

# ARTICLES: PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

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## CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

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David Chalmers, the author of “The Conscious Mind” (1996), in a talk, addressing the audience, claimed: “Right now you have a movie playing inside your head. It’s an amazing multi-track movie. It has 3D vision and surround sound for what you’re seeing and hearing right now, but that’s just the start of it. Your movie has smell and taste and touch. It has a sense of your body, pain, hunger, orgasms. It has emotions, anger and happiness. It has memories, like scenes from your childhood playing before you. And it has this constant voiceover narrative in your stream of conscious thinking. At the heart of this movie is you experiencing all this directly. This movie is your stream of consciousness, the subject of experience of the mind and the world”<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of this essay on consciousness and the experience of self is to highlight some aspects of the conscious life that transform the trivial perception we hold, about ourselves and the world around us. In sum, the particular nature of consciousness has deep implications in the characterization of the reality around us. How can we define consciousness? Once again, Chalmers tells us: “Consciousness is one of the fundamental facts of human existence. Each of us is conscious. We all have our own inner movie, you and you and you. There’s nothing we know about more directly. At least, I know about my consciousness directly. I can’t be certain that

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers, D. (2014). How do you explain consciousness. *TED*, March, 2014. Retrieved from: [https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_chalmers\\_how\\_do\\_you\\_explain\\_consciousness](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_chalmers_how_do_you_explain_consciousness).

you guys are conscious. Consciousness also is what makes life worth living. If we weren't conscious, nothing in our lives would have meaning or value. But at the same time, it's the most mysterious phenomenon in the universe. Why are we conscious? Why do we have these inner movies? Why aren't we just robots who process all this input, produce all that output, without experiencing the inner movie at all? Right now, nobody knows the answers to those questions"<sup>2</sup>.

Let's specify the concept of consciousness. The word "consciousness", as the majority of natural language terms, has different meanings; some of them are irrelevant to the present analysis. Many times we use the word *conscience* with a moral connotation. We say that someone has high moral conscience or high consciousness. The later, about a very responsible and careful person, and the first, about the judgment about a person's actions. If someone doesn't feel well about his or her actions, we can say that person is very conscious about them. On this present moment, this moral aspect is irrelevant to us. It is important to distinguish consciousness from the state we usually designate as vigil or "being awake". After all, we can be asleep and yet, the movie in our head is still in progress during our dreams. In turn, it is possible to observe some psychological states in which one is vigil and, yet, one is not conscious. As example, here is a description of an episode experienced by one of Damasio's patients: "Suddenly the man stopped, in mid sentence, and his face lost animation; his mouth froze, still open, and his eyes became vacuously fixed on some point on the wall behind me. (...) I spoke his name but there was no reply. (...) I asked him what was going on, and he did not reply, his face has no expression. He did not look at me. (...) Now he turned around and walked slowly to the door. I got up and called him again. He stopped, he looked at me, and some expression returned to his face (...) For a brief period, which seemed like ages, this man suffered from an impairment of consciousness. (...) The man had not collapsed on the floor, comatose, and had not gone to sleep, either. He was both there and not there, certainly awake, attentive in part, bodily present but personally unaccounted for, absent without leave [Damasio, 2000: p. 6]".

Opposite to the described situation happens regularly when we are dreaming. We are conscious but not vigil. To designate this kind of consciousness present in the dreamlike experience, it is common to find terms such as "consciousness of the paradoxical sleep" (that is, dreams) or even "paradoxical consciousness". In turn, consciousness, as object of our reflection, little has to do with certain terms such as when, for example, we say we are "well aware of the problem". Of course that in this context consciousness (or awareness) is synonym of attention and care. Finally, consciousness little has to do with the particular meaning of "self-consciousness" when we claim that a complex situation made us become aware of what we are. As an example, someone very ill will say he became self-conscious of his mortality.

Consciousness is a particular mental state capturing what is learned about oneself and the surrounding circumstance. This can refer to internal states (such as

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

memories) or external ones (such as mental representations of the room where I am writing). Sometimes, the act of apprehend the self is more stressed, in others it fades due to our focus on a given event or problem. This mental state requires a particular perspective, the first person perspective that can't be observed by anyone but the self. So, it is a mental apprehension that offers an unique and private knowledge of the self, in a given context internal or external. Consciousness is the experience of the self. As Thomas Nagel points in "Mortal Questions", consciousness is the experience of being a specific organism [Nagel, 1979: p. 166]. Firstly, it is experiential and, as such, all external descriptions reveals itself, if not fake, at least incomplete. Second, it is a particular experience, (that is the experience of being oneself), which implies observation of oneself and the world.

The dynamics between consciousness and the experience of the self is highlighted by Antonio Damasio in a key text of his work on the feeling of the self. It turns out that the feeling of the self, the feeling of what happens (in the original English title of the book) is one other way of saying consciousness. If this thesis, that we adopt, is true, it is not possible that conscious acts without correspondence with an experience of self, no matter how weak it might be.

