

ARE PERSONITES A PROBLEM FOR ENDURANTISTS?

I. INTRODUCTION

Personites are shorter-lived, very person-like things that extend across part but not the whole of a person's life.¹ That there are such things is a consequence of the standard perdurance view championed by David Lewis and earlier (though not under that name) by Quine;² it is also a consequence of liberal endurantist views which allow such things coinciding with persons during part of their lives, though not themselves parts of the persons. Johnston and Olson argue that the existence of personites has bizarre moral consequences and renders what are manifestly wholly uncontentious moral judgements contentious. It suffices to note that, for example, they say that if there is a personite now coinciding with me that will no longer exist tomorrow, though I will, this renders morally problematic my planned visit to the dentist today, since the personite, unlike me, will suffer the pain today but not live long enough to experience any gain. The same reasoning renders morally problematic spending time learning a difficult language in anticipation of a trip abroad. And irritatingly, in accordance with this reasoning, the child who claims that making him do his homework 'isn't fair', turns out to be arguably right. Moreover, since not only persons and personites, if they

¹The term is used by Johnston (Johnston, M. "Personites, maximality and ontological trash", *Philosophical Perspectives* 30 (2016): 198-228, and Johnston, M. "The personite problem: should practical reason be tabled?" *Noûs* 51 (2017): 617- 44); 'subperson' was previously used by Eric Olson for the same concept (Olson, E.T. "Ethics and the Generous Ontology", *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 31 (2010): 259-70).

²David Lewis (Lewis D. *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)), W.V.O. Quine (Quine, W.V. "Identity, ostension, and hypostasis", *Journal of Philosophy*, 47 (22) (1950): 621-633).

exist, but also, for example, dogs and what we might call caninites, would seem to have a right to be counted in the moral calculus, it can also be argued that just as it is morally problematic to force a lazy child to do homework, it is morally problematic to put an obese dog on a strict diet. What underpins the reasoning here is the basic thought that *no relation³ one sentient being has to another can deprive it of the right to be counted in the moral calculus*. Hence the relation a personite has to a person cannot do so. Given this basic thought the acknowledgement of the existence of personites is, Johnston argues, morally disastrous, or at least dictates an extreme hedonism.⁴

II. TWO ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONSERVATIVE ENDURANTISM

This, however, looks like good news for conservative endurantists who can point out that their theory alone is not committed to the existence of personites.⁵ But is such conservative

³ E.g., being a child of, being the wife of, being the creation of, being part of.

⁴ Perhaps, he says, the most primitive form of hedonism, which treats suffering as like mass, and so not additive in the case of coinciding things, to which ‘the most telling objection has been regarded as being that it treats persons as mere receptacles of good-making features’, is the only refuge for a believer in personites (Johnston 2017: 642, fn. 5))

⁵ It may be argued (see Alex Kaiserman (Kaiserman, A. “Stage Theory and the Personite Problem”, *Analysis* 79(2) (2019): 215-222)) that stage theorists like Katherine Hawley (Hawley, K. 2001. *How Things Persist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)), and Ted Sider (Sider, T. *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)) are not threatened by the personite problem either, though they acknowledge the existence of personites.

endurantism a tenable position?⁶ Johnston argues that it is not, at least for a naturalist. The lesson of the personite problem is thus that we should reject naturalism. This is by far the most interesting of the claims Johnston makes in his two papers. I argue that it can be resisted. For all he says, personites are no problem for endurantists, even ones who are naturalists, since they do not have to acknowledge the existence of personites.

Johnston writes: ‘there will be personites on any view that treats personal identity as consisting in the holding of relations of bodily and/or psychological continuity, *whether or not* the view goes on to model personal identity over time in terms of cross-time sums of temporal parts or other shorter lived items’.⁷ An endurantist, in other words, cannot reject a generous, personite-including, ontology so long as he thinks that psychological or bodily criteria of personal identity over time can be given. The only thing Johnston says in support

⁶ Of course, there are other arguments against it already in the literature. The best and most well-known are the vagueness argument (Sider 2001) and the argument from supervenience (Lewis’s Appendix B to “Survival and identity” (Lewis, D. *Philosophical Papers I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1983): 76–77)). But both of these can be and have been challenged (see Wasserman et al. (Wasserman, R., Hawthorne, J. & Scala, M. “Recombination, Causal Constraints, and Humean Supervenience: An Argument for Temporal Parts?” In Dean Zimmerman (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), Chad Carmichael (Carmichael, C. “Vague Composition Without Vague Existence”, *Noûs* 45 (2) (2011): 315-327) and Magidor (Magidor, O. “Endurantism vs. perdurantism: a debate reconsidered”, *Noûs* 50 (2016): 509-32)). Perhaps the most powerful consideration in favour of perdurantism and personites is the need to make sense of multiply occupancy in accounts of fission/fusion.

