Abstract
In this paper I consider Derek Parfit’s attempt to respond to Rawls’ charge that utilitarianism ignores the distinction between persons. I proceed by arguing that there is a moderate form of reductionism about persons, one stressing the importance of what Parfit calls psychological connectedness, which can hold in different degrees both within one person and between distinct persons. In terms of this form of reductionism, against which Parfit’s arguments are ineffective, it is possible to resuscitate the Rawlsian charge that the utilitarian maximizing approach to matters of distribution ignores something that is of moral relevance, viz., the difference between the degrees of connectedness that hold between different stages of the same person, and between that person and his nearest and dearest, and the lack of connectedness between that person and distant others who may be benefitted at his cost. To Parfit’s charge that reductionism sees the differences between persons as being ‘less deep’, I reply that the sense in which they are less deep is not at odds with their retaining their original moral importance, perhaps now better understood.

Introduction
Prior to the torrent of positive arguments he provides for a revitalized Kantian moral and political theory in A Theory of Justice, John Rawls motivates the overall project with a succinct negative argument against utilitarianism, the dominant theory Rawls wished to replace. Central to this argument was a sound bite that has come to have the status of a platitude: ‘Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons.’ Utilitarians, Rawls alleges, take the acceptable principle of rational interpersonal choice (involving maximization) and apply it to the interpersonal choices of society as a whole. In appealing to the idea of the impartial spectator to make this move more vivid, utilitarians fuse many persons into one. One way to interpret his argument is

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as follows: (1) it is a basic and deep metaphysical fact that persons are separate, i.e., that persons are distinct entities with distinct lives to lead; (2) any ethical theory ignoring this fact is seriously problematic; (3) utilitarianism ignores this fact; thus (4) utilitarianism is seriously problematic.

Obviously, utilitarians might respond by denying one or more of the premises. Denying premises (2) or (3), however, is simply not viable. Ignoring some basic metaphysical truth about the nature of persons would not bode well for a theory whose advocates pride themselves on its practical, ‘real world’ status, and denying that utilitarians do overlook the boundaries between persons (for matters of resource distribution, say) is just false. The only feasible approach for the utilitarian, then, is simply to deny (1), holding instead that the separateness of persons just is not a basic and deep metaphysical fact. Indeed, this is the approach made famous by Derek Parfit. Parfit maintains that the true metaphysical picture of persons and personal identity de-claws the Rawlsian objection, rendering utilitarianism more plausible than it would have been otherwise. Unfortunately for utilitarians seeking to take advantage of such a move, however, Parfit is unsuccessful. It is my aim in this paper to show why. In so doing, I hope to carve out and develop a compromise position, one that maintains the force of the Rawlsian objection to utilitarianism even if the truth of Parfit’s fairly plausible metaphysical view is granted.

Distributive principles and reductionism
Parfit argues that the best explanation for the utilitarian rejection of distributive principles is that they ‘accept the Reductionist View about personal identity’ (331). Reductionists maintain that the facts about persons and personal identity simply consist in more particular facts about brains, bodies, and series of interrelated physical and mental events (210–211). This view is contrasted with non-reductionism, according to which the facts about persons and personal identity consist in some deep further fact, usually construed in terms of souls or Cartesian egos. On the psychological version of reductionism Parfit favours, what matters in terms of our survival and anticipation/concern for the future

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is not the identity-relation \textit{per se}; rather, what matters are relations of psychological connectedness and psychological continuity, together known as Relation R. Psychological connectedness consists in the holding between temporally-distinct person-stages of certain direct psychological relations, such as memories, beliefs, desires, aspects of character, intentions, etc., and this relation may hold to any degree. Strong connectedness, for instance, obtains between two person-stages ‘if the number of direct connections, over any day, is \textit{at least half} the number that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person’ (206; emphasis in original). Psychological continuity, on the other hand, consists in overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness (206).

Reductionists advocate what John Broome has called a ‘disuniting metaphysics’, insofar as they deny the necessary unity of persons over time.\textsuperscript{3} To see why, consider the relation between, say, the seventy-year-old and twenty-year-old stages of some person. What makes these stages of the \textit{same} person is that the later stage is uniquely psychologically continuous with the earlier stage; that is, X is identical to Y just in case X is psychologically continuous with Y and there is not some other Z with whom X is also psychologically continuous (i.e., the continuity-relation does not take a ‘branching’ form). But the later stage may be very weakly psychologically connected to the earlier stage insofar as the seventy-year-old stage remembers very few of the experiences of the twenty-year-old stage and there is little resemblance between their characters, beliefs, desires, etc. Thus, given that this important relation in identity holds very weakly between the two stages, they are not unified in important respects. Indeed, Parfit introduces the language of successive selves to illustrate just this sort of disunity. A ‘self’ refers to a collection of person-stages unified by strong psychological connectedness. And where there is a marked break in connectedness between two person-stages, even though they are related by psychological continuity, we may refer to them as \textit{different} selves. Thus, I may refer to my twenty-year-old stage as my past self and refer to one of my distant future stages as my expected future self. And the stages with which I am currently strongly connected are united as my present self (302–306). Such


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a picture has numerous implications for both prudence and morality. For instance, different selves within the life of one person may, in effect, be treated as different persons. Consequently, if my smoking now will have negative effects on my future self, we may say that my smoking now is immoral, whereas it is normally thought to be merely imprudent.

