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Separating Persons

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By the time Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* was published in 1984, a near-consensus had emerged that traditional forms of consequentialism are false because they fail to respect the 'separateness of persons'.¹ Parfit held that the reductionist views of personal identity he defended in *Reasons and Persons* undermined this emerging consensus:

The fact that we live different lives is the fact that we are not the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep, so is the fact of non-identity. There are not two different facts here, one of which is less deep on the Reductionist View, while the other remains as deep. There is merely one fact, and this fact's denial. The separateness of persons is the denial that we are all the same person. If the fact of personal identity is less deep, so is this fact's denial.²

The aim of this essay is to argue that Parfit's reductionist views of personal identity are in fact compatible with a plausible interpretation of the separateness of persons. My thesis does not, however, leave those of us who are inclined to accept Parfit's reductionist views of personal identity in the same place as those who have traditionally wielded the separateness of persons as an objection to consequentialism. This is because the separateness of persons, on the Parfitian view of personal identity, can arise within a life. We thus have reason to reject moral views which treat the interpersonal and intrapersonal distribution of goods as different in kind. The legacy of *Reasons and Persons* should therefore not be understood as undermining the significance of the separateness of persons, but as transforming our understanding of its role in our moral and prudential thinking.

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¹ See e.g. D. Gauthier, *Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 123–7; T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 134; R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 32–3; J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 26–7; and B. Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams (eds.), *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 108–18.

² D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 339.

My argument proceeds by considering a series of cases. The first set of cases, which I dub ‘Diamond Cases’, show that the separateness of persons has intuitive support. The second set of cases, which I dub ‘Fission Cases’, illustrates Parfit’s reductionist views of personal identity. The third set of cases, which I dub ‘Diamond-Fission Cases’, combine Diamond Cases and Fission Cases. These cases will illustrate that there is intuitive support for the separateness of persons in the very kinds of cases which motivates Parfit’s reductionist views of personal identity. I propose that the lesson that those of us attracted to Parfit’s reductionist views of personal identity should draw from Diamond-Fission cases is that the fundamental concern underlying the separateness of persons can also arise within a single individual’s life. Thus, on the Parfitian view, we should accept that individuals are divided in a normative sense, not just a metaphysical sense.

1. Diamond Cases

This section introduces the Diamond Cases. These cases are meant to illustrate the intuitive appeal of the separateness of persons. Thus, to introduce Diamond Cases properly, we should get a firmer grip on what it means to respect the separateness of persons in the first place. John Rawls is often cited as the originator of the objection that Classical Utilitarianism fails to respect the separateness of persons. Here’s his most cited passage on the topic:

[Classical Utilitarianism] is the consequence of extending to society the principle of choice for one man, and then, to make this extension work, conflating all persons into one through the imaginative acts of the impartial sympathetic spectator. Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons.³

The objection, quite roughly, is that the Classical Utilitarian conflates what is morally appropriate for the distribution of goods or utility among different persons with what is prudentially appropriate for the distribution of goods or utility within a single life over time. The best examples to illustrate Rawls’s point were introduced in Peter Diamond’s critique⁴ of John Harsanyi’s defense of Average Utilitarianism.⁵ Diamond objects to Harsanyi by offering a pair of cases. Here’s a structurally analogous version of the first of Diamond’s cases:

³ See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 27.

⁴ See P. Diamond, ‘Cardinal Welfare, Individualistic Ethics, and Interpersonal Comparison of Utility: Comment’, *Journal of Political Economy* 75 (1967): 765–6.

⁵ See J. Harsanyi, ‘Cardinal Welfare, Individualistic Ethics, and Interpersonal Comparisons of Utility’, *Journal of Political Economy* 63 (1955): 309–21. Interestingly, Rawls believed that Harsanyi’s

Intrapersonal Coin-Flip: You can flip one of two coins, ϕ or ψ . If ϕ lands heads, Anne receives 10 units of welfare on Monday and 5 units of welfare on Tuesday. If ϕ lands tails, Anne receives 5 units of welfare on Monday and 10 units of welfare on Tuesday. No matter what side of ψ lands face up, Anne will receive 10 units of welfare on Monday and 5 units of welfare on Tuesday.