⁷ Johnston 2017: 617, my italics.

of his claim in the 2017 paper is: ‘Unfortunately, personites will also emerge on those endurantist theories that allow for a plurality of available essences for enduring things to have, thereby allowing massive coincidence. And naturalism undermines the principled basis for resisting a plurality of available essences’.⁸ He has more detail in his 2016 paper where he argues that the rejection of ‘four-dimensionalism’ does not dissolve the personite problem, at least not for a ‘reductionist’.⁹

I shall first look at the argument of the 2017 paper and then with this background available turn to the more detailed argument of the 2016 paper.

III. THE 2017 ARGUMENT EXAMINED

The crucial claim of the 2017 paper appears to be that personites will emerge so long as a plurality of available essences for enduring things is allowed, and a naturalist cannot resist acknowledging a plurality of available essences, thereby allowing massive coincidence. But no elaboration is given beyond a reference to an unpublished manuscript.¹⁰ It seems that Johnston’s idea is that there is a structurally similar version of the personite problem for perdurantists which endurantists face, generated by the principle that for any x , for any subset of the properties instantiated by x , there is an object coincident with x which possesses those and only those properties essentially. So, for example, whilst I could have been conceived earlier or later (though I could not have had different parents) there is an object all-time-coincident with me which could not have had a different moment of origin, and if Socrates

⁸ 2017: 641.

⁹ 2016: 224ff.

¹⁰ Johnston, M. and Leslie, S.J (MS). “Against the limited variety of essences”, Princeton University.

was temporarily a musical man there was a shorter-lived object, the musical man, coincident with Socrates while he was musical which was essentially musical, and so psychologically endowed as Socrates was. But it surely needs substantial argument that this controversial¹¹ principle is required by naturalism, or indeed that naturalists need to buy into essences at all (Quine was a self-described kind of naturalist), much less such a plurality of them that such massive coincidence of psychologically endowed beings is a consequence.

Johnson says little about what he means by naturalism. But if we take it to require only the rejection of the supernatural and of a Cartesian-style dualism of mind and body and so, as Johnston puts it, of ‘some enduring soul pellet, Cartesian ego or separately existing mental entity “distinct from our brains and bodies” [quoting Parfit]’,¹² on the face of it naturalism need not buy into essences at all, much less such a plurality of them that such massive coincidence of sentient beings is a consequence. And, in particular, it seems that the problem of personal identity over time which is addressed in the current philosophical literature, and has been a subject of debate within analytic philosophy at least since the 1950’s, long before the resurgence of interest in essence, can be formulated in such a way that endurantists can accept it as one they can meaningfully engage with without any commitment to essences and without abandonment of naturalism, as I shall now explain.

¹¹ Another example. Define an ‘anankat’ following Dreier (Dreier, J. “Is there a supervenience problem for robust moral realism?”, *Philosophical Studies* 176 (6) (2019) :1391-1408, 1403),

as a cat that is necessarily on a mat. According to the principle, on the mat in front of me now there is a shorter-lived anankat as well as my cat Tibbles.

¹² Johnston 2016: 225

Standardly the problem of personal identity over time is formulated something like this: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person P_1 at t_1 being the same as a person P_2 at t_2 ? Similarly, we can ask: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a restaurant R_1 at t_1 being the same as a restaurant R_2 at t_2 ? And so on for other kinds of thing. But, when we look at the discussion of these questions, we see that the questions debated are about what changes are possible and what changes are not. Thus, we can ask whether a person can have a different body at different times or a wholly different psychology at different times. And we can ask what suffices for the persistence of a person through change. For example, is it true for every person that no matter how much his psychology has altered if the same brain is producing consciousness in more-or-less the normal manner that person still remains? Similarly, we can ask whether a restaurant can have a different location at different times. And we can ask what suffices for the persistence of a restaurant through change. For example, is it true for every restaurant that no matter how the ownership has altered, if the same front-facing staff are delivering the same cuisine that restaurant still remains? The questions we are concerned with when we think about problems of identity over time are questions about persistence conditions.