What matters most for our purposes, however, is that on the reductionist view the unity of a person’s life is certainly not guaranteed, as it would be if the non-reductionist view were true. If there were some deep further fact about souls, say, involved in personal identity, then regardless of any psychological changes occurring over the course of one person’s life, that life would still be deeply unified by the continuous presence of a single soul. Not so, on the reductionist picture. Rather, because psychological connectedness is one of the only two relations that matter in identity, the unity of various stages of one’s life will in part correspond to the strength/degrees of connectedness that obtain between them.

In terms of the implications of this metaphysical picture for morality, then, being a reductionist involves comparing the weakness of psychological connectedness within lives to the absence of connections between different people. As a result, reductionists come to treat the subdivisions within lives as in some ways like the divisions between lives. In other words, individual persons are importantly analogous to collections of persons (i.e., societies). This means that there are two ways of treating them alike: ‘We can apply distributive principles to both, or to neither’ (334). Parfit’s claim is that, while the scope of such principles may be widened so that they will apply both within lives and between lives, the weight of such principles should be lessened by a conversion to reductionism. Parfit is noncommittal, however, about just how much weight we ultimately ought to give to distributive principles, giving one argument for an extreme position and a more complex argument for a moderate position, both positions that he thinks are ‘defensible’. Each position depends on the reductionist analogy between individual lives and sets of lives (albeit in different ways), so each moves from a discussion about the justification of maximization (and its relation to distributive principles) within lives to a utilitarian conclusion about the justification of maximization (and its relation to distributive principles) across lives.

In what follows, I will argue for both a negative and positive thesis. The negative point I wish to make is that none of Parfit’s
reductionist arguments against distributive principles are successful. The positive point I wish to make is that there is an important compromise position between the Parfitians and the Rawlsians, a position I call Moderate Reductionism. As we shall see, it is a reductionist view of personal identity that also maintains certain important boundaries between the morally relevant metaphysical units. This view will thus allow for an increase in the scope of distributive principles (to apply them within lives) while simultaneously allowing for a sustaining (or even an increasing) of the weight accorded them by non-utilitarians. I begin with a brief examination of Parfit’s (too extreme) extreme position.

The extreme position

What exactly justifies maximization – and thus the rejection of principles ensuring fairness of distribution – within an individual life? One possible justification is that if I take on a burden now, I can be fully compensated by a benefit later to me, so in this intrapersonal case I am not being treated unfairly. But it is seen as unfair when I bear a burden and someone else receives the compensating benefit. Compensation, then, seems to require the deep further fact of personal identity: for a benefit to compensate a burden, the same person who takes on the burden must be compensated with the greater benefit. ‘On this view, it is the nonidentity of different persons . . . which supports the claim for fair shares.’ But if, on the reductionist view, this non-identity is a less deep fact, then the distributive principles normally based on it should have less weight. Indeed, there may even be reason to give them no weight.

To see this point, suppose that I have taken more than my fair share of the resources of society and I step into a Star Trek-like teletransporter to make my getaway to Mars. Suppose further, though, that the machine malfunctions, and so while a replica of me – call him Backup – does step out on Mars, my original body on Earth is not destroyed (as it was supposed to have been during the scanning process), and the person on Earth with that body will survive for a few more days before dying (the ‘Branch-Line Case’). As a result, let us say that Backup is not given his full share of society’s resources because of my pilfering before his existence.

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5 For Parfit’s description of this sort of case, see *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 199–201.

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He is told that because Relation R obtains between us and because he is just like me in every way that he will receive less because I was fully compensated in advance for his poverty. Of course Backup protests, claiming that it is unfair and that he was not compensated for the benefits I received before he even existed.

Parfit claims that most of us would side with Backup here, but why? A natural reason would seem to be that Backup was not compensated because he is not me. But replying in this way would reveal us to be non-reductionists with respect to compensation, because personal identity would remain more important than the various psychological connections involved between Backup and myself. What we would believe to be missing in the relation between Backup and myself is the ‘further fact’, the fact which we seem to believe is the only thing justifying compensation within a single life. But because there is no such fact – it is always missing – we are forced to draw another conclusion: ‘Since it was only this fact which made compensation possible, it is never possible.’

