

[Staff at the Department of Philosophy](#) | In Swedish | In English

Mallsida för personalsidor - engelska

IDENTITY AND MORALITY

Praktisk filosofi, Kandidatkurs, Litteraturkurs II
vt 2008; Attila Tanyi; D713
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Office hours: Tue 14-16; Thu 16-18; by appointment



This course will focus on personal identity and its role in ethical theory. We will discuss several theories of personal identity and examine their implications for our views about prudence, moral responsibility, bioethics, distributive justice, and special obligations.

Persons seem to persist through some physical and psychological changes, but not others. What are the conditions of personal identity through time, and how are they related to a person's physical and psychological characteristics? What unites different stages of a single life, and what distinguishes stages in different lives? Some views about personal identity are reductionist, claiming that a person's persistence is a matter of familiar physical and/or psychological facts; others deny these reductionist claims. We will look at the classical debate between reductionists, such as John Locke (1632-1704) and non-reductionists such as Joseph Butler (1692-1752) and Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and then turn to contemporary discussions, especially the imaginative and resourceful defense of psychological reductionism by Derek Parfit.

Parfit argues that psychological reductionism makes best sense of our responses to a diverse range of thought experiments – involving brain transplants, physical and psychological scanning and modification, physical and psychological fission (and fusion), and teletransportation. He also believes that psychological reductionism has some surprising consequences. According to psychological reductionism, my survival can be indeterminate. For instance, I might know all the facts about the future, including the fact that someone will suffer tomorrow, yet, according to reductionism, I might still not know whether it will be me that suffers. Psychological reductionism also seems to imply that the difference between myself and others is a difference of degree, not kind. Is this plausible, or is the separateness of persons some deep fact? If the intrapersonal/interpersonal distinction is not a fundamental one, psychological reductionism may force us to change some common assumptions. Perhaps my relationship to my distant future self is more like my relationship to another person. If so, this may lead us to reconsider the rationality of prudence. Psychological reductionism may also lead us to see some interpersonal associations – for instance, those involving love and friendship – as held together by the same sort of glue that holds together a single life. How might this conclusion affect our view of self-love and friendship? Of there can be interpersonal, as well as intrapersonal psychological continuity, should this affect the way that we apportion responsibility for good and bad deeds? Perhaps parents should be held responsible, at least in part, for the crimes their children commit. What about distributive justice? It is sometimes thought the importance of distributional norms depends on the separateness of persons. Both John Rawls (1921-2002) and Robert Nozick (1938-2002) rest their influential criticisms of utilitarianism on the separateness of persons. How might our views about distributive justice change if we reject the separateness of persons? Finally, several areas in bioethics rely heavily on considerations of personal identity. The morality of advance directives, of embryonic stem cell research (and genetic issues in general), or of abortion are good examples. In all these cases psychological reductionism takes a leading and often revisionary role.

FORMAT

The course consists of seven three-hour seminars. Each seminar will be framed by a student presentation: in the course of a close reading of the text, the student will guide us through the text (see below), while other participants can join in with their questions and comments. The number of presentations per seminar may vary depending on the number of registered students. If there is more than one presentation scheduled for a seminar, I will schedule presentations in such a way that they correspond to the structure of the topic discussed. I will also try to introduce material and ask questions in a way that aims to impose useful analytical structure on the readings and issues.

REQUIREMENTS

Students registered for the course are required to give presentations and write one term paper. The outline of the presentation

(2-3 pages) must be submitted to me 5PM of the day before the seminar takes place. Presentations should have an analytical structure, setting out the arguments employed in the text and making critical remarks, suggestions related to the arguments. Topics for the term paper will be distributed to participants before the last seminar of the course (March 31). Each student should choose one topic and write an argumentative essay of not more than 15 pages (12 point, Times New Roman, double spaced) and submit the paper to me not later than April 7, 12AM. Seminar participation, including presentation will be worth 50% of the final grade; the term paper will be worth 50% of the final grade. Participation in seminars is strictly obligatory, given the few number of occasions we will meet.

COURSE MATERIAL

The following books have been ordered for the course and should (soon) be available at the University Bookstore (Akademikbokhandeln):

Parfit, [Reasons and Persons](#), Oxford UP
 Perry, ed. *Personal Identity*, Columbia UP

The following encyclopedia entries provide a good introduction to and overview of the topic:

Olson, '[Personal Identity](#)', in. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
 D. Shoemaker, '[Personal Identity and Ethics](#)', in. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

A useful course website that I borrowed a lot from:

[David Brink: Persons and Values](#)

WEBSITE

The website contains all the necessary information: literature, topics, schedules, practical information on the course etc. Where it was possible, I also provided links to the articles and books: they are available from the University Library. The remaining literature (only the required, not the recommended) will be available for pickup in the Philosophy Department's administration office from the beginning of March (with the exception of the above two books: Perry and Parfit). The website will also contain the uploaded student presentations (the 2-3 page long outlines mentioned above) as soon as I receive them (that is, after 5pm of the day before the seminar). Participants are therefore strongly advised to check the website regularly.