So what we want to know when we think about the problem of personal identity over time is what the persistence conditions of persons are.

Now persistence conditions are of two kinds: passing-away conditions and preservation conditions.

The question about passing-away conditions can be formulated as follows:

Passing Away: Which relations R satisfy: Necessarily, if x is a person then if x exists at t and t^* then R_{xtt^*} ?

Specifying a relation that satisfies the Passing Away schema for persons gives us a sentence that expresses a constraint on *how* persons can vary across their temporal extents – or, in ordinary terms, it gives us a sentence that tells us that persons cannot survive certain changes.¹³

Next, preservation conditions. Note that as well as asking what changes a person can survive, we can also ask (with bracketing for clarity):

Preservation: Which relations R satisfy the following schema: Necessarily, if x is a person, then [if x exists at t then {if y is a person and exists at t^* and $Rxtyt^*$, then $x=y$ }]?

Specifying a sentence that satisfies this schema tells us that persons must survive any changes *so long as* a certain condition is satisfied – or, in ordinary terms, it gives us a sentence that tells us that persons cannot but survive, and so will be preserved across, certain changes, i.e. any changes that leave things unaltered in a certain respect.¹⁴

¹³ An example from Salmon 2005:220: ‘so long as [a person] is not brain-dead, his or her brain must be *that very brain* and no other’ (Salmon, N. *Metaphysics, Mathematics and Meaning: Philosophical Papers, Volume I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Again, an example from Salmon 2005:222: ‘no matter how much the psychology may have been altered – due to brain-washing ... etc., – if the same brain is producing consciousness in a more-or-less normal manner, it is the same person, even if he/she has been psychologically deeply altered.’

Additionally, of course, we can ask about synchronic constraints as well as *diachronic* constraints on being a person, i.e. constraints on how a person must be at any time it exists.

These will be given by answering the question:

Synchronic: Which properties F satisfy: Necessarily, if x is a person then if x exists at t , x has F at t ?

in which 'F' represents a property of x that implies nothing about any times other than t . For example, it may be said that if a person exists at a time the person must be actively engaged in thought at the time (a position Locke ascribed to Descartes), or that if a person exists at a time the person must have some shape and size at that time (a materialist position).

These are *all* the questions philosophers are interested in when they debate the problem of personal identity over time. And, as the formulations of the questions make clear, they are questions about what is necessary for *being a person*, for membership of that kind. Thus, when we look at it more closely, we see that the traditional problem of personal identity over time is not one about the conditions for *identity* at all. It can be stated differently, so it is not a problem about identity.

In restating the traditional problem of personal identity over time in this way, in terms of the schemas above, I am, of course, following the advice of David Lewis.

Lewis writes:¹⁵

Identity is utterly simple and unproblematic. Everything is identical to itself; nothing is ever identical to anything except itself. There is never any problem about what makes something identical to itself; nothing can fail to be. And there is never any problem about what makes two things identical; two things never can be identical.

¹⁵ 1986:192-3

Furthermore, as Lewis goes on to say:

We *do* state plenty of genuine problems in terms of identity. But we *needn't* state them so. Therefore, they are not problems about identity. Is it ever so that an F is identical to a G?... More simply, is it ever so that an F is a G? The identity drops out. Thus it is a good question whether a river is something you can bathe in twice; or whether a restaurant is something that can continue to exist through a simultaneous change in ownership and location and name.... [T]hese questions could be stated in terms of identity – harmlessly, unless that way of stating the questions confused us about where to seek for answers.

Question schemas of the following kind are prevalent in the literature on identity over time:

River R_1 at t_1 = river R_2 at t_2 iff ...?

Restaurant R_1 at t_1 = restaurant R_2 at t_2 iff ...?

Person P_1 at t_1 = person P_2 at t_2 iff ...?

These schemas can be expressed as questions in English as follows:

Under what conditions can/must a river/restaurant/person x at one time be identical with a river/restaurant/person y at another?

These questions *seem* to ask in some general manner what the necessary and sufficient conditions for identity over time for rivers/restaurants/persons are. Lewis's lesson is that if they are what they seem to be they cannot be sensible questions. But they are sensible questions. So they are not what they seem to be – questions about identity over time for rivers, restaurants and persons. They are, and can be rephrased to make it clear that they are, questions about certain types of necessary conditions of being a river/restaurant/person.