The scope of compensation is narrowed by reductionism, such that compensation, while commonly thought not to be possible between lives, is also not even possible within lives. ‘We should apply the Rawlsian objection even to the different parts of the same life. The units for distributive principles become the states that people are in at different times.’ Consequently, if we accept the commonsense principle that we should give priority to helping those who are the worst off, and, on this view, the worst off are just those who are in the worst states at a particular time, then some form of Negative Utilitarianism (in which priority is given to the overall reduction of suffering) seems to be made more plausible than it would have been if non-reductionism were true. One should, then, attempt to make those negative states people are in at particular times less bad. This is Parfit’s extreme position and it seems to be the view he has settled on most recently.

Arguments against the extreme position

The first thing to notice about this argument is its methodological inconsistency with the structure of reasoning most often used

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1 Parfit, ‘Comments’, p. 840.
2 Ibid., p. 842.
3 Parfit, ‘Comments’, p. 802. In Reasons and Persons, he is far more cautious, merely claiming that, ‘though this new conclusion is defensible, it can also be defensibly denied’ (p. 343).

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throughout *Reasons and Persons*. One of Parfit’s main arguments there has to do with how our patterns of concern ought to be altered when we become reductionists. He argues, for example, that because it is Relation R and not personal identity that matters in survival, and because one of the relations in Relation R (psychological connectedness) may hold to reduced degrees over time, then we may justifiably alter our patterns of concern to reflect that fact, e.g., by caring less about our own further futures. He does not suggest that caring for others or our own further futures is necessarily irrational if we become reductionists, only that *different reasons need to be offered* to justify such concerns. For if I will strive to maintain strong connectedness between myself now and a future stage of me – if I will *identify* with that future stage – then it may very well still be rational to care about that future stage.

But in his case for the extreme position he is arguing in a different, and rather odd, way. Here he posits that perhaps only the further fact justifies compensation, and once we see that further fact to be absent, we should see as well that nothing then justifies compensation and compensation is thus impossible. But why not present a normative argument analogous to the one regarding patterns of concern? For example: there is no further fact of identity, and if we normally use that further fact to justify compensation then we should perhaps find another justification for compensation. And one such justification could involve what actually matters in personal identity: Relation R. Thus, compensation would be justified to Y for a burden imposed on X just in case between X and Y there obtains psychological connectedness and/or continuity. Compensation, on this argument, would not automatically be abandoned as impossible. Rather, one would attempt to find another justification for it, a justification, it seems clear, that can be found in Parfit’s own world.

And there are other, positive reasons for moving in this direction. Take the case of Backup and suppose we are after the answer to a different question, namely, what should I think of my own prospects for survival here? It is clear in this case that Backup is not me. After all, we would be able to talk to one another, we would be spatially separated, etc. And I, on the Branch-Line, would undergo bodily failure in a few days. Should I view this prospect as being like death? As Parfit himself has argued, the answer is no. While I will not survive as Backup, what will occur is *just as good as ordinary survival*. Between Backup and me there
obtains Relation R – the relation that matters in ordinary survival – and so while I will not technically survive as Backup, it will be as if I had survived as Backup. Now suppose we ask a related question about compensation, viz., was I compensated in advance for the burdens to be placed on Backup? If compensation presupposes my survival, i.e., personal identity, and what matters in survival is Relation R, and between Backup and myself Relation R obtains, then burdening Backup for an earlier benefit to me is just as good as ordinary compensation.

Further, we might have good reasons to believe that, of the two relations that make up Relation R, psychological connectedness is the more important of the two in terms of what matters to us in our ordinary practices of anticipation/concern for the future. Indeed, we tend to care a great deal more about the obtaining of this relation than we do about mere continuity. For instance, most of us deem our lives worth living only insofar as we continue to be able to remember many of our past experiences directly. What matters to us here is not that there is an overlapping chain of memories, formally (and indirectly) linking our past to our present. It matters far less to me that I can remember some past stage of myself who himself remembers my distant past experiences than that I now remember that distant past. Consider also my relation to the future. It seems clear that we want those desires and carings that make up our present world to remain part of our world in the future. Their loss is consistent with a preservation of psychological continuity, but such preservation may rightly seem of little comfort. Finally, most of us want for our lives the kind of unity that only connectedness can bring. We most likely would regret the type of episodic change in our sets of desires, intentions, beliefs, etc. that would, nevertheless, be consistent with psychological continuity.9

Parfit toys with the possibility that connectedness matters more than continuity, but he seems to settle for the more diplomatic view that both relations matter, claiming that he knows of no argument for the belief that one matters more than another (301). Nevertheless, taking connectedness to be the relation that matters in our survival and anticipation/concern for the future remains a viable reductionist view, one that I will henceforward call ‘Moderate Reductionism’.10 I will not here defend such a view;

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10 See ibid., esp. pp. 395–400.

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rather, I merely want to point out how it is clearly a possible reductionist view, one that nevertheless fails to have the implications for utilitarianism and distributive principles that Parfit seems to think follow from any variety of general reductionism.