I. PERSONAL IDENTITY

Session I. Locke and his critics. What is it for one person to persist through time, that is, for persons at different times to be one and the same? Why do we need a theory of personal identity? We expect persons to survive certain physical and psychological changes, but not others. Why is this? How are these physical and psychological features of persons related to their identity? We begin our inquiry with Locke's memory theory and its criticism by Reid (transitivity charge) and Butler (circularity charge). Here we will also meet the main alternative theories, i.e. reductionism (physical and psychological) and non-reductionism.

Required:

Locke, 'Of Identity and Diversity' in. Perry
 Reid, 'Of Identity' and 'Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity' in. Perry
 Butler, 'Of Personal Identity' in. Perry

Recommended:

Hume, 'Our Idea of Identity', 'Of Personal Identity' and 'Second Thoughts' in. Perry
 Noonan, *Personal Identity*, Chapter 1

Session II. Psychological reductionism and its rivals I. We start with Bernard Williams' argument against psychological reductionism. Then we turn to Parfit's development of Locke's theory - psychological continuity vs. memory - as well as his defense of psychological reductionism against Williams' (and others') objections. What is quasi-memory and what is the combined spectra argument? And how do they support psychological reductionism?

Required:

Parfit, [Reasons and Persons](#), Chapters 10-11

Recommended:

Williams, 'The Self and the Future' in. Perry

Noonan, Personal Identity, Chapters 2-11
 S. Shoemaker, 'Persons and Their Pasts' and 'Personal Identity'
 Grice, 'Personal Identity' in. Perry
 Rovane, *The Bounds of Agency*, Chapters 1-2

Session III. Psychological reductionism and its rivals II. Parfit claims that fission cases (cases when people divide) demonstrate that it is psychological continuity, rather than personal identity as such, that matters to us. Is he right? Are fission cases, as many claim, amount to an objection against psychological reductionism? We then turn to another argument, this time by fellow (physical) reductionists. Olson's thinking animal argument against psychological reductionism (and in favour of physical reductionism).

Required:

Parfit, [Reasons and Persons](#), Chapters 12-13

Recommended:

Olson, *What Are We?*, Chapter 2
 Nagel, 'Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness' in. Perry
 Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, Chapter 3
 Lewis, 'Survival and Identity'
 Sosa, 'Survival Matters'
 Olson, *The Human Animal* and 'An Argument for Animalism'
 Noonan, 'Animalism versus Lockeanism'

II. PERSONAL IDENTITY AND ETHICAL THEORY

Session IV. Reductionism and special concern. Private projects (e.g. that I finish editing this website) are central to our lives and may seem to be ingredients in psychological continuity. Yet they also seem to presuppose personal identity. Are these aspects of private projects consistent? What is the justification of private projects, and how does our answer affect our views about what matters? Perry's claim that special concern is strictly derivative; Whiting's attempt to account for the non-derivative significance of special concern in the framework of psychological reductionism.

Required:

Perry, 'The Importance of Being Identical' in. Rorty

Whiting, '[Friends and Future Selves](#)'

Recommended:

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 305-312
 Whiting, 'Impersonal Friends'
 Broad, 'Self and Others'
 Brink, 'Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship, and Political Community'
 Wolf, 'Self Interest and Interest in Selves'

Session V. Reductionism and prudence. Parfit offers various arguments against rational egoism or prudence, some of which rest on his reductionist claims about personal identity. Is Parfit right to insist on the parity of interpersonal and intrapersonal distribution? How might the egoist appeal to the separateness of persons to defend her theory? Any defense of egoism that appeals to the separateness of persons must address Parfit's claim that reductionism undermines the separateness of persons. Egoism's temporal neutrality implies that it is rationally required for a person to make a sacrifice now for her own greater future good. Parfit thinks that reductionism challenges the rationality of this kind of sacrifice. One reason he offers is that personal identity is metaphysically less deep, according to the reductionist. He also appeals to the fact that psychological connectedness depreciates over time. Are these arguments compelling?

Required:

Parfit, [Reasons and Persons](#), Chapters 7, 14

Brink, 'Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons' in. Dancy

Recommended:

Brink, 'Self-Love and Altruism'
 Brink, 'Prudence and Authenticity'
 Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 418-419
 Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*
 Johnston, 'Humean Concerns without Superlative Selves' in. Dancy

Session VI. Reductionism, responsibility and distributive justice. Parfit also claims that reductionism should affect our attitudes toward moral responsibility and distributive justice. He thinks that reductionism makes it hard for us to hold people responsible for the actions of their earlier selves and to impose long-term punishments for crimes. He also thinks that reductionism undermines the separateness of persons, reduces the importance of distributional principles, and makes utilitarianism more plausible than it would otherwise be. Does reductionism support these moral claims, and are they

as revisionary as Parfit thinks?

Required:

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Chapter 15

Jeske, '[Persons, Compensation, and Utilitarianism](#)'

Recommended:

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§5-6

Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. 33

Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, pp. 138-142

van den Beld, ed. *Moral Responsibility and Ontology*

D. Shoemaker, 'Personal Identity and Practical Concerns'

Schultz, 'Persons, Selves and Utilitarianism'

Session VII. Reductionism and bioethics. Considerations of personal identity appear in several bioethical discussions. Debates concerning embryonic stem cell research, abortion, or advance directives are all infused to a great extent with arguments from personal identity. We will only deal with one such field of application: the moral authority of advance directives. Is it morally justified for the will of the non-demented self of the patient to bind his later demented self? Is the demented self the same person? Is he a person at all?

Required:

Buchanan and Brock, *Deciding for Others*, Chapter 3

DeGrazia, '[Advance Directives, Dementia, and 'the Someone Else Problem'](#)'

Recommended:

Conee, 'Metaphysics and the Morality of Abortion'

McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 321-329

Becker, Gerhold K. ed. *The Moral Status of Persons*

Burley, Justine and Harris, John, eds. *A Companion to Genetics*

DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics*, Chapter 5

Holland, S., Lebacqz K., and Zoloth, L. eds. *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate*

Olson, Eric T. *What Are We?*, Chapter 2

Singer, *Unsanctifying Human Life*

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Brink, David, 'Self-love and Altruism' in. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997): 122-57

Brink, David, 'Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons' in. *Reading Parfit*, Dancy ed. pp. 96-134

Brink, David 'Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship, and Political Community' in. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 (1999): 252-289

Brink, David, 'Prudence and Authenticity: Intrapersonal Conflicts of Value' in. *The Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 215-245

Broad, C. D. 'Self and Others' in. *Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy* ed. D. Cheney, London: Allen and Unwin, 1971, pp. 262-282

Buchanan, Allen, 'Advance Directives and the Personal Identity Problem' in. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17:4 (Autumn 1988): 277-302

Buchanan, Allen and Brock, Dan W., *Deciding for Others: The Ethics of Surrogate Decision Making*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

Burley, Justine and Harris, John, eds. *A Companion to Genetics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002

Butler, Joseph, 'Of Personal Identity' in. *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 99-107

Conee, Earl, 'Metaphysics and the Morality of Abortion' in. *Mind* 108:432 (Oct, 1999): 619-646

Dancy, Jonathan (ed.), *Reading Parfit*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997

DeGrazia, David, 'Advance Directives, Dementia, and 'the Someone Else Problem'' in. *Bioethics* 13:5 (1999): 373-391

DeGrazia, David, 'Identity, Killing, and the Boundaries of Our Existence' in. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31:4 (2003): 413-442

DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Grice, H. P. 'Personal Identity' in. *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 73-99

Holland, S., Lebacqz K., and Zoloth, L. eds. *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate*, MIT Press, 2001

Hume, David, 'Our Idea of Identity' in. *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 159-161

Hume, David, 'Of Personal Identity' in. *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 161-173

Hume, David, 'Second Thoughts' in. *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 173-179

Jeske, Diane, 'Persons, Compensation and Utilitarianism' in. *The Philosophical Review* 102 (1993): 541-575

Johnston, Mark, 'Humean Concerns Without Superlative Selves' in. *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy, pp.148-179

Korsgaard, Christine, 'Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency': A Kantian Response to Parfit' in. *Philosophy and Public*