"You are looking at this page, reading the text and constructing the meaning of my words as you go along. But concern with text and meaning hardly describes all that goes on in your mind. In parallel with representing the printed words and displaying the conceptual knowledge required to understand what I wrote, your mind also displays something else, something to indicate, moment by moment, that you rather than anyone else are doing the reading and the understanding of the text. The sensory images of what you perceive externally, and the related images you recall, occupy most of the scope of your mind, but not all of it. Besides those images there is also this other presence that signifies you, as observer of the things imagined, owner of the things imagined, potential actor on the things imagined. (...) If there were no such presence, how would your thoughts belong to you? Who could tell that they did? The presence is quiet and subtle, and sometimes it is little more than a 'hint half guessed', a 'gift half understood,' to borrow words from T.S. Eliot. (...) In that perspective, the presence of you is the feeling of what happens when your being is modified by the acts of apprehending something. The presence never quits (...). The presence must be there or there is no you" [Damasio, 2000: p. 10].

Unlike other kind of images or mental representations, the feeling of the self, as what had been already highlighted by Kant, is the circumstance from which any kind of representation can occur and, as such, it is not likely to have a specific representation that can be described (unlike internal or external representations). Consciousness is a subjective experience. We understand subjectivity not as much as an epistemological uncertainty about the veracity of a judgment — to know, for example if Dostoevskii is better writer than Tolstoi — but rather the first-person experienced perspective of each individual's internal mental states. In consequence, the term "subjective" when referring to the consciousness, doesn't translate what is random, flippant, and apparent. The mental experience can translate

into objectively researchable behaviors but it also has one other set of real properties that are irreducible to any neutral experience of the world. Searle tells us: "This subjectivity is marked by such facts as that I can feel my pains, and you can't. I see the world from my point of view; you see it from your point of view. I am aware of myself and my internal mental states, as quite distinct from the selves and mental states of other people. Since the seventeenth century we have come to think of reality as something which must be equally accessible to all competent observers — that is, we think it must be objective. Now, how are we to accommodate the reality of subjective mental phenomena with the scientific conception of reality as totally objective?" [Searle, 1992: p. 16].

A parallel example is presented by Thomas Nagel himself. Imagine a crazy neurologist wants to learn the subjective taste of my experience of eating chocolate. If this scientist opens my skull we will only see a so called gray matter of neurons. If he used sophisticated instruments of measure, such as contemporary brain scan, he would find the main areas of my brain activated by my gluttony. Desperate because he wasn't able to find the subjective experience of tasting chocolate, the scientist then decides, in an act of mental insanity, to lick my brain. Most likely, as Nagel states, my brain would not taste as chocolate to him. However, and this is a key aspect, even if it did, what he would get would only be *his* subjective experience of the taste of chocolate and it would never be my experience of it. Let me stress that this difficulty in principle, highlighted by Nagel, doesn't seek to deny the clear fact that to taste chocolate several objective physical facts are required: the melting of the chocolate in my tongue, the chemical transformations on the taste buds, the electric impulses from my tongue to the brain, and the changes in the neural systems responsible for the experience of taste. Without this succession of physical events there would not be chocolate good enough to do the trick [Nagel, 1987: p. 29-30].

Beyond the explanatory gap between mental and physical states we can identify one other gap or fissure between consciousness' private experience and its description by one other person. In fact, the epistemological fissure, denoted in the type of access to consciousness' states, demonstrates, the way we see it, something more than a simple knowledge problem. It's private truth, inaccessible to any objective observation, expresses an ontological rupture between two reality levels. On the one hand, an objective world, neutral, susceptible of being observed from any angle or perspective. Yet, on the other hand, one world as real as the first one, that can only be accessed in the first-person perspective. Due to reasons concerning the contemporary development of the scientific knowledge, only the neutral, objective world was considered real. In his last work, "Mind and Cosmos" (2012), Nagel tells us: "However, the exclusion of everything mental from the scope of modern physical science was bound to be challenged eventually. We humans are parts of the world, and the desire for a unified world picture is irrepressible. It seems natural to pursue that unity by extending the reach of physics and chemistry" [Nagel, 2012: p. 36].

Naturally, the best strategy to implement this plan consisted in analyzing the objective manifestations of mental phenomena, in one word, behaviors. Behaviorism embodies this demand, to an extent that, in its most radical form, it claims that mind itself is a bunch of behaviors. Behavior would be everything that the organism does (to think, to feel, etc). However, something central, was left out — precisely the consciousness. As Nagel claims: “Yet all these theories seem insufficient as analyses of the mental because they leave out something essential that lies beyond the externally observable (...) for example, the way sugar tastes to you or the way red looks or anger feels, each of which seems to be something more than the behavioral responses and discriminatory capacities” [And Nagel concludes:] “Behaviorism leaves out the inner mental state itself” [Ibid: p. 38].

Perceiving this ontological gap between consciousness and the objective behaviors isn't new evidence in the history of philosophy. However, such model is usually narrowed to one single interpretative model, precisely the one Descartes explained and is characterized as “substantial dualism”; dualism between the extensive matter, determined spatiotemporally, on the one hand, and the dimension of thought assigned to that “thinking entity” (*res cogitans*). It would be minimizing to think there weren't any other philosophical models about reality comprehension not neglecting the mentioned gap. Notwithstanding, the philosophical thesis that seems to us more in line with the mentioned epistemological gap is the one suggested by Leibniz. On the one hand we have countless sets of monads, of view points, from which reality is experienced. Yet, in turn, in the intramonadic intervals we find spