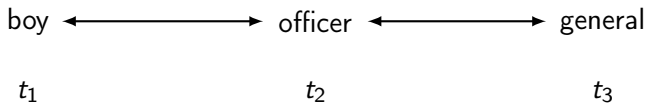# Non-Branching Clauses

Johan E. Gustafsson

Suppose, following Parfit, that R is the relation of temporally ordered psychological continuity.
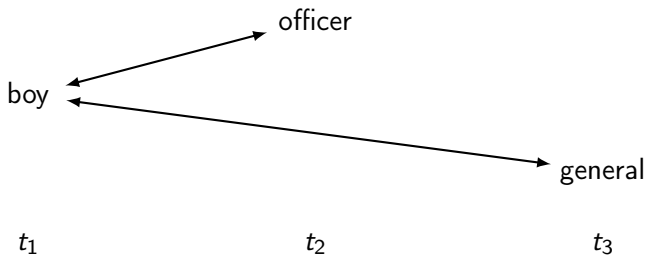
That enables the boy to be R-related to the general in

The Brave Officer

boy ←————→ officer ←————→ general

t_1 t_2 t_3

But it does allow the officer to be R-related to the general in

The Senile General
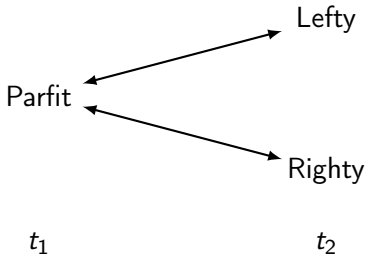

t_1 t_2 t_3

Because identity is a one-one relation and R can hold from one to many, we cannot accept the straight-forward view that

> A person P_1 who exists at t_1 is identical with a person P_2 who exists at t_2 if and only if P_2 is at t_2 is R-related to P_1 at t_1.

In My Division, Lefty is not identical to Righty, yet both Lefty and Righty is R-related to Parfit.

My Division

Parfit (1984, p. 267) suggests that

> *A future person will be me if he will be R-related to me as*
> *I am now, and no different person will be R-related to me.*

In terms of perdurance, this proposal can be stated as follows:

> xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no person-stage z such
> that either (i) xRz and not yIz or (ii) yRz and not xIz.

Problem: This approach seems circular, because it analyses the
I-relation in terms of the I-relation.

Parfit (1971, p. 13), however, has another proposal:

> The criterion might be sketched as follows. "X and Y are
> the same person if they are psychologically continuous
> and there is no person who is contemporary with either
> and psychologically continuous with the other."

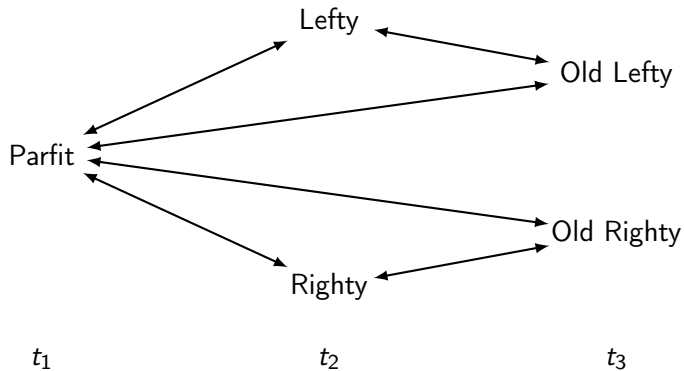In terms of perdurance, this proposal can be stated as follows:

> *Parfit 1971*
> xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
> (i) xRz, y is simultaneous with z, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) yRz, x is
> simultaneous with z, and $x \neq z$.

Parfit 1971
xIy if and only if *xRy*, and there is no stage *z* such that either (i) *xRz*, *y* is simultaneous with *z*, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) *yRz*, *x* is simultaneous with *z*, and $x \neq z$.

This yields the right results in the previous cases.

Lefty and Old Lefty are *I*-related, and Righty and Old Righty are *I*-related. No other person-stages are *I*-related.

Parfit 1971
xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
(i) xRz, y is simultaneous with z, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) yRz, x is
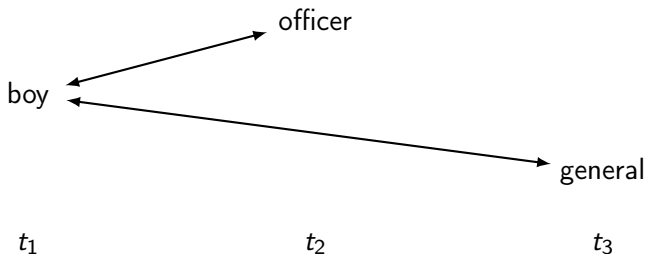simultaneous with z, and $x \neq z$.