So long as Anne doesn't have a preference for which day of the week she receives her welfare, it doesn't matter whether one flips ϕ or ψ . This is because there's nothing objectionable in thinking that one's reasons to prefer different outcomes might be neutral with respect to times. Most who invoke the Separateness of Persons as an objection to Classical Utilitarianism will agree with the intuitive verdict in this case. But consider a structural analogue of Diamond's second case:

Interpersonal Coin-Flip: You can flip one of two coins, ϕ or ψ . If ϕ lands heads, Beth receives 10 units of welfare and Carol receives 5 units of welfare. If ϕ lands tails, Beth receives 5 units of welfare and Carol receives 10 units of welfare. No matter what side of ψ lands face up, Beth will receive 10 units of welfare and Carol will receive 5 units of welfare.

Many believe that it does matter which coin you choose to flip in this case. You should choose to flip ϕ because it gives each potential receipt of the welfare benefit a 'fair shake' at receiving the larger benefit. From a completely person-neutral standpoint—that is, a standpoint that does not recognize the separateness of persons—it should not matter which coin you flip. Each way the coin lands would confer the same sum total of benefits impersonally construed. Therefore, highly impersonal views like Classical Utilitarianism seem to run counter to powerful and important intuitions about the separateness of persons in cases like Interpersonal Coin-Flip. On a slightly different way of thinking about it, the problem is not that Classical Utilitarianism is impersonal per se. Instead, the problem is that the Classical Utilitarian does not recognize that there are moral reasons to prefer that one distribution of equally valuable prospects to another. Because individuals are 'separate' they must each receive an equal chance, insofar as it's possible, of receiving a given benefit.

The lesson of Intrapersonal Coin-Flip and Interpersonal Coin-Flip, according to those who have traditionally invoked the separateness of persons as an objection to Classical Utilitarianism is that these two cases illustrate that there's an important moral difference between how we should distribute goods within a life and how we should distribute goods between lives. There is, in other words, a

view did not violate the separateness of persons for reasons most of us who now discuss the separateness of persons often ignore. See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 183–94.

kind of asymmetry between intrapersonal and interpersonal cases. However, notice that we don't need to posit an asymmetry between intrapersonal and interpersonal cases in order to accept our intuition about Interpersonal Coin-Flip. We could accept this intuition while also rejecting our intuition about some versions of Intrapersonal Coin-Flip, thereby adopting a non-standard, but symmetrical view. Thus there are three possible views:

The Asymmetry View: The distribution of goods in intrapersonal cases and interpersonal cases should be treated differently. For example, we have moral reasons to give two different individuals a fair shake in cases like Interpersonal Coin-Flip. But we have no moral reason, *ceteris paribus*, to give two distinct time slices of the same person a fair shake.

The Old Symmetry View: We should think of the distribution of goods in interpersonal cases on the model of intrapersonal cases. On this view, we have no moral reasons to give two different individuals a fair shake. We also have no moral reasons, *ceteris paribus*, to give two distinct time slices of the same person a fair shake.

The New Symmetry View: We should think of the distribution of goods in intrapersonal cases on the model of interpersonal cases. On this view, we do have moral reasons to give two different individuals a fair shake in the rights. However, we also have moral reasons, *ceteris paribus*, to give two distinct time slices of the same person a fair shake.

Classical Utilitarians hold the Old Symmetry View. They believe that how welfare is distributed within a life as opposed to between lives is not make a moral difference. And they would reject the view that we should give fair shakes in cases of intrapersonal distribution. Those who have wielded the separateness of persons as an objection to Classical Utilitarianism hold the Asymmetry View. They believe it's a matter of fairness that we don't treat the distribution of goods between individuals as we treat the distribution of good within a life. The New Symmetry View holds, in effect, that the concern underlying the separateness of persons can arise within a life. If that's right, the Classical Utilitarian is not wrong because they fail to accept an important difference in the distribution of goods in intrapersonal and interpersonal cases, but because they fail to recognize the moral concern underlying the separateness of persons in all cases.