The reformulation of the badly named¹⁶ problem of personal identity over time given above in terms of passing away and preservation schemas is thus a result of implementing Lewis's insight. And now we can see that so formulated the problem is one that one can find intelligible without presupposing a perdurantist ontology, and that one does not have to presuppose such an ontology to offer solutions to it. Moreover, it is utterly unobvious that only *opponents* of naturalism can engage with, or offer solutions to, it. It is equally unobvious that only endurantist solutions which reject naturalism (and refer to Cartesian soul pellets etc., or the supernatural) have any chance of being correct. Finally, it is obvious that the only notion of necessity employed in the formulation given is *de dicto*: the problem is whether certain universal generalizations about persons are *necessary truths*. There is no appeal to *de re* necessity, or a fortiori, essence.

From what we have seen so far then, Johnston's claim that a supporter of an endurantist account of personal identity over time must be committed to the existence of personites, at least if he is a naturalist, because of a commitment to essences, seems unwarranted.

IV. THE 2016 ARGUMENT EXAMINED

But Johnston goes into more detail (or gives a different argument) in his second paper.¹⁷ The thought here, very roughly, is that if *we* operate with a concept of a person which embodies a certain passing-away condition, so that we require that if a person *x* exists at times *t* and *t** the relation *R*, which encapsulates that passing-away condition (say, bodily continuity), must be such that $Rxtt^*$ (*x* is at *t* bodily continuous with *x* at *t**) then we must admit (at least if we are reductionists) that there could have been *other* communities which employed a variant

¹⁶ Lewis 1986: 192

¹⁷ Johnston (2016)

concept of a person which embodied ‘more demanding’ passing-away conditions (perhaps bodily continuity plus some psychological continuity). But such communities would not have been in error in speaking like this. They would not ‘have missed some distinguished set of facts in the reduction base. No; they would simply be extracting one kind of information about identity over time from the reduction base, while we are focused on another kind of information about identity over time there in the reduction base’.¹⁸ But then there is no reason to deny that ‘persons’, as spoken of in the hypothetical community, exist. Yet, of course, they are *personites* (relative to our concept of a person), shorter-lived, very person-like entities. So endurantists who are reductionists cannot deny the existence of personites.

To get to grips with the details of this argument from Johnston let us first address the thought that personites *must* be accepted once we acknowledge that the concepts we use are simply some among the many possible ones we could employ in describing the world. We do not talk of ‘in-cars’, ‘day-persons’ or ‘series-persons’ etc.,¹⁹ but we can easily imagine a linguistic community that did and would do so faultlessly. These concepts must therefore have application, and the existence of entities falling under them, including personites, acknowledged.

I shall now argue that this view is false. Consider, as a simple putative example of such a concept, the concept of a (British) professor.²⁰ A professor is something very like a

¹⁸ 2016:226.

¹⁹ Hirsch, Eli. *The Concept of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), Parfit, D. *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 290-92

²⁰ For American readers it may be easier to think of the concept of a CEO, and in place of the London Grote Professor and the Oxford Waynflete consider the CEO of Apple and the CEO of Microsoft.

person, but with different persistence conditions. Each professor's existence is, as it were, tied to a chair. The Grote Professor of Mind and Logic at University College, London²¹ is currently British, he was Canadian between 1988 and 1998 though no person is British now and was Canadian then. He did not exist between 1982 and 1988, though no person had an intermittent existence. Some professors are personites, since some chairs are only ever occupied by one person.

We do not use the term 'professor' in this way. We do not take professors seriously (ontologically). But we can imagine a community using the term in this way, and not being in any difficulty in doing so. It does not follow that there are extra entities which are at any moment coincident with persons, material things, composed at any moment of their existence of exactly the same matter as a person, which are thinking intelligent things, at any moment thinking the thoughts of the person whose matter they then share, which have an intermittent existence and are sometimes of one nationality, sometimes of another (and like the Oxford Waynflete Professor, but so far unlike the Grote Professor, sometimes male, sometimes female). I have not defined the predicate 'is a professor' and it is consistent with a community using the word 'professor' in the way sketched that it has a variety of extensions. Someone who maintains the view I am opposing can say that the extension of the predicate is a subclass of bodies, in Quine's sense,²² 'the material content of any region of space-time however discontinuous or diverse'. But someone who rejects this view can assign a different extension. He might say that a professor is simply a space-time region filled in a particular way, or a sequence of pairs of persons and periods of times (e.g., the sequence whose