Suppose, then, that we are Moderate Reductionists, maintaining that the relation that matters in our identity over time is strong psychological connectedness. If so, then perhaps what ought to justify compensation is such connectedness. As a result, compensation would be justified within a self. However, if connectedness is what matters, then I still may not be able to be compensated by benefits to a future self, just like I cannot be compensated by benefits to another person. This view would expand the scope of the restrictions on compensation, but it by no means would render compensation across time impossible. Parfit’s extreme position, then, is unwarranted. We have the resources from Parfit’s own toolbox to resist the claim that as the deep further fact of identity goes, so goes the possibility of compensation. I turn now to the more plausible arguments of the moderate position. Insofar as there are two parts to this position, each consisting in a response to one aspect of Rawls’ ‘separateness of persons’ charge, I will treat them separately for purposes of clarity.

The moderate position, part one

Some non-utilitarians claim that one cannot maximize across lives because what justifies ordinary prudential maximization within a life is simply absent across lives. We can maximize within a life only because it is one life. Individual lives are unified in a way that the set of all lives is not. So perhaps we would be free to maximize over all lives if they were like individual lives in this respect. But they are not. Humankind is not like a super-person. Consequently, we are not justified in maximizing over all lives.11

The easy reply available to the utilitarian, however, is that what justifies maximization of any kind is not the metaphysical unity of the object of maximization, but rather merely the fact that “[s]uffering is bad, and happiness is good. It is better if there is less of what is bad, and more of what is good” (334). Thus I am justified in maximizing within my own life when doing so yields more happiness and less suffering. And because this justification

is independent of the metaphysical considerations about unity-relations, we could also be justified in maximizing across lives without claiming that humankind is like a super-person.

Indeed, what lends additional support to this move is the reductionist claim that the unity of a life is in fact less deep, so such unity is probably a poor candidate to trot out for the justification of intrapersonal maximization in the first place. Rawls claims that utilitarians conflate all persons into one, but what may be the case instead is that utilitarianism is supported by the ‘partial disintegration’ of persons (336). The unity of an individual life is quite tenuous, according to reductionism, so a person’s life is generally less deeply integrated than we have assumed. In this respect, therefore, individual lives are indeed much more akin to the set of all lives, and the utilitarian may be quite right to treat benefits and burdens as if the identity of their distributees simply makes no moral difference. No, societies are not like a super-person; instead, individual persons are like societies.

The moderate position, part two

A related, yet distinct, non-utilitarian worry is captured by what Parfit calls the ‘Objection to Balancing’, according to which one person’s burden cannot be morally outweighed by benefits to someone else. This objection usually rests on what he calls the ‘Claim about Compensation’, which maintains that ‘someone’s burden cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else’ (p. 337; emphasis in original). Consequently, in Rawls’ words, ‘[t]he reasoning which balances the gains and losses of different persons as if they were one person is excluded.’ The idea here, once more, is that compensation presupposes personal identity: my burdens cannot be compensated unless I, the same person who underwent the burden, receive the counterbalancing benefits. And Parfit agrees that, with the exception of benefits to those I love (in which case I am still only indirectly compensated), my burdens cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else (337). Here again, reductionism would increase the scope of such a distributive principle: if the connections between the stages of a person’s life are weak, we may also say that benefits to one stage cannot compensate burdens to another stage.

But agreeing with the Claim about Compensation does not support the Objection to Balancing, for the relation ‘greater moral weight than’ does not presuppose personal identity. True, burdens cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else. But they can be morally outweighed by such benefits, say, just in case they are factually outweighed by such benefits, where a benefit factually outweighs a burden if, given a choice, people would choose both over neither (336). As a result, utilitarians can deny the Objection to Balancing while maintaining the truth of the Claim about Compensation. Utilitarians may thus reject distributive principles (or simply reduce their weight) without running afoul of the identity requirements of compensation.

The Objection to Balancing puts great weight on the significance of the boundaries between lives, i.e., on the non-identity of different persons. But the reductionist regards these boundaries as less deep. They are instead more like the boundaries between nations. As Parfit puts it, ‘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’ (339). As a result, utilitarianism is more plausible than it would have been if non-reductionism were true.

**Arguments against the moderate position**

*Part one: Maximization and the unity of a life*

According to Part One of Parfit’s moderate position, the fact of the unity of an individual life is less deep, so this particular justification for intrapersonal maximization is rather implausible. Instead, what may actually justify such maximization is that there is more of what is good and less of what is bad, and this is a justification which could also be used with respect to maximization across lives. As a result, it seems utilitarians may safely ignore the boundaries between lives and give less weight to distributive principles because the disanalogy pointed to by non-utilitarians between persons and societies is, given the truth of reductionism, a non-starter. Reductionism seems to imply that the so-called deep fact about the separateness of persons is neither deep nor much of a fact.

But this is much too quick. Instead, while the separateness of persons may not be much of a fact, there remains a crucial distinction between certain metaphysical units – found in the reductionist view itself – to which the non-utilitarian might appeal, both
to reformulate the Rawlsian objection and to maintain a crucial disanalogy between individuals and societies. Specifically, the view I have called Moderate Reductionism yields both the unity and separateness of selves.

