

Good example of research paper on derek parfit on personal identity

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Personal identity has been variously defined. It mainly deals with matters that are connected to ourselves based on the idea of our being people. There is a broad literature of personal identity both in the Western, and Eastern philosophy and discussions have emerged in the recent past on our identity over the years. The concept of personal identity in psychology relied significantly on the version of relational memory criterion by Locke. The relational theory raised many objections. The theory argued that memory presupposes identity such that past experiences play an important role in a person's identity. However, since 1970s, debates have become rampant especially following Derek Parfit argument of survival in relation to identity. According to Derek Parfit, survival is not identity. In his book *Reasons and Persons* wrote in 1984, Derek expresses his concern for the study of philosophy and the capability of the personal fission. His numerous articles centered on various themes that he later pursued and were still being developed today. Themes such as the idea of "reductionist" explained that identity is constituted by the relationship between the physical and the mental events and not necessarily determinates such as an individual soul (Martin 1).

The thought of the personal fission played a significant role in Parfit arguments. In particular, it has influenced Derek Parfit theory of reductionism and his argument that identity does not necessarily matter in survival. Parfit rejects the concept of identity as a criterion for survival. According to him, survival is broad and complex process such that the identity alone cannot be used as a criterion for survival. Psychologically, he argued that a person's existence consists of a series of occurrences and

interrelated events that are mental in nature. Parfit illustrates that a person's identity do not change through time. In addition, the related mental events are directly connected. The connections are mainly brought about by the notions of intention, memory, belief and continuity of desire. Accordingly, Parfit indicates that the concept of survival should be understood separately from identity. It is so since he argued that one can survive, but this does not necessarily entail that there is another person alive who possesses similar identity as the first person. Although there are some modifications and assumptions in some of his books relating to the understanding of survival and identity, Derek Parfit maintains his idea that the identity cannot be used as a criterion for survival.

Furthermore, Parfit maintains that we can possess what is essential in survival without necessarily having personal identity. Derek can be termed as a reductionist. He believed that there exists no adequate criterion of personal identity and persons cannot exist apart from their components. In his conceptualization, reality can be described impersonally. Ideally, he observes that we can identify and know the facts and experiences about an individual's continued existence but we are not in a position to say that such an individual has survived. According to Derek Parfit, people are highly mistaken by taking the assumption that personal identity is what is relevant and important in survival. Parfit, on the contrary, identify that the relation is what matters in survival. As a matter of fact, he articulates that psychological connectedness and continuity determines survival.

Psychological connectedness in terms of memory and character is what matters rather than personal identity. Parfit rejects identity as a criterion of

survival. These are ascertained through concentrating on the fact that individuals are composed of just brains and bodies, but personal identity is elaborate and complex and cannot be reduced to either brains or bodies. In fact, identity is cannot be said to be a determinate as people often suppose. Instead, identity mainly arises from the way we talk and express our ideas. Matters of survival and existence, therefore, should not be expressed in relation to identity because individuals exist just like the way nations or clubs exists. Parfit vehemently rejects the idea of physical and soul theories including their possible explanations of survival entails. He asserts that a person's body, soul, and experiences are distinct. It means that the self is more than a physical body, but less than a separate soul that is in existence. Moreover, Parfit uses the question, ' Am I about to die?' to illustrate that personality is not determinate in all cases. The question may be empty or may have a Yes or No answer. He shows that the physical theory for instance, is not true when it claims that the physical elements in self are more like the biological concept of the body. According to him, the elements that are in the self are just psychological and are sufficient for the survival of the self. The brain also plays a part in every mental event and thus it is also significant for our survival since it is part of the psychological connectedness. Is supports an important element of the survival (Martin 21).

Derek Parfit employs the example of a cell to illustrate his concept of identity and survival. He claims that when cells die and are being replaced in one's body, a perfect replica of that person's self is being generated.

Unfortunately, in such a situation we cannot claim since the cells are identical then it signifies survival. In addition, in the case of cerebrum donor

and recipient, we cannot imply that a donor who dies in the process of the transplant has survived since the recipient possesses identical characteristics as the donor. Parfit disagrees with that concept arguing that the identity should determine survival. However, what matters to him is the chain of the psychological continuity and connectedness. In understanding survival as a matter of physical connectedness, Parfit seems to be in agreement with Locke conceptualization that consciousness is important in the survival of the self. According to Locke, losing a great amount of memory implies the death of the self but retention of a sufficient amount of memory is required for the survival of the self. He notes that memory assists in the survival simply because our imaginations are capable of forming a lamp and a series of impressions that can form the self. Additionally, Parfit has attempted to show that it is irrational for persons to consider the physical continuity as an element of importance in the survival. In his understanding, physical continuity should receive less importance as the body is simply an instrument and serves an instrumental value. Parfit views the body as a vehicle that enhances psychological continuity. Although Parfit agrees with the idea that one becomes sentimental and attached to the original wedding ring as opposed to a new ring is a clear indication of psychological or physical connectedness (Martin 21). One of the drawbacks of Derek's idea is that he does not provide an explanation of the extent and degree of permissible rationality or irrationality in matters that are relatively important to a person's body. In Parfit's view, it is not irrational when one becomes a little sentimental about an original wedding ring since in such instances there are historical properties and connections. However,

Parfit defense the situation by claiming that the people's beliefs that an essential element to their identities is their bodies make such persons prefer their bodies to replicas (Martin 22).

In the case of the wedding ring, the ring helps one to be psychologically closer to events that had a positive impact in that person's life. It, therefore, has an instrumental value in Parfit's conceptualization of psychological continuity. In my opinion, Parfit's concept and argument that identity ought not to be used as a benchmark for survival are not correct. It is wrong because Parfit in the first place provides a contradictory statement in his position regarding the idea of identity and survival. In his book, he talks less about survival than he talked of in the articles. He keeps on shifting positions as to whether we should place emphasis on survival apart from identity or shift to what matters in survival without regarding personal identity. He did not identify specifically where the hedge should be placed between identity and survival. In addition, Parfit relies heavily on the experimental aspect to building his arguments especially about the self. However, numerous scholars and philosophers caution that the use of thought experiments could be dangerous as it indicates that it is too much fictional than real. For example, according to philosopher Wilkes, split-brain transplants could be considered not genuinely theoretically possible hence Parfit's arguments based on such analysis cannot be relied upon as being correct (Martin 19).

Derek does not consider the aspect of impossibility in his thought experiments. He remains particular and optimism on what will happen in his experiments and operates within the stipulations. However, such stipulations often do not take into account the impossibility of the occurrence. It may not

be possible for the imaginary cases of Parfit to happen in science and technology. Another criticism of the personal identity view is by reductionist Mark Johnson, who rejects Parfit notion of identity. According to Mark Johnson, identity has a significant contribution in survival. He maintains that personhood is what matters as opposed to Parfit's explanation that facts in the personhood is what significant in survival (Schechtman 39). In conclusion, Derek Parfit provides another angle through which personality and survival can be understood. Parfit rejected the physical and soul theory and claimed that personal identity is not what matters in survival (Martin 19). His argument is based on the thought experiments and spectrum that determining the state of personal identity is almost impossible. The idea that an individual possesses similar characteristics do not signify survival since for personal identity to hold, one on one relation must be identifiable. However, the concept of the self can survive in one-two relations. Furthermore, Parfit argued that it is Relation R that matters in survival rather than personal identity. He maintains this view because the idea of Relation R incorporates the psychological connectedness and continuity. He clearly demonstrated this using his thought experiments that included the split-brain and the transplant experiment to show that the idea of Relation R possesses everything that we human beings consider as being most vital about ourselves.

Work Cited

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