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grote_Professor_of_the_Philosophy_of_Mind_and_Logic

²² Quine, W.V. *Word and Object* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1960): 171

members are: <Ayer, 1994-1959>, <Hampshire, 1960-1963>, <Wollheim, 1963-1982>, and so on). One need not accept that just because communities can be imagined in which different languages are employed we must accept that where I am now there is an infinite number of massively coincident material objects, materially and psychologically indistinguishable, differing only in their futures and pasts, which is what accepting the existence of personites comes to. The key point is that when we specify the persistence conditions associated with a possible concept we do no more than specify some *necessary* conditions (given by the passing-away and preservation conditions of the concept) for the satisfaction of that concept (as noted above in the case of our concept of a person). In the case of the concept of a professor the crucial question is then whether there is anything satisfying these necessary conditions which is *also* a possessor of psychological states. There is no reason to think that there is.

This, in a nutshell, is the response to Johnston's second argument, as we can now see if we drill down into the details of that argument. Johnston uses 'D-zero continuity variant', to denote persons, i.e., what *we* call persons, whatever the persistence conditions of our concept are. He then uses 'D₁ continuity variant', 'D₂ continuity variant', etc., to denote concepts with more demanding persistence conditions (and negative number subscripts to denote concepts with less demanding persistence conditions). He then notes that we can give an endurantist-friendly criterion of identity over time for persons (D-zero continuity variants) along the lines (assuming, inessentially for the argument, that psychological continuity is central):

A person x , considered at t_1 , is numerically one and the same person as a person y , considered at t_2 , iff the mental profile exhibited by x at t_1 is psychologically continuous with the mental profile exhibited by y at t_2 .²³

We can state criteria of identity for D_1 -continuity variants, D_2 -continuity variants, and so on by inserting, say, the further requirements that the psychological continuity has some *reliable* cause, has its *normal* cause, and so on. But then there are, in some possible circumstances D_1 -continuity variants that are personites, and even if this is not actually so because all actual persons satisfy the further requirement of D_1 -continuity, there will actually be D_2 -continuity variants, or D_3 -continuity variants or D_4 -continuity variants or ... that are personites.

Obviously, it does not matter for the purpose of this argument what more demanding constraint on persistence we impose when we move from the D -zero continuity variant to a D -positive one. So let us simply introduce the concept of a profperson by requiring, in addition to psychological continuity, occupation of the same Professorial Chair (we can say that persons who never occupy Chairs always occupy the same Chair). Then if profpersons exist, some of them are personites. But there is no more reason to allow that they exist than there is to allow the existence of professors in the sense introduced earlier (and, as noted, some professors in this sense, if they exist, are personites since some Chairs are never occupied by different people). There is no more reason to think that coinciding with me there is a physically and psychologically indistinguishable profperson than to think that there is a numerically distinct physically and psychologically indistinguishable professor.

²³ This can be restated in terms of passing away and preservation conditions

The key point, to state it again, is that when we specify a criterion of identity over time/persistence conditions for a concept we specify some necessary conditions (given by the passing-away and preservation conditions of the concept) for the satisfaction of that concept. In the case of the concept of a profperson, and the other D-positive continuity variants we can introduce in accordance with Johnston's recipe, the crucial question is then whether there *is* anything satisfying these necessary conditions, which extends over part but not the whole of a person's life, and *also* possesses the psychological traits personites are supposed to possess. This is what Johnston has to establish in order to show that endurantists must accept the existence of personites and so face the same problem as perdurantists.

V. A REPLY AND RESPONSE

Johnston's reply to this, I think, would have to be that it is not all endurantists, but only those who are naturalists and so reductionists who are committed to the existence of personites. He takes as his target reductionist endurantist Derek Parfit because Parfit's formulations of the problem of personal identity over time do not make explicit reference to an ontology of person-stages or parts and so are 'silent' on the matter, as Johnston puts it. But, of course, Parfit cannot be the only target of Johnston's argument if it is to be interesting. And, in fact, Parfit is hardly a paradigmatic endurantist as Shoemaker demonstrates in his "Critical Notice".²⁴ Someone who is, is Shoemaker himself. And he is also a naturalist and self-described reductionist. But there is nothing in what Johnston says that gives a reason for

²⁴ Shoemaker, S. "Critical Notice of Reasons and Persons" *Mind* 94 (1985): 443-453

thinking that a theorist of personal identity who adopts Shoemaker's position must acknowledge the existence of personites.