The Moderate Reductionist self is the metaphysical entity unified by strong psychological connectedness, and it can be a fairly substantial entity. One may, for instance, strive with great success to unify various enduring parts of one’s life. But success may not always be in the offing. In such cases, though the transition from one self to another may be a matter of degree (given that psychological connectedness itself is a matter of degree), various subdivisions within a life may still be drawn. After all, despite my best intentions long ago, I may have come to be a very different person over time for various reasons, having undergone significant reductions in connectedness to my past stages. Further, this reduction will be reflected in my inability to identify with the life-stage in question: his or her actions or thoughts may seem to me now to be those of a stranger. And given that the difference between one’s various selves will be, in effect, like the difference between persons, maximization across an individual lifetime may come to look like maximization across persons.

But within a self, on this view, maximization may still be justified, precisely because it is a single, unified entity. After all, even on Parfit’s brand of reductionism, it is only the life of a person (whose unity-relation is psychological continuity) that is less deeply integrated than is assumed by non-reductionists, and this view implies only the partial disintegration of persons. But a self, by definition, is rather deeply integrated. What would constitute survival, or something just as good as survival, according to Moderate Reductionism, would be strong connectedness, seemingly the more important of the two relations in Relation R, and so X’s survival as Y would simply mean that X and Y are stages of an integrated, unified self: both would share similar intentions, goals, beliefs, memories, etc. So the amended Rawlsian claim would be that one ought not ignore, not the distinction between persons, but rather the distinction between selves. Thus, maximization within a self may very well be justified by the fact that it is one self, unified by strong psychological connectedness. And on this line of reasoning, maximization over all lives would not be justified for the simple reason that such lives are not so unified.

One objection to this kind of move from the person to the self might be that it just offers a new target for the same Parfitian
worry. After all, the unity of a self, on Parfit’s reductionism, is also less deep: unity of the self is a matter of degree and does not involve the ‘further fact’. If this unity is less deep, then perhaps maximization even within a self is less plausible.

While I will present a lengthier response to the general ‘less depth means less plausibility’ principle shortly, I wish to address this specific objection about depth here first. Parfit’s problem with the ‘unity of a person’ justification for intrapersonal maximization was that there is no deep further fact guaranteeing such lifetime unity, that in all probability over the course of a life one person may simply collapse into a series of successive selves. Thus, a benefit received by one self may require a burden to another self, which would in effect be like benefitting one person as compensation for the burden of another. And what makes one self disunified from another is that the relation of strong connectedness does not obtain between them.

However, selves, by definition, are such unified entities, unified by strong psychological connectedness. And selves must also be temporally-extended entities, given their connections (of memory, say) into the past and their connections (of desires and intentions, say) into the future. As a result, there are certain metaphysical unities, unities which are not unimportant and which can, on the particular reductionist view of personal identity I have sketched, count as integrated and individuated unities. And that is all that is necessary to motivate the Rawlsian objection. It seems quite plausible, then, to posit the unity of the self as what may justify maximization within the self, a unity that clearly does not hold across all lives. Consequently, there remains an important disanalogy between selves and societies which may be used to block the utilitarian rejection of distributive principles for both.

**Part two: Compensation and personal identity**

Consider next the argument that compensation presupposes personal identity, and that because personal identity is a less deep fact on the reductionist view and thus has less deep moral importance, ‘the fact of compensation is itself morally less important’ (338). There are several interesting features of this argument that deserve close analysis. Our immediate task is to decipher the general principle Parfit appeals to here, that because a fact is less deep it has less moral importance. What, for example, is meant by the vague phrase ‘less deep’? We might begin with the phrase Parfit uses as synonymous with ‘less deep’, viz., ‘involves less’ (see,
e.g., 337). So if some fact involves less than we normally think it does, and there are certain moral claims that depend on that fact, then those moral claims should involve less as well. But this phrasing does not seem to help very much, for what is meant by ‘involves less’? Are we talking in ontological terms? If so, then that would be a rather implausible position, for what could a less crowded ontology have to do with moral importance? Suppose we come to see human life as not having any mysterious or deep properties, but instead as consisting merely in a series of chemical reactions. Coming to this ontologically ‘less deep’ position would not, for example, affect the weight we give to such principles as ‘It is wrong to take a human life’. Similarly, suppose we were to realize that our rational nature is not as deep or mysterious as we once thought (as being inspired by God, say). ‘It need not follow that moral principles based on this deep fact – such as the duty to cultivate one’s faculties – should be given less weight.’