2. What Did Parfit Believe?

The passage I quoted of Parfit's in my introductory remarks suggests that he held the Old Symmetry View. However, if we consider different passages of *Reasons and Persons*, whether it would be fully accurate too attribute to Parfit the Old

Symmetry View becomes less clear. For example, Parfit summarizes part of his conclusion as follows:

Thus it is more plausible to claim that great burdens imposed upon a child cannot be compensated, or fully compensated, by somewhat greater benefits in this child's adult life. When we thus extend distributive principles so that they cover, both whole lives, and weakly connected parts of the same life, this makes these principles more important. This is a move away from the Utilitarian View.

I have just discussed a second argument for a change in the scope of our distributive principles. This claims that only the deep further fact makes possible compensation over different parts of a life. Since there is no such fact, we ought, as Nagel suggests, to change 'the size of the units over which a distributive principle operates.' The units shrink to people's states at particular times.⁶

In this passage, Parfit is at least entertaining something very like the New Symmetry View. The idea that our distributive principles should operate over units much smaller than lives—that is, over time slices of a single life—is very much in keeping with the New Symmetry View. However, Parfit immediately follows this statement with a bit of hedging: 'This conclusion is defensible, but so is its denial.'⁷ This statement suggests that Parfit was at least agnostic about which view to accept. And interestingly, he follows this claim up by reaffirming the passage I quote in my introductory remarks about how the separateness of persons may seem to do less work in justifying distributive principles on the reduction view of persons.⁸ However, here, once again, Parfit takes an interesting turn. He says,

I earlier discussed whether, if we change our view, we had as much reason to be specially concerned about our own futures. Some writers claim that only the deep further fact justifies this special concern, and that, since there is no such fact, we have no reason to be specially concerned about our own futures...

I then advanced another argument against the Self-interest Theory about Rationality. This appealed to the fact that part of what is important in personal identity, psychological connectedness, holds over time to reduced degrees. When some important fact holds to a reduced degree, it cannot be irrational to believe this fact to have less importance. It therefore cannot be irrational to be less concerned, now, about those parts of our future to which we are now less closely connected.⁹

Here, Parfit seems to be saying that our future selves are less like us and more like other people from the standpoint of prudence. He even takes this one step further

⁶ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 346.

⁷ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 346.

⁸ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 346.

⁹ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 346–7.

by claiming that any criticism of how one treats his or her distant future self can only be criticized on moral grounds:

On the Revised Self-interest Theory, which is not refuted, it may not be irrational to do what one knows will be worse for oneself. Great imprudence may not be irrational. If such acts are not irrational, they need to be criticized. I claimed that we should regard them as morally wrong. If such acts are morally wrong, this strengthens the case for paternalism.¹⁰

If Parfit is right about this, then perhaps there remains room on his view to accept the New Symmetry View. Of course, claiming that prudence concedes ground to morality does not by itself entail the New Symmetry View. Perhaps this explains why Parfit seems to hedge in other passages. He is agnostic about whether to accept the New Symmetry View, at least in part, because his views don't entail it. What we would need is a further argument.

I will argue that those who accept Parfit's claims about personal identity should accept that the truth lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View. In other words, we should hold tightly to our intuitions about cases like Interpersonal Coin-Flip, but some intrapersonal cases should be thought of more on the model of interpersonal cases than others. The difference between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal, on this view, is a matter of degree, not kind. For now, let's set this view to the side. We'll return to it in due course.

The next step in my argument is to consider Parfit's argument against the separateness of persons. I'll argue that, insofar as Diamond cases are the litmus test for whether we should accept or reject the core concern people have with the separateness of persons, Parfit's argument doesn't go as far as he suggests. We can accept a view very much like the separateness of persons on his reductionist view of personal identity. Once this discussion is complete, we can return to the argument that, for those attracted to Parfit's views about the relationship between prudence and personal identity, the truth lies somewhere between what I call the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View.

