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## SUMMARY

This book presents a contribution to the discussion on the relationship between personal identity and various identity-related practical concerns, such as egoistic concern, responsibility, compensation and anticipation.

I map and scrutinize the development of the discussion over the past 30 years, focusing primarily on Derek Parfit's ground-breaking theory of personal identity and practical concerns and the responses that it has stimulated. Parfit has argued that our identity-related practical concerns have been grounded in the wrong theory of personal identity – non-reductionism – according to which the holding of personal identity over time consists in a fact which is independent of the existence of the body, the brain, and all the physical and mental processes occurring in them, such as the continuing existence of a soul. When we realize the mistake and adopt the reductionist view of personal identity according to which the existence of a person only consists in the existence of the above facts and processes, we will be

rationally required to reform our practical concerns to correspond to the new theory of personal identity over time. In many instances, the reform will be quite radical, leading to extremely counter-intuitive revisions, because the relations that personal identity consists in may weaken over time and, according to Parfit, our concerns should reflect that fact. One of the central claims of Parfit's theory, which is disputed in the book, is that our practical concerns should not be grounded in the unity of the whole person, but in a temporally shorter unity, that is, the unity of the self, defined by the relation of psychological connectedness.

Several philosophers have attacked the methodological assumptions of Parfit's theory. I first assess M. Johnston's critique, according to which it is a mistake to think that our identity-related practical concerns are grounded in a metaphysical theory of personal identity. According to Johnston, they are justified independently of any theoretical accounts of human nature by being deeply ingrained in our nature and interpersonal interactions, and very difficult to suppress. Drawing on Jonathan Haidt's observations about the nature of human moral beliefs, which too are deeply ingrained in human nature and difficult to reform, I formulate an objection to Johnston's critique. I argue for the general claim that the fact that a trait or an attitude is deeply ingrained in human nature and difficult to change does not mean it is justified and should not be reformed. Many of





our natural beliefs, attitudes and concerns are clearly wrong and call for a reform even if such a reform will be a very difficult and long process. I argue further that a theoretical account of human nature, including a metaphysical theory of personal identity, is needed to provide the guidelines for the required reform.

The next part of the book concentrates on a cluster of theories I term subjective theories of personal identity. They are exemplified by the theories of C. Korsgaard, M. Schechtman, and C. Rovane, and share the feature that they regard persons as essentially active agents, who constitute their own identity by adopting a sort of pro-attitude toward their mental states and actions. These theories also share the claim that our identity-related practical concerns can be given a much more plausible account if we realize that persons constitute their identity in this way. However, my analysis leads to the conclusion that it is actually very difficult to see what exactly the theories attempt to achieve. I argue that if they purport to provide the persistence conditions for human beings, they lead to paradoxes. Alternatively, they may only be defining certain practically relevant roles – moral or practical identities – that ground our identity-related practical concerns. Using several examples I show that none of the proposed mechanisms of self-constitution can provide a plausible grounding for all of the identity-related practical concerns. Finally, Parfit's theory is revisited to show that certain

aspects of the theory make use of a self-constitution mechanism as well, and must therefore be rejected.

The chapter on subjective theories is followed by an assessment of a claim implicit in some psychological theories of personal identity, namely that dramatic objective changes in a person's psychology may result in the demise of the person and its replacement by another person. I confront the claim with a non-philosophical perspective provided by a psychiatric expert opinion, and then argue on the basis of a detailed analysis of our beliefs about the appropriateness of self-concern, responsibility and compensation that the claim cannot be accepted. Even the most radical psychological changes in realistic scenarios are consistent with the preservation of many other original traits of the person, which, in turn, ground our continuing concerns about and attitudes to the person.

The analysis of the concerns shows how wide is the gap between our actual concerns and the form of concerns proposed by Parfit. For this reason, the next part of the book turns to Parfit's claim that the acceptance of reductionism necessitates the proposed revision of the concerns. I argue for the claim that the weakening of a person's relation to her future self does not rationally obligate a corresponding weakening of the identity-related practical concerns, as Parfit believes. I also claim that relations other than psychological continuity and connectedness may matter to people in their practical interactions.





This leads me to embrace a position called pluralism. In the final chapter I outline the pluralist perspective on practical concerns represented by the claim that different practical concerns are justified by different relations. In the exposition of the pluralist perspective I follow the work of D. Shoemaker. Next, I turn to worries about the pluralist perspective expressed by M. Schechtman in her latest book. Schechtman believes that pluralism clashes with our everyday experience of persons as necessarily unified entities. I distinguish two interpretations of pluralism and show that the clash only emerges if we accept an interpretation of pluralism which is contaminated with metaphysical problems. Then I show that there is a benign interpretation of pluralism that does not lead to the objectionable fragmentation of persons.

I also scrutinize Schechtman's new theory, which she develops in an attempt to fend off the threat of pluralism. Schechtman provides a definition of human person which makes it the appropriate target of all of our practical concerns. I express worries about the vagueness of the definition and claim that we already have a reasonable account of human persons in terms of biological continuity. I argue that it is the human organism with biological persistence conditions which is the proper target of our concerns. But I simultaneously maintain the pluralist perspective in claiming that sameness of the organism is a necessary, but not always sufficient condition for the legit-

imate expression of our concerns, and different concerns may have different sufficient conditions. This leads me to the conclusion that in many cases it is not personal identity that grounds our identity-related practical concerns.

The last pages of the book focus on thought experiments, since these seem to provide evidence against my claim that biological continuity is a necessary condition for the expression of our identity-related practical concerns. I present several examples illustrating the belief that our intuitions about cases described in many bizarre thought experiments actually depend on the detail of the description of the scenario, and, thus, do not reliably indicate our beliefs or attitudes. Following Snowdon I then show that several thought experiments used by the proponents of the psychological theory of personal identity against the claim that biological continuity is a necessary condition for the legitimate expression of identity-related practical concerns fail to establish that conclusion. Finally, I put forward some general thoughts about why I believe thought experiments are not the most effective tool to analyse our practical concerns.



# PODĚKOVÁNÍ

*Mé díky patří profesorům E. Olsonovi, M. Schechtmanové a D. Shoemakerovi za zpětnou vazbu, kterou mi během výzkumu poskytovali.*

*Děkuji také své rodině za podporu a trpělivost.*