- Affairs*, 18:2 (Spring 1989): 101-132
- Lewis, David, 'Survival and Identity' in *The Identities of Persons*, A. Rorty ed. pp. 17-41
- Locke, John, 'Of Identity and Diversity' in *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 33-53
- Marquis, Don, 'Why Abortion Is Immoral' in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86:4 (April 1989): 183-202
- McMahan, Jeff, *The Ethics of Killing*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002
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- Nagel, Thomas, 'Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness' in *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 227-247
- Nagel, Thomas, *The View from Nowhere*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986
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- Noonan, H. 'Animalism versus Lockeanism: A Current Controversy' in *Philosophical Quarterly* 48 (1998): 302-318
- Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974
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- Perry, John, 'The Importance of Being Identical' in *The Identities of Persons* ed. A. Rorty, pp. 67-91
- Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971
- Reid, Thomas, 'Of Identity' in *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 107-113
- Reid, Thomas, 'Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity' in *Personal Identity*, J. Perry ed. pp. 113-119
- Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg (ed.), *The Identities of Persons*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1976
- Rovane, Carol, *The Bounds of Agency*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998
- Schultz, Bert, 'Persons, Selves, and Utilitarianism' in *Ethics* 96:4 (July 1986): 721-745
- Shoemaker, David, '[Personal Identity and Ethics](#)' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, March 13, 2007
- Shoemaker, David, 'Embryos, Souls, and the Fourth Dimension' in *Social Theory and Practice* 31 (2005): 51-75
- Shoemaker, David, 'Personal Identity and Practical Concerns' in *Mind* 116:462 (April 2007): 317-357
- Shoemaker, Sydney, 'Persons and Their Pasts' in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): 269-285
- Shoemaker, Sydney, 'Personal Identity: A Materialist Account' in S. Shoemaker and R. Swinburne, eds. *Personal Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984
- Sider, Ted, *Four-Dimensionalism*, New York: Oxford UP, 2001
- Sidgwick, Henry, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed.
- Singer, Peter, *Unsanctifying Human Life*, ed. Helga Kuhse, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002
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- van den Beld, ed. *Moral Responsibility and Ontology*, the Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000
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- Whiting, Jennifer, 'Impersonal Friends' in *The Monist* 74 (1991): 3-29
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- Wolf, Susan, 'Self Interest and Interest in Selves' in *Ethics* 96:4 (July 1986): 703-720
- Wrigley, Anthony, 'Personal Identity, Autonomy and Advance Directives' in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 24:4 (2007): 381-396

SCHEDULE

Place and time	Topic	Presentations (previous semester)	Outlines
Tuesday 7.10 13-14 D255	Introduction, scheduling of presentations, other practical matters	none.	Session 0
Tuesday 14.10 13-14 D255	Locke and his critics: Locke, Reid, Butler	Tobias on Locke Jon on Butler and Reid	Session 1
Friday 17.10 13-16 D255	Psychological reductionism and its rivals I: Parfit	Nina on Parfit Chapter 10 Joakim on Parfit Chapter 11	Session 2

Tuesday 21.10 13-16 D255	Psychological reductionism and its rivals II: Parfit	Lisa on Parfit Chapter 12, 13	Session 3
Friday 24.10 13-16 D255	Reductionism and special concern: Perry, Whiting	Karim on Perry Joakim in Whiting	Session 4
Tuesday 28.10 13-16 D239	Reductionism and prudence: Parfit, Brink	Jon on Brink	Session 5
Friday 31.28 13-16 D255	Reductionism, responsibility, and distributive justice: Parfit, Jeske	Nina on Parfit, Chapter 15	Session 6
Tuesday 4.11 13-16 D255	Reductionism and bioethics: Buchanan and Brock, DeGrazia	Karim on Buchanan and Brock Tobias on DeGrazia	Session 7

NEWS

3.3. I have put the course material in a box marked 'Identity' in the expedition office of the Department. Except for the assigned chapter from the Brock and Buchanan book (which I will include later), all articles and chapters are there so that those who don't want to or cannot print can also have access to the assigned readings.

8.3. I have made the changes we have agreed about concerning literature and requirements. We also have a new participant in the course, Joakim. This means that the presentation burden will be reduced to 2 presentations/participant. We will briefly talk about this on Monday.

13.3 The Buchanan and Brock chapter (last session material) is now available for pick up in the expedition office.

17.3. Some of the articles disappeared from the box in the expedition office. I have now replaced them; they are again available for pick up if any of you needs them.

18.3. Please read pp. 307-312 from Parfit's book for Thursday.

24.3. I have fixed the links to the presentation outlines; they now work properly.

31.3. Here are the essay [questions](#) for the term paper. Remember: deadlines for submission is 7 APRIL 12AM!

New semester

13.10. I have refreshed the site and uploaded the outline for the introductory session.

21.10. Two rescheduled seminars. Thursday 23.10. 10-13 F271 and Monday 3.11 13-16 F279

3.11. Exam: one freely chosen topic or one from the list of questions above. Length etc. are there too. Deadline: Nov. 19. Result by the end of that week.

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