3. Fission Cases

The best way to understand Parfit's argument against the separateness of persons is that it suffers from a presupposition error. If the category of 'person' is to cast some kind of morally relevant boundary, as the separateness of persons suggests, there had better be something morally significant about the category of 'person'

¹⁰ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 347.

in and of itself. But, Parfit argues, the category of person is not in and of itself so morally relevant. His argument for this claim proceeds by showing that facts about personal identity over time don't form the basis of a theory of prudence over time. Because prudence is usually thought to be what's fundamentally at stake in cases of the intrapersonal distribution of goods, facts about personal identity over time are not relevant to intrapersonal distribution. Thus, Parfit reasons in some of the passages I've quoted, the supposed basis of the Asymmetry View is undermined if facts about personal identity over time do not ground facts about prudence over time.

Parfit rejected the claim that relations of personal identity cast prudentially relevant boundaries in favor of the view that 'relation-R' formed the basis of rational prudential concern about the future. Relation-R is a relation of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness and/or continuity formed by the right causes.¹¹ It's important to note that relation-R could not, by itself, be a relation of personal identity. Why? Consider:

Fission: Ed enters the replicator machine. The replicator machine scans Ed's body, produces two perfect replicas of him, simultaneously destroying his body. The two replicas of Ed are called 'Ted' and 'Fred' respectively. Both Ted and Fred wake up in the replicator machine with all of Ed's beliefs, desires, intentions, and memories. To each of them, it feels like they were Ed, blinked, and are now on the other side of the room.

Relation-R—so long as we follow Parfit in understanding 'the right kind of cause' as any cause whatsoever—holds between Ed and Ted as well as between Ed and Fred. That is, it holds one-to-many—from one individual at a time T1 to multiple individuals at another time T2. Identity relations can only hold one-to-one. This is, in part, because identity is a transitive relation: If α is identical to β and β is identical to γ , then α is identical to γ . Relation-R is not transitive. It obtains between Ed and Ted as well as between Ed and Fred. But it does not obtain between Ted and Fred. Relation-R is therefore not a relation of identity. Ed, according to Parfit, should think of Ted (and Fred for that matter), prudentially speaking, as if he were going to be Ted.

Parfit was right, so far as it goes, that his views about personal identity and prudence are relevant to the separateness of persons. If the category of 'person' is not itself morally relevant, this does seem *to* count against the idea that the boundaries between people could matter; morally irrelevant categories don't have morally relevant boundaries. But Parfit's point doesn't carry him as far from the Separateness of Persons as he seems to think. For, as we've just seen, he recognizes

¹¹ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 215.

another possible boundary-setting relation in place of personal identity: relation-R. The lesson to be drawn is thus not that boundaries between individuals are morally irrelevant, but that the morally relevant boundaries between individuals are not grounded in relations of personal identity. The Parfitian view can make room for the ‘separateness of R-related beings.’ Though he does not say so explicitly, perhaps this is part of what Parfit meant when he says claims that what appears to be great imprudence is actually morally wrong.

Reconsider Intrapersonal Coin-Flip and Interpersonal Coin-Flip. Assume that Anne is R-related to herself today and on Monday, today and on Tuesday, and on Monday and Tuesday. Beth and Carol, however, are not R-related across the outcomes in Interpersonal Coin-Flip. Our intuition that there is something different about the trade-offs in the distribution of goods in Intrapersonal Coin-Flip and Interpersonal Coin-Flip can thus be explained by the prudential and moral significance of the R-relation. So while Parfit is correct to reject the separateness of persons, he can do so while accepting the intuition that supports the separateness of persons.

One might think that the separateness of R-related beings will support the Asymmetry View, thereby forcing Parfit to ally himself with those who have appealed to the separateness of persons as an objection to traditional forms of consequentialism which would accept the Old Symmetry View. In the next two sections, I will argue that this isn’t quite right. While Parfit should reject the Old Symmetry View, he should accept that the truth lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View.