But the proposal does less well in a slight variation of the case.
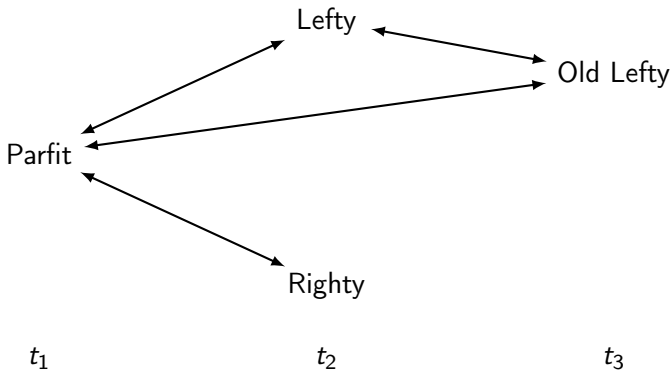
Problem: Parfit is I-related to Old Lefty, Old Lefty is I-related to
Lefty, but Parfit is not I-related to Lefty.

Temporally unordered psychological continuity

The Senile General

To get that officer is *I*-related to the general, we might want *R* to not be temporally ordered.

One might object that psychological connectedness does not just hold when there is a direct memory connection; it also holds when a belief or a desire continues to be had.
But the problem is that, in My Division, Lefty and Righty also share a lot of beliefs and desires.
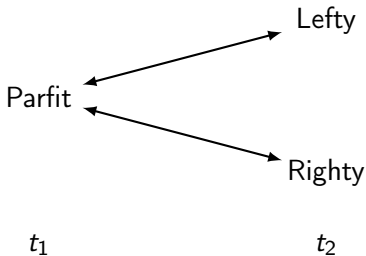
Anthony Brueckner (2005, p. 298) suggests:

> *Brueckner (4)*
> xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
> (i) xRz and $\neg(yRz)$ or (ii) yRz and $\neg(xRz)$.

But this yields the wrong result in

> *My Division*

Since Parfit, Lefty, and Righty are all R-related (unordered), they
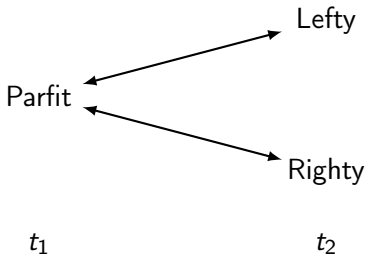are all I-related on this proposal.

Brueckner (2005, p. 298) then considers another proposal:

Brueckner (5)
xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
(i) xRz, y is simultaneous with z, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) yRz, x is
simultaneous with z, and $x \neq z$.

This yields the right result in

My Division

We get that none of Parfit, Lefty, and Righty is I-related to each
other.

Circularity?

> *Brueckner (5)*
> *xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
> (i) xRz, y is simultaneous with z, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) yRz, x is
> simultaneous with z, and $x \neq z$.*

Brueckner (2005, pp. 298–299) objects, however, that this proposal
is circular: How do we know, for example, whether Lefty and Righty
are different person-stages?

That seems to depend on whether Lefty and Righty are I-related.
Harold Noonan (2006, p. 166) replies:

> *Since Brueckner is working within Lewis's framework we
> can take over Lewis's notion of a person stage: a
> short-lived physical object which comes into existence
> abruptly, ceases to exist abruptly and does many of the
> things a person does: it walks and talks and thinks, it has
> beliefs and desires, it has a size and shape and location*

Brueckner (5)
xIy if and only if xRy, and there is no stage z such that either
(i) xRz, y is simultaneous with z, and $y \neq z$, or (ii) yRz, x is
simultaneous with z, and $x \neq z$.

Yet this proposal still yields counter-intuitive results. Consider a
fission case where Lefty lives longer than Righty:
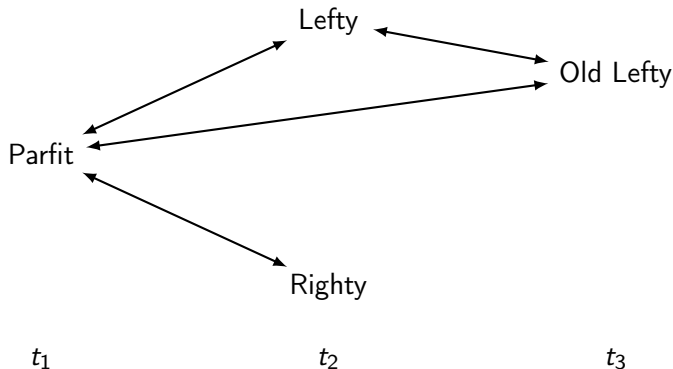
Here, we have that Parfit and Old Lefty are I-related yet neither
Parfit nor Old Lefty is I-related to Lefty or to Righty.

A further problem in the search for an adequate non-branching clause is that it sometimes hard to have a clear intuition about which person-stages are part of the same branch.
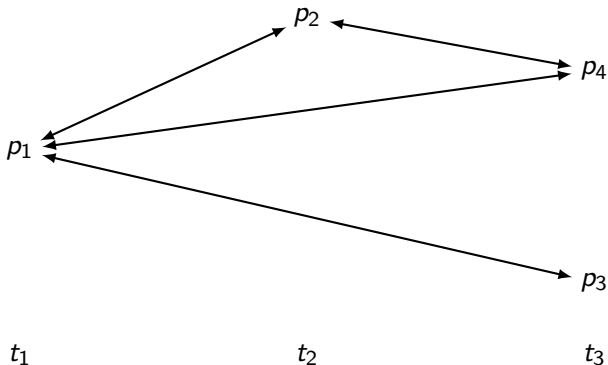
Does the branching occur before or after t_2?

So far, we have only considered non-branching clauses in psychological-continuity account of personal identity.
If, however, personal identity is not what matters in survival, perhaps we should not be worried about this problem..

Is there a need for a non-branching clause in a psychological-continuity account of what matters?
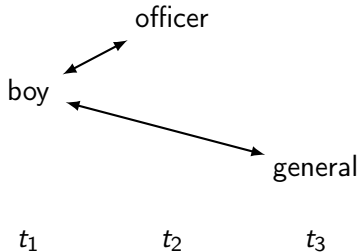
It might seem obvious that it is not needed.
The relation that matters in survival need not be a one-one relation.

My Division

Lefty

Parfit

Righty

The Senile General

officer

boy

general

t_1 t_2 t_1 t_2 t_3
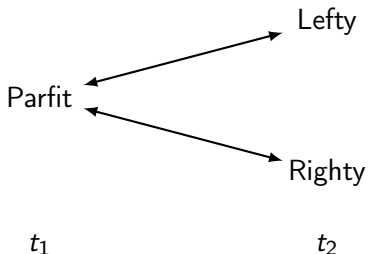
The greater-success argument

In his discussion of My Division, Parfit (1971, p. 5) gives the following argument:

> *I could survive if half my brain were successfully transplanted and the other half were destroyed. But if this is so, how could I not survive if the other half were also successfully transplanted? How could a double success be a failure?*
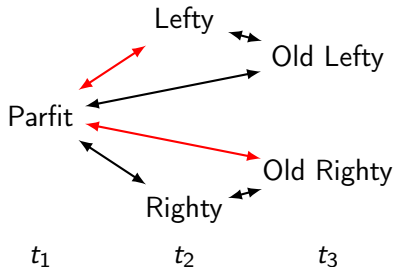
This suggest the following argument:

If x and y are related by what matters in survival and u and v are related by the same type of relations in the same pattern and also by some more relations of this type, then u and v are related by what matters in survival.

The Senile General
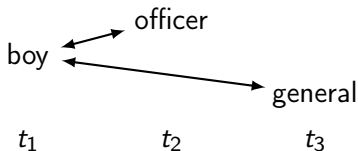
Intuitively, the officer and the general are related by what matters.

My Long Division

Intuitively, Lefty and Old Righty are not related by what matters.

So we have a choice between

>   biting the bullet in My Division and My Long Division,

>   biting the bullet in The Senile General,

>   adding a non-branching clause to the account of what matters in survival and be susceptible to the greater-success argument, or

>   giving up the psychological-continuity approach.

References

Brueckner, Anthony (2005) 'Branching in the Psychological Approach to Personal Identity', *Analysis* 65 (288): 294–301.

Noonan, Harold W. (2006) 'Non-Branching and Circularity: Reply to Brueckner', *Analysis* 66 (290): 163–167.

Parfit, Derek (1971) 'Personal Identity', *The Philosophical Review* 80 (1): 3–27.

— (1984) *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.