I now turn to the elaboration of these points.

First, Shoemaker is an endurantist. He does not believe in temporal parts. As he writes, somewhat indignantly, in a response to Jonathan Lowe: 'Lowe identifies me as one of the leading advocates of the four-dimensional approach'. In fact, I have always been a staunch opponent of this approach'.²⁵

Secondly, Shoemaker is a naturalist. He does not believe in the supernatural. He rejects Cartesian dualism and identifies as a materialist. He endorses a functional account of mental states and believes that they are physically realized.²⁶ So he does not think that there are any enduring soul pellets, Cartesian egos or separately existing mental entities involved in our histories, to use Johnston's words.²⁷

²⁵ Shoemaker, S, "Against simplicity" in *Personal Identity: Complex or Simple?* Eds. George Gasser and Mathias Stefan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2012): 133. See also Shoemaker, S. "Persistence and Properties", *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2015): 433-448. Shoemaker writes: 'I favour endurance theory, that is, three-dimensionalism. It seems to me far and away the most intuitive of the competing views about persistence'.

²⁶ Shoemaker, S. and Swinburne, R. *Personal Identity*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Shoemaker, S. *Physical Realization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

²⁷ Johnston 2016: 225

Thirdly, Shoemaker is a self-described reductionist (he also describes himself, in Parfit's alternative terminology, as a 'complex' rather than a 'simple' theorist).²⁸ He endorses reductionism in the sense of Parfit's official definition. He does not endorse, as he explains in his Critical Notice,²⁹ what we might call (upper-case) Parfitian Reductionism, which goes far beyond the reductionism about persons and personal identity Parfit officially defines. He is a lower-case reductionist.

Parfit's actual formulation of reductionism is:

Our existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events. Our identity over time consists in physical and/or psychological continuity.³⁰

This seems a fairly modest thesis. It denies that we are 'separately existing' mental entities distinct from our brains, bodies and our mental events – so we are not enduring soul pellets, Cartesian egos or some other separately existing mental entity.³¹ It fits with the view, as Shoemaker expresses it, that there is something which constitutes the persistence of persons, something that is a sufficient condition for a series of events being the career of a

²⁸ Shoemaker, S. 2012

²⁹ Shoemaker, S. 1985

³⁰ Parfit, D. "Experiences, Subjects and Conceptual Schemes" *Philosophical Topics*, 26 (1999):217-20, 218; see also 1984: 210 f. and Parfit, D. "The Unimportance of Identity", in Harris, J. (ed.) *Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 16, 19.

³¹ Johnston 2016: 225.

persisting person, which can be expressed in terms of physical and/or psychological continuity without reference to a ‘separately existing’ entity.³²

But as Shoemaker emphasizes, there are other things Parfit believes and takes to be part of, or entailed by, his reductionist position, which go beyond this lower-case reductionism.

First, in explaining his reductionist view of personal identity over time, Parfit repeatedly compares it to the Logical Positivists’ thesis concerning the relation of nations and their citizens, thereby continuing, of course, a tradition begun by Hume, who compares a person to a republic and the person’s perceptions to the constantly changing citizens of the republic. Parfitian Reductionism is in fact a reductionist thesis about persons logically structurally analogous to the Logical Positivist reductionist thesis about nations. The core idea is that people stand to their experiences as nations stand to their citizens. Facts about experiences constitute a reduction class relative to statements about people. And, just as people are neither ontologically nor conceptually dependent on nations (people can exist though nations do not, and people can be thought about though nations are not), so experiences are neither ontologically nor conceptually dependent on people. Thus at one point³³ Parfit proposes to use the word ‘event’ rather than ‘state’ to refer to experiences precisely because a state must be a state of some entity, whereas this is not true of events.³⁴ Thus the whole truth about reality can be given by an ‘impersonal’ description in which

³² Shoemaker, S. “Against Simplicity”, in G. Gasser and M. Stefan (eds.) *Personal Identity: Complex or Simple?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 129.

³³ 1984: 211.

³⁴ See also Parfit 1984: 209.

neither persons nor any entities which are either ontologically or conceptually dependent on persons are referred to or quantified over.