4. Diamond-Fission Cases

I’ve introduced two kinds of case. The first kind of case—Diamond Cases—are really a pair of cases. The first of the Diamond Case pair involves an intrapersonal trade-off, while the second of the Diamond Case pair involves an interpersonal trade-off. The point of the Diamond Cases is to illustrate that most of us believe there is some important difference in the distribution of goods in intrapersonal and interpersonal cases. The second kind of case I’ve introduced is Fission cases. Parfit used Fission cases to support his views about personal identity and prudence. Such cases also nicely demonstrate that the R-relation—the relation Parfit believes to form the basis of rational prudential concern over time—is non-transitive and therefore not an identity relation. If we combine Diamond Cases with Fission Cases, we can see why Parfit has reason to reject the Asymmetry view. Here’s one way to combine the two kinds of case:

Diamond-Fission: Ed can walk into one of two replicator machines, ϕ or ψ . If Ed walks into ϕ , then either (i) Ted will have a hundred years of good life and

Fred will have a hundred years of similarly good life or (ii) Ted will have fifty years of good life and Fred will have fifty years of similarly good life. There's a 50 per cent chance of each outcome occurring. If Ed walks into ψ , then no matter what, Ted will have a hundred years of good life and Fred will have fifty years of similarly good life.

Intuitively, does it matter whether Ed picks ϕ or ψ ? It seems to me that it does. Ed should walk into ϕ . Ψ , after all, gives Fred a fair shot at a hundred years of good life while ψ does not. However, from the perspective of Ed who is making the decision, both Ted and Fred are R-related to him. They are individuals for whom he should care in the same prudential way as he cares for himself. And yet, this prudential concern seems entirely susceptible to the fair-shake intuitions in Interpersonal Coin-Flip.

Here's a natural suggestion about what's going on in this case. While it's true that Ed should feel for Ted and Fred as he would feel for a future individual who was identical to him, it's not true that Ted and Fred should feel that way about each other. After all, Ted and Fred don't stand in relation-R. That is, they are each psychologically continuous and connected by the right kind of cause to Ed, but not to each other. Thus the separateness of R-related beings (or persons for that matter) is not fundamentally about the relationship that the individual making a decision bears to those affected by that decision. The separateness of R-related beings instead applies only to those affected by a choice. On the Parfitian view, two individuals can fail to stand in the relevant prudence-inducing relation to each other while nevertheless both standing in the relevant prudence-inducing relation to the same third party. And this is because relation-R is non-transitive. Thus, on the Parfitian view, an agent can have prudential reasons to care about two distinct individuals for their own sake and yet the separateness of R-related beings arises anyway because those two distinct individuals don't stand in the prudence-grounding relationship to each other. The lesson here, for the Parfitian view, is simply that the distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal cases is far messier than the more traditional views would have us believe.

Our intuitions about Diamond-Fission support the first premise in an argument that shows the Asymmetry View is on shakier ground, given Parfit's views about personal identity and prudence, than it would first seem: the separateness of R-related beings can obtain so long as the individuals affected don't stand in relation-R to each other, whether or not the individual making the decision stands in relation-R to those affected. If that's right, even when an individual stands in a prudence-grounding relation to other individuals, this fact does not undermine the existence of the special concern felt by those who believe in the separateness of persons. Thus, the thought that there's some deep divide between what one has reasons to do in interpersonal and intrapersonal cases is on shakier grounds than it may first seem.

However, the Asymmetry View is still an option. For the contrast between interpersonal and intrapersonal cases can be drawn along the lines of whether those affected by the given choice stand in the R-relation or not. If they do, you don't need to give the individuals a fair shake. If they don't, you do need to give each individual a fair shake. In the next section, I will argue that Asymmetry View is false. The truth instead lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View.

5. Intrapersonal Separateness without Fission

Suppose Zack is twenty years old and is making a big life choice. He will either become an academic or a lawyer. Each path has its own distinct virtues. Becoming an academic will allow Zack to travel, think about difficult questions, and read great books. The life of a lawyer, on the other hand, will allow Zack to help others with his legal expertise and provide him with a level of financial stability that will easily allow him to have a large family. Zack realizes that he will be a very different person if he decides to become an academic from the one he will be if he decides to become a lawyer. His tastes, political preferences, and even beliefs about the world are very likely to differ. And neither life strikes Zack as better than the other. There's thus at least a poetic sense in which Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer are just different people even though either of them would in the relevant sense be Zack the Twenty-Year-Old.

On the Parfitian view, this is more than poetry. Zack the Twenty-Year-Old would be R-related to Zack the Academic if that's what he chose. Similarly, Zack the Twenty-Year-Old would be R-related to Zack the Lawyer if that's what he chose. But Zack the Academic is not and would not be R-related to Zack the Lawyer. And this isn't only because Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer fail to both exist. For illustrative purposes, suppose that Modal Realism—the thesis that all possible worlds are equally concretely real—is true. If that's right, then Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer both exist, just at different worlds. Of course, these two individuals could not fulfil the causal condition on relation-R since there are no trans-world causal relations. But even if there could be, Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer are not psychologically continuous or connected across those possible worlds. Now these same claims could be mirrored by a more modest metaphysical picture which treated those worlds as abstract objects or fictions. In either case, relation-R wouldn't hold among the abstracta or within the fictions. Thus, there's no meaningful sense in which Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer would stand in the right kind of prudential relation to each other.

If what I've said in the previous paragraph is correct, then from the standpoint of the separateness of R-related beings, Zack the Twenty-Year-Old's choice is relevantly like Diamond Fission. That is, choices regarding how one could

potentially distribute goods across radically different lives one might lead is not importantly different than choices regarding how to distribute goods across two R-related beings that will actually exist. Think about it like this. Zack the Twenty-Year-Old is making a choice which affects two potential individuals: Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer. Zack the Twenty-Year-Old thus has reason to give both Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer a fair shake, whatever that means in this case. Perhaps this means one is, *ceteris paribus*, required to flip a coin in this case. (Ruth Chang claims that it runs counter to the phenomenology of hard life choices to use a randomizing procedure to decide them.¹² However, if the reasoning I've proffered thus far is compelling, we should perhaps jettison Chang's intuition.) Moreover, if I'm right about Diamond-Fission, then the fact that Zack would be R-related to Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer is irrelevant from the standpoint of whether Zack the Twenty-Year-Old has a reason to be concerned about the separateness of R-related beings. After all, Ed was R-related to both Ted and Fred. But intuitively, this fact was insufficient to undermine reasons that Ed had to give both Ted and Fred a fair shake. So the fact that Zack the Twenty-Year-Old would be R-related to both Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer gives Zack the Twenty-Year-Old no less reason to give Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer a fair shake. Therefore, the separateness of R-related beings arises within lives as well.

Here's an important caveat. For flipping a coin to be appropriate it must be that Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer are equally or sufficiently nearly equally well-off. If Zack the Academic would have a wonderful life and Zack the Lawyer's life would be terrible, then flipping a coin wouldn't be appropriate. Reconsider Interpersonal Coin-Flip. Suppose that if ϕ lands heads, Beth will still receive 10 units of welfare and Carol will still receive 5 units of welfare. But if ϕ lands tails, Beth will receive -100 units of utility and Carol will receive 10 units of welfare. In such a case, no one would think that we should flip ϕ on the grounds that it gives Carol a fair shake. Even if it would give her a fair shake, the normative force of this point is clearly outweighed by the potential costs to Beth. Thus the position defended in this section should not be mistaken for the highly implausible view that we should flip a coin no matter what the relevant costs would be to various non-R-related individuals.

I don't claim that the view I have stated in this section is intuitive. I instead claim that a series of powerful theoretical claims that are backed up by our intuitions lead those of us attracted to Parfit's views of personal identity to this conclusion. And if that's right, we have reason to think that the Asymmetry View, as it's normally understood, is false. The separateness of R-related being can arise within a life without fission. This suggests that the standard interpersonal/intrapersonal distinction cannot bear the explanatory burden the Asymmetry

¹² See R. Chang, 'Hard Choices', *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 3/1 (2017): 15.

View has asked of it. Before considering this implication in more detail, let's address some objections to the line of argument presented in this section.

