecological crisis is – the ultimate act of self-harm.

In the twenty-first century, Man is left, in the words of Richard Tarnas, 'between the inner craving for a life of meaning and the relentless attrition of existence in a cosmos that our rational scientific world view has assured us is empty, dead, devoid of all purpose'. Man is, paradoxically, a stranger to the cosmos; a conscious, purposeful creation confronting a systematically unconscious, purposeless cosmos.

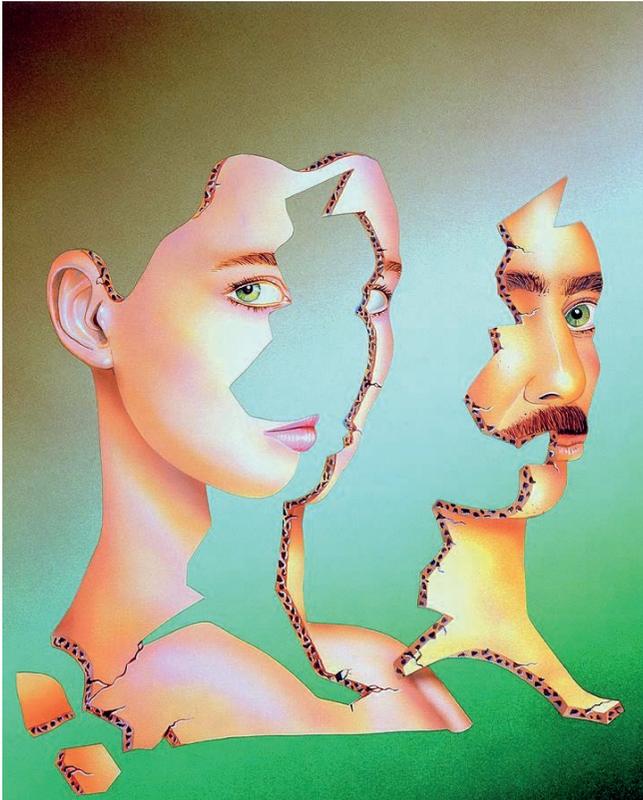
Our philosophy has gone wrong, and it needs to change if we are to survive. Man needs a better answer to the question of who we are.



# INDETERMINACY: ON THE FISSION

By Xinyi Song

In *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit comes up with the thought experiment of “fission” to support his argument that personal identity does not matter (1986). In his science-fictional setting, two cerebral hemispheres of one person can be transplanted into two heads thus bringing about the dilemma of personal identity. After examining a brief reconstruction of Parfit’s argument, another possible explanation of this case, i.e. the “four-dimensionalism” view, is proposed for comparison. Through this approach, I come to find some difficulties in the assessment and eventually suggest that before finding any genuine proof other than common-sense intuition, it might be reasonable to suspend judgement between the argument of Parfit and that of Sider.



# Parfit: Argument Against Personal Identity

Parfit's discussion of personal identity is based on his "reductionist" stand, which refers to the view that the essence of personal identity only consists in some basic facts like psychological continuity, no further thing would be involved (1986). Particularly, Parfit considers relations of psychological connectedness and continuity as what matters and names them Relation R. Commencing from these basics, the main argument is developed as follows:

Premise 1: A person X at time 1 is identical to a person Y at time 2 iff there is a Relation R between X and Y.

Premise 2: There are three possibilities after the fission: (1) The pre-fission person does not survive; (2) She survives as any one of the two people; (3) She survives as both.

Premise 3: If (3) is true, then personal identity does not matter in survival.

Premise 4: (1) is impossible because there is a person at t2 who bears Relation R with the pre-fission person. According to premise 1, the pre-fission person must survive.

Premise 5: (2) is impossible because each post-fission person bears exactly the same Relation R with the pre-fission person. There is no reason for preference.

Premise 6: There only leaves the possibility that (3) is true

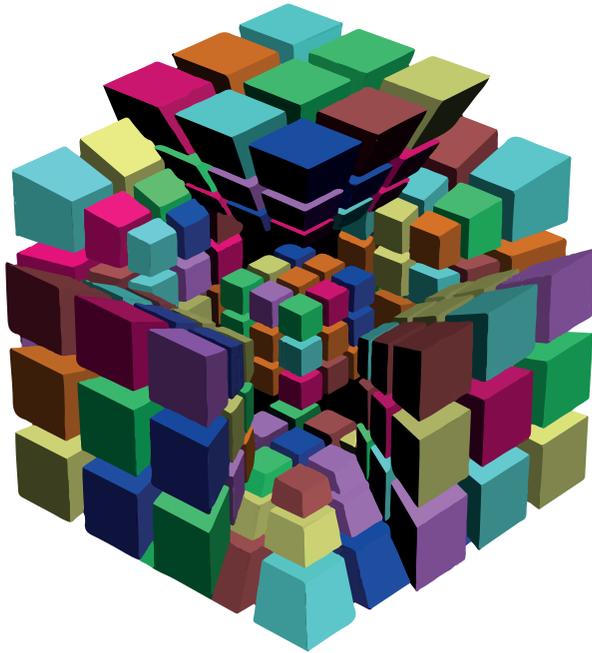
Conclusion: Personal identity does not matter in survival.

The discrepancy between personal identity and Relation R is that the former is transitive while the latter is not. Hence, it is possible to have a case in survival where only Relation R is preserved. To deal with the problem caused by fission, Parfit chooses to abandon our ordinary intuition that personal identity is what matters. But this does not seem to be the only solution. There are philosophers who still attach great importance to the idea of personal identity.



# Lewis And Sider: In Favour of Four-dimensionalism

David Lewis attempts to preserve the significance of personal identity with his conviction on four-dimensionalism. Specifically, a person extends in time in a parallel way as she extends in space, and the identity of a person is wholly constituted by numerous temporal parts. Thus, when we talk about any "person" in the case of fission, what we refer to is in fact certain temporal part, which in Lewis' multiple occupancy view, can overlap with each other (1983). One obvious advantage of this strategy is that it ensures the legitimacy of both Relation R and personal identity, mitigating the risks brought by their discrepancy. In other words, personal identity can still be what matters in survival as well as Relation R, while the puzzle of fission receives an acceptable explanation.





However, objections may arise in two ways. First, the multiple occupancy view conforms to common sense no more than Parfit's claim. If we accept the parallel between space and time, while admitting that multiple objects occupy the same space seems to simply not work, then Lewis might need a further demonstration on how multiple objects occupy the same time slice can be possible.

Otherwise, this approach to keep personal identity with ordinary intuition might bring about new counterintuitive assumptions. Besides, a more serious problem comes with semantic difficulties. For example, it seems to be implausible to use any personal pronoun to refer to a certain temporal part in a coincident case.

Correspondingly, Theodore Sider proposes the stage view to avoid these problems, based on a similar standpoint of four-dimensionalism. What is different is that the notion of temporal parts is characterised as stages that cannot overlap. Precisely, the number of stages at one time slice determines the number of “persons” we actually refer to at that time. Moreover, Sider appends the counterpart relation to his theory that a person X at time 1 is identical to a person Y at time 2 if and only if Y is a counterpart of X over a series of time. This gives further reason to support our common understanding that there is only one “person” before the fission who is identical to two post-fission “persons” (2001). In this way, it seems that in the branch of four-dimensionalism, the stage view provides a more satisfactory solution to the puzzle of fission than the multiple occupancy view does.

Nevertheless, how can we make a comparison between the proposition of Parfit and that of Sider? Notably, up to this point, the appraisal of various arguments contains one presupposition that a satisfactory explanation must be consistent with our ordinary intuition. As Sider claims, one obvious benefit of his stage view is that it reconciles its theory with the “common-sense platitude” (2001). However, shall we take the reconciliation between an argument and an ordinary intuition as a benefit before we ascertain any fact about that intuition? In view of this, this essay will end up with a suspension of judgement. Here the concern is that our ordinary intuition in the case of fission seems to be the sole basis we can rely on, though far from sound. Since we have not yet found any genuine proof to test the soundness of both arguments, any preference according to intuition seems not reasonable enough (Hawley, 2020). Nonetheless, from a methodological perspective, things may appear more urgent for Sider. He might need to give a further demonstration to show that the multiplicity of different notions such as personal identity, Relation R and counterpart relation is indeed necessary, while Parfit offers a valid explanation with only one relation left, even in a counterintuitive way.





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