Secondly, the most prominent element in Parfit's Reductionism, or what he takes to be its most important consequence, is his famous thesis that identity is not what matters in survival. This slogan does not carry its meaning on its face. But it seems to imply at least that we do not have, or ought not to have, any non-derivative concern for our own future existence and well-being, but only for that of our Parfitian survivors. Whether Parfit's arguments for this work is, and perhaps always will be, a matter for debate. But at any rate it is clearly something additional to lower-case reductionism.

Shoemaker focuses, in particular, on Parfit's Humean characterisation of persons as logical constructions out of their experiences, and demurs. He proposes 'a weaker characterisation'³⁵ of reductionism, which, he says, will suit many of Parfit's purposes. This is as follows. Consider the relation between experiences which obtains just in case they belong to the same person, the relation of copersonality. The position the reductionist is opposed to is that this relation can be characterized *only* in this way, i.e., in a way that makes essential use of the notion of personal identity. The reductionist says that the relation of copersonality can be given an independent characterization, even if only one which quantifies 'over entities, for example, experiencings, whose existence [as states] is adjectival on subjects [as dents are adjectival on surfaces]'.³⁶ He emphasizes the modesty of this reductionism later.³⁷ He writes:

³⁵ 1985: 447

³⁶ 1985: 447.

³⁷ Shoemaker, S. "Reply to Wiggins" *The Monist* 87 (4) (2004): 610-11

I do not hold that persons are “constructed from” states over which psychological continuity is to be defined. I take it as obvious that a state must be a state of something. What I do hold is that for each kind of persisting subject, it should be possible to give an account of what it is for different states, ... at different times ... or the same, to have the same subject of that sort. There are clearly informative things to be said about what makes it true that the building having marble columns at [one]entrance is the [one] having a rusty fire escape ... at another. And there are ... informative things to be said, about what makes it true that a building having certain features at one time is ... the one having others at another. ... [T]hese tell us something about what it is to be a building. The psychological continuity view attempts to do the same thing for persons.³⁸

³⁸ How might this modest reductionism be explained given the formulation of the problem of personal identity stated above in terms of passing-away and preservation conditions? As follows. The reductionist holds that there is a specification of R which (a) yields a true reading of the schema from Preservation: ‘Necessarily, if x is a person, then [if x exists at t then {if y is a person and exists at t^* and $Rxyt^*$, then $x=y$ }]’ but (b) does not yield a true reading of the schema (omitting the antecedent of the embedded main conditional): ‘Necessarily, if x exists at t then {if y is a person and exists at t^* and $Rxyt^*$, then $x=y$ }’. So it is not possible that a *person* is a counter-example to the second schema so understood, but it is possible that some other things are. Hence the first schema so understood gives a preservation condition for persons which is sortally specific (unlike the specification of R as ‘the experiences of x at t and y at t^* are copersonal’ which trivially renders the second schema true since ‘ x is the same person as y ’ entails ‘ $x = y$ ’).

So Shoemaker is an endurantist, a naturalist and a (lower-case) reductionist (or ‘complex theorist’).³⁹ But the argument of Johnston’s from his 2016 paper criticised in section IV above gives no reason to think that anyone who accepts Shoemaker’s position must acknowledge the existence of personites. The key defect of Johnston’s argument identified in section IV remains a defect even if the conclusion of the argument is taken to be not that *any* endurantist must accept the existence of personites, but merely that any endurantist who is also a naturalist (and so, any endurantist who is a naturalist in the way Shoemaker is) must accept the existence of personites.

However it may be, then, with Parfitian Reductionism (in fact Parfit does accept the existence of personites),⁴⁰ there is a type of endurantism, represented by Shoemaker’s view, which is naturalist about persons and personal identity, but, so far as is shown by anything Johnston says, is not committed to personites.

VI. CONCLUSION

³⁹ It might be said that Shoemaker’s ‘weaker characterisation’ of reductionism does not define *genuine* reductionism. This is irrelevant for the purposes of this paper. Johnston’s thesis is that any endurantist who is also a naturalist must accept the existence of personites. His argument for this in his 2016 paper assumes that a naturalist is a reductionist. Shoemaker is certainly a naturalist (whether or not his nuanced position should be described as reductionist). My contention is that there is nothing in Johnston’s argument that gives reason to think that anyone who accepts Shoemaker’s endurantist and naturalist position (whether or not this is rightly also called reductionism) must acknowledge the existence of personites.

⁴⁰ ‘day-persons’ 1984: 292.

So we need not accept that the only way to go for endurantists who want to avoid moral disaster is to abandon naturalism.