6. Objections to Intrapersonal Separateness

One might claim that I've been conflating questions of prudence across times with questions of prudence across possibilities. These, one might insist, are simply different kinds of questions. Perhaps that's right. But we need to hear more about why they're so different. Here's what seems pretty well settled that challenges this objection. If Parfit doesn't believe that individual persons have bare essences which travel with them across times to underlie what matters about prudence, then he shouldn't believe that such bare essences travel with the very same individuals across possibilities. In other words, it's difficult to see the motivation for being a reductionist about persons across times, but a not a reductionist about persons across possibilities. Furthermore, it's natural to appeal to facts about modality and relation-R when explaining why a given option is what an individual has most prudential reason to choose. I have prudential reason to eat more healthfully because there would later be an R-related individual to me who would benefit from doing so. In fact, it's difficult to say most of what we want to say about prudence and relation-R without appealing to what R-relations would or would not obtain. Thus, to reject my claim, one must explain why relation-R should be the relevant prudence-grounding relation across times, but not across possibilities.

Here's a different objection. Zack the Twenty-Year-Old's choice is clearly different than Diamond-Fission. In Diamond-Fission, Ted and Fred would concretely coexist at the same world. This isn't true of Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer. Thus, Fred can have a 'fair-shake' complaint against Ed because Fred will actually exist in either outcome. But if Zack the Academic were to exist then Zack the Lawyer would not. Thus, Zack the Lawyer couldn't have a complaint against either Zack the Twenty-Year-Old or Zack the Academic and vice versa. What this objection suggests is that there may be a kind of intrapersonal variant of the more familiar interpersonal Non-Identity cases introduced by Parfit.¹³ In interpersonal Non-Identity cases, we're usually asked to consider whether to have one of two children who are non-identical. The first would lead a much better life than the second. In such cases, most of us believe you should have the child that has the life with more good in it. However, we cannot explain why this is the case by appealing to what would be better or worse for either child since if the first

¹³ See Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, ch. 16 for the original Non-Identity Problem. I owe the idea that there may be an intrapersonal analogue of the Non-Identity Problem to Jeff McMahan's third Rutgers Lectures, entitled 'Killing, Saving, and Causing to Exist' (manuscript).

child exists the second does not and vice versa. Zack the Twenty-Year-Old's choice is seemingly similar because Zack the Academic and Zack the Lawyer cannot coexist as separate entities. Therefore it's incumbent upon me to explain why Zack the Academic would have a claim to a fair shake without appealing to the view that Zack the Academic has a complaint against Zack the Twenty-Year-Old or Zack the Lawyer.

Some interpersonal Non-Identity cases elicit fair-shake intuitions.¹⁴ For example:

Non-Identity Coin-Flip: You can flip one of two coins, ϕ or ψ . If ϕ lands heads, Anders will be born and will live a hundred years of high quality life. If ϕ lands tails, Bjorn will be born and receive thirty years of high quality life. If ψ lands heads, Anders will be born and will live sixty-five years of high quality life. If ψ lands tails, Bjorn will be born and live sixty-five years of high quality life.

The expected utility of both coins is the same. Thus, from a purely utility maximization standpoint, it doesn't matter which coin you choose. Intuitively, however, it seems like you should flip ψ . ψ gives Bjorn a fair shake at receiving a much better life. Non-Identity Coin-Flip thus seems to mirror Interpersonal Coin-Flip. (Intuitions about this case are, of course, compatible with our simply being risk-averse. However, we can change the probabilities, remove knowledge of the probabilities entirely, or try other cases entirely to remove this potential confound in the case. For ease of presentation, however I will proceed with this simpler case.)

If our fair-shake intuitions persist in Non-Identity Coin-Flip, this suggests to me that whatever we care about when we care about fair shakes doesn't have to do just with outcomes. That is, the separateness of R-related beings should be understood as a deontic, not telic constraint. This is suggested by the fact that the expected utility of both coins is the same. While I concede that we cannot appeal to a relation between Anders and Bjorn, since only one will exist, we can appeal instead, not to what is brought about, but to how it is brought about. We can object to ϕ as a kind of act that violates the separateness of R-related individuals. Similarly, we can object to Zack the Twenty-Year-Old deciding in some way other than simply flipping a coin. Just as the fact that makes no difference to a victim whether they were killed or merely allowed to die, so too does it make no difference to the value of the outcome which coin is flipped. But just as with the distinction between killing and letting die, we shouldn't understand the separateness of R-related beings as a distinction concerned with outcomes. It's a

¹⁴ I owe both this case and the thought that fair-shake intuitions can arise in Non-Identity Cases to Daniel Ramoller.

distinction in how outcomes are brought about. The separateness of R-related beings is, in other words, still a non-consequentialist constraint.