A better interpretation might be the one we have already encountered with respect to the extreme position: if a moral claim is taken to be based on a particular fact, and that fact is false (or wildly implausible), then the moral claim resting on it is simply rendered weightless (where I take ‘weightless’ here essentially to mean ‘morally irrelevant’). But this general principle is certainly not self-evident. Parfit might be arguing for this principle by means of his own cases, claiming for example that by becoming reductionists and abandoning a belief in Cartesian egos, those principles based on the existence of such egos that we once held are rendered weightless. Unfortunately, the cases he gives do not provide reason to hold this general principle. Rather, they indicate once again that if we hold a moral principle based on some fact, and that fact is false, then we should give such principles based on that alleged fact no weight, unless another ground can be found for that principle. This seems to be a much more sensible methodology of cases. If a generally-held principle X is based on an incorrect ‘fact’, then we have two options: either we abandon X or we attempt to find other, more solid, grounds on which to base X.

Now Parfit might very well agree with this analysis. Indeed, he

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14 This point is made by Milton Wachsberg, in ‘Personal Identity, the Nature of Persons, and Ethical Theory’ (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1983), pp. 123–124.
15 Schultz, p. 731.

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may say, this is the source of the difference between the extreme and moderate positions, for the advocate of the extreme position holds that we ought to abandon our moral claims resting on the so-called ‘fact’ of personal identity, while the advocate of the moderate position is willing to accept other grounds for moral claims formerly based on the ‘fact’ of identity, but finds them to be less weighty than the original grounds. And what must ‘less weighty’ mean here? It can only mean that the new grounds for the moral claims in question are more tenuous, less solid and secure, than the previous grounds. Consequently, the moral claims in question are themselves more tenuous, and so they should play less of a role in our moral theorizing than they originally were thought to play.

To be more specific, suppose the Claim about Compensation presupposes personal identity, and the further fact we thought was involved in personal identity is either false or implausible. What, then, does this mean for the Claim about Compensation? The advocate of the extreme position insists we abandon it, but as we have seen, this move is too hasty; there remain other grounds on which we can base this claim, grounds provided by what I have called Moderate Reductionism. The advocate of Parfit’s moderate position, on the other hand, may accept these new grounds but still insist that they are more tenuous than our original grounds, thus implying that the Claim about Compensation deserves less weight than it did in our moral theorizing. Is this moderate advocate correct? I do not believe so.

To see why, first consider the question of whether or not compensation does presuppose personal identity, i.e., is it necessarily the case that my burdens cannot be compensated by benefits to someone else? On first glance, this claim seems obviously true. If you impose a burden on me, then in order to provide compensation you must offer me some counterbalancing benefit.16 But is it ever possible to compensate me for a burden with a counterbalancing benefit to someone else? In one sense, this is clearly possible, as illustrated by cases in which I am compensated indirectly for a burden by benefits to a loved one, or a compatriot, etc. But can my burden be compensated by benefits to other people? Parfit claims outright that it cannot (337). Nevertheless, if I can be indirectly compensated for a burden by a benefit to an

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intimate, say, then what is it about the relation I bear to my intimates that allows for the possibility of such compensation that is missing in my relation to others?

An obvious answer is that I care about the lives of my intimates in a way that is significantly different from the way in which I care for the lives of strangers. The quality of my intimates' lives means a great deal to me, while the quality of the lives of strangers may mean fairly little to me. Now certainly the quality of life of a starving Ethiopian may mean something to me (I may feel pity and send some money to a charitable organization), but the depth of feeling aroused in me will be significantly different were I to find out that, say, my beloved brother was starving. But what is the ground for such caring and depth of feeling?

One possibility, easily generated by the Moderate Reductionism I have sketched, is that the degree of such caring, where the affective concern in question involves reasons (as opposed to being the type of non-rational concern a parent has for his or her child), may very well be grounded in the degree of psychological connectedness one bears to the person in question. Given that the boundaries between persons are less black and white on a reductionist view than on a non-reductionist view, I may be fairly strongly connected in important ways to a loved one: we may share highly similar goals, values, beliefs, and experience-memories. And this is not an unusual phenomenon. It is a common feature of many best friends and couples that they are able to complete one another’s sentences and laugh at stories they only obliquely refer to, much to the consternation of people around them.

Admittedly, this claim is not obviously true. The question of precisely how one person might be psychologically connected to another is rather vexed, and it is a possibility Parfit himself clearly disavows (302). Nevertheless, given the nature of the various elements involved in connectedness, there seems no reason in principle to restrict this relation to holding only between temporally-distinct person stages (as opposed to spatially distinct, simultaneously-existing person-stages). Part of what is involved in connectedness is the persistence of certain beliefs, but I fail to see why a belief I now hold that connects me to a past stage of myself that held the same belief might not also provide a connection between me now and someone else now who holds the same

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belief. There may of course be differences between us with regard to the role that belief plays in our overall cognitive structures, but it seems that what matters with regard to connectedness is merely that the *propositional content* of both beliefs is the same. Similar remarks would apply to structurally analogous elements of connectedness such as desires and interests. Further, for Parfit, connectedness of character is merely a resemblance relation, given that there are numerous traits involved in one’s personality, and some traits may fade, while others emerge, but insofar as a person remains of *roughly* similar character, character connectedness remains more or less intact. There again would seem to be no reason to deny connectedness of this sort between simultaneously-existing persons of similar character.