Of course, more needs to be said in order to properly draw the boundaries between what does and does not count as a fair shake. That the separateness of R-related beings would be understood as a non-consequentialist constraint, however, would not surprise those who appealed to the separateness of persons as an objection to traditional forms of consequentialism. Perhaps it's more surprising that, as I understand it, the separateness of R-related beings is an agent-centred as opposed to victim-centred constraint. In any case, that the separateness of R-related beings is an agent-centred constraint that doesn't apply directly to what is good or bad is sufficient to evade the objection at hand. Now, those who are happy to consequentialize non-consequentialist constraints are free to do so here. This would make little difference since such a non-traditional version of consequentialism would need to define outcomes differently or adopt agent-relative values. With these objections answered, let's move on to tease out the implications of the view of the separateness of R-related beings that I have been describing.

7. Between Asymmetry and New Symmetry

I said earlier in this essay that the truth lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View. What I've been arguing in the last two sections is that the Asymmetry View is not the whole truth. In this section, I will explain why I believe the Asymmetry View to be part of the truth and thus why the New Symmetry View is not the whole truth.

Reconsider Intrapersonal Coin-Flip. In Intrapersonal Coin-Flip, we have a decision to make between two distributions of goods within a single life. What defines these distributions are the days of the week on which the various units of welfare fall. Anne right now is R-related to herself on Monday, Anne on Monday is R-related to Anne on Tuesday, and Anne on Tuesday is R-related to Anne right now. Thus, no concerns about the separateness of R-related beings arises on this case. This is the truth in the Asymmetry View. So long as the R-relations are indeed in place between the relevant individuals, we can maintain that there's a difference between what is required when we distribute goods in interpersonal and intrapersonal cases. This allows us to capture the distinction illustrated by the most plausible versions of the Diamond cases. And insofar as we can capture this distinction, we can hold onto a form of the Asymmetry View, but one with a more limited scope than is usually assumed.

Next, the relations that underlie relation-R—relations of overlapping chains of psychological continuity and connectedness—are matters of degree. I can stand

in weaker or stronger chains of this form. The more abrupt and wide-sweeping the changes are in my psychology, the less strongly the relations underlying the R-relation obtain between me and my future self. Thus, whether the relations underlying the R-relation obtains between any two individuals is not an all-or-nothing matter. This leaves us with at least two possibilities. The first is that there is a threshold of degrees of overlapping chains of psychological continuity and connectedness that must be met in order for relation-R to obtain. The second possibility is that relation-R itself comes in degrees. Of these two possibilities, I prefer the second. We should avoid appealing to arbitrary thresholds where we can and I don't see a principled way to determine the relevant threshold in this case. I also don't think there a particularly worrying implications of accepting that the prudence-grounding relation comes in degrees.

If I'm right that we should think of relation-R as coming in degrees, this illuminates another way in which the truth lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View. The degree to which we should be concerned about the separateness of R-related beings will depend upon the degree to which beings are or are not R-related. The weaker the R-relation, the stronger our concern should be for giving the various parties a fair shake. In this way, we might think of Intrapersonal Coin-Flip and Interpersonal Coin-Flip as forming the opposite extreme ends of a spectrum. Intrapersonal Coin-Flip is the end of the spectrum in which no rational concern for the separateness of R-related beings arises. Interpersonal Coin-Flip is the end of the spectrum in which the rational concern for the separateness of R-related beings is at its strongest. Many cases of prudence, if not most, lie somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum.

Moving from the separateness of persons to the separateness of R-related beings thus supports a position that lies between the Asymmetry View and the New Symmetry View. This is because, on the Parfitian view, the category of 'persons' doesn't carve at the joints of prudence and morality. Relation-R does. Parfit was thus correct to doubt the separateness of persons as it was originally conceived. And he was thus right to say,

There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others.¹⁵

Those affected by my choices are often not so strongly R-related. Possible future versions of myself and others are all owed a fair shake.

¹⁵ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 347.

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