Finally, consider experience-memory, which is a trickier case, but nevertheless allows, I believe, for similar treatment. One might suggest that when my wife and I remember our dining together last weekend, our memories will differ in key respects. What connects my wife to the person with whom I ate dinner is *her* memory of the event; what connects me to the person with whom she ate dinner is *my* memory of the event. And simply in terms of our different physical perspectives on the evening, our experience-memories will be importantly different and so cannot be considered elements constituting any connectedness to each other. But consider the various ways in which my own memory of an event may be altered across time. Different features of the evening may become more salient, the memory may be coloured in various ways (I may remember the evening being more jocular than I thought it was at the time, say), and my perspective may even shift (e.g., I occasionally shift the point of view such that I remember seeing *myself* seated across the table), etc. Nevertheless, I remain connected to the experiencer of that event by memory. What matters in establishing such connectedness, it seems then, is that I remember the occurrence of an *event* (dinner at a certain restaurant with my spouse), and insofar as my wife and I both experienced that event, our memories have their source in a common cause, which serves to connect us both to the original event experience and, concomitantly, to each other. And I believe similar remarks may provide an explication of how connections of *intentions* may hold interpersonally as well (at least with respect to the notion of *shared* intentions). Again, more needs to be said

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18 Ibid., pp. 359–361.
here, but I believe these remarks at least establish the possibility, and perhaps even the plausibility, of our admission of interpersonal connectedness into the realm of reductionism.

On this model of the self, then, what might motivate the possibility of the indirect compensation at issue would simply be the degree of connectedness that obtains between various selves, i.e., I may be compensated for a burden by a benefit to someone with whom I am strongly connected, insofar as that other entity is actually a spatially-distinct extension of me. Furthermore, setting up the model in this way implies that compensation is a matter of degree. I may be more or less compensated for a burden by a benefit to someone else in direct proportion to the degrees of psychological connectedness that obtain between us. If connectedness is the key, then compensation is a matter of degree.

I should point out, however, that these comments do not undermine the claim that compensation presupposes personal identity in some sense. For even on Moderate Reductionism, where selves are the metaphysical units of moral significance, I (construed as my present self) am still the one being compensated by benefits given to those with whom I am connected. And psychological connectedness is one of the relations involved in personal identity. Moderate Reductionism would simply broaden the boundaries (to some extent) of who I am.

Thus far, I have only suggested that if connectedness is the key, then compensation is a matter of degree. But do we have any reason to believe that it is? Actually, we have already seen how this model of persons and compensation can be derived from the general Parfitian picture. Start with Parfit’s claim that compensation presupposes personal identity. According to Parfit, personal identity is not what matters. Rather, it is Relation R that matters and ought to matter. But, as I have suggested previously, of the two relations in Relation R we may plausibly believe that psychological connectedness is by far the more important. Now if we are to switch our patterns of concern to those grounded in Relation R, as opposed to personal identity (which Parfit himself suggests we ought to do), it seems we also should switch those other elements in our social dealings that we initially thought were grounded in personal identity. That being the case, we should claim that Relation R – or, more specifically, connectedness – is what ought to justify our approaches to such things as compensation, responsibility, rationality, and promise-keeping.

Such a model, of course, is not without controversy. For one
thing, it would be fairly difficult to apply in some cases without some sort of full-blown theory of personality. Bernard Williams has also raised objections to this sort of move by pointing to examples of ethical concepts, for example promise-keeping, that do not admit of degrees – either I keep my promise, say, by giving you the ten dollars I owe you or I don’t. It seems ‘a lunatic idea’ to suggest that I should give you less money simply because you have changed to a certain extent since I made the promise. It would seem in some cases to be equally ‘lunatic’ with regard to compensation: how are we to compensate me for a burden with a benefit to my cousin, say? Is she to be given less of a benefit than one which would have been a restoration of a good I would have had without the burden? If so, then how much less? Or is it the case that she should receive the full benefit I would have had and that I am only compensated to the degree to which I am connected to her, in which case I would only be partially compensated?

I think the latter suggestion is the way to go here for the following reason. If compensation is a matter of degree, then I can be more or less compensated depending on the degrees of connectedness holding between me and the person receiving the benefit for my burden. And although Williams points out an interesting feature in our concept of promise-keeping (and perhaps compensation), it is also the case that, quite often, when dealing with ethical concepts admitting of degrees (e.g., responsibility, punishment, etc.), we simply make somewhat arbitrary stipulations. For example, I may be fully, mostly, somewhat, or minimally responsible for some crime. In these cases, we stipulate what degree of participation in the crime merits a certain level of punishment. Thus, in the case of promise-keeping, we may simply stipulate the degree to which X and Y must be connected in order to determine whether or not my promise to X is to be fulfilled to Y. Similarly, we can also stipulate the degree to which X and Y have to be connected in order to determine whether or not the benefit we give to Y counts as compensation (partial or full) for the burden to X. And I would claim that this is what we already do (in many cases). Benefitting the C.E.O. of McDonalds for a burden to me is simply viewed as an action that does not compensate me in the least, while benefitting my beloved brother for that

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19 A point made by Schultz, p. 735.
burden to me does seem to count as nearly full compensation to me. Cases in the range between these two may simply depend on some sort of stipulation. Nevertheless, the model I have presented does seem to give us some important insights into the nature of compensation, and at the very least it may provide good reason to continue doing what we already often do, viz., viewing compensation as admitting of degrees and as being grounded in psychological connectedness.

There are two important lessons to be drawn from the Parfitian picture. First of all, while his reductionism about persons suggests their partial disintegration, it by no means implies their complete disintegration: there remain significant unities. While there may not exist much discernible unity over the course of a person’s entire life, there may, nonetheless, be certain clearly discernable unities within that life, found in those selves unified by psychological connectedness. Second, simply because the boundaries between persons are less black and white than we normally believe them to be, this is not at all to say that the boundaries between some persons are not very distinct.21 For while I may be fairly strongly connected to certain loved ones, I am, at most, very weakly connected to, say, the C.E.O. of McDonalds.

I am not, then, equally connected to every other person on the Moderate Reductionist picture. Rather, I am a self that is unified across a certain amount of time by psychological connectedness, and I am also a self that is partially unified by psychological connectedness with certain other people – certain other selves – but I am not a self that is unified with most other people, because between us there will likely be a lack of such connectedness. Further, the degrees of connectedness are what we should take as grounding compensation, and so compensation itself we should take to be a matter of degree.

So what precisely does all of this mean for the amount of weight we should accord distributive principles like the Claim about Compensation? I have already established in my discussion of the extreme position that there are compelling reasons against reductionists assigning no weight to such principles. But should they bear the same weight accorded them by non-utilitarians who maintain the no-longer-plausible hard and fast metaphysical boundaries between lives? I believe they should.

To see why, consider again the picture of the self as construed

by Moderate Reductionism. On the one hand, it is generally an entity with a shorter life-span than that of a non-reductionist person (who is alleged to be unified by a Cartesian ego, say). This notion leads the Moderate Reductionist to hold that the scope of distributive principles like the Claim about Compensation must be increased: my present burden cannot be compensated by benefits, not only to other persons, but also to my future selves. On the other hand, the self is also generally an entity with broader boundaries at a given time than those of a non-reductionist person (whose identity is delimited by the boundaries of his/her epidermis), given that strong psychological connectedness may hold between spatially-distinct, simultaneously-existing entities. The boundaries of who I am are wider than they are normally thought to be. This notion leads the Moderate Reductionist ultimately to hold a simpler version of the Claim about Compensation: my present burden cannot be compensated by benefits to other selves, period, where ‘my’ is the possessive of a robust present self with all that that entails. Now the distinction between selves – between both selves across time and selves across space – is far less black and white than is the non-reductionist distinction between persons, simply because the unity-relation of selves holds by degrees. But this merely means that the extent to which X is connected to Y determines the extent to which X may be compensated for a burden by a benefit to Y.

So why exactly should distributive principles like this one bear any less weight after these Moderate Reductionist modifications? Yes, the Claim about Compensation presupposes personal identity, and personal identity, on any reductionist interpretation, involves less insofar as it no longer involves any further facts about Cartesian egos/souls. But does switching our focus from egos/souls to psychological connectedness as being what matters in personal identity mean that our moral claims resting on such facts ought to become more tenuous, less secure, less *weighty*? I fail to see why this should be the case. If anything, such moral claims become *more* secure, given that they rest on facts we can now actually understand and analyze. Sure, the fact of personal identity on the reductionist view involves less. But what it involves less of is *mystery*. It no longer involves the alleged existence of something beyond our empirical grasp. But ridding our moral claims of their obscure and implausible ‘deep’ bases, and being able to replace them with more plausible metaphysical grounds that do precisely the work we wanted the original ones to do,
should only bolster the solidity of those moral claims. A deep but empty hole, after all, supports no weight.

**Conclusion**

What I have tried to show is that none of the arguments Parfit offers regarding distributive principles are very plausible. Instead, reductionism neither supports the rejection (or even a reduction in weight) of distributive principles, nor supports a concomitant gain in the plausibility of utilitarianism. Rather, Rawls’ ‘separateness of persons’ charge can still maintain its force (in the modified ‘separateness of selves’ version), and the Moderate Reductionism I have sketched provides (a) a way, drawn from Parfit’s own general picture, to distinguish between maximizing within selves and maximizing across all selves equally, and (b) a compelling justification for maintaining the weight non-utilitarians attribute to distributive principles like the Claim about Compensation. Consequently, insofar as fairness of distribution is still a great concern for most of us, there is nothing about the truth of reductionism itself that should cause us to abandon, or even reduce the weight of, such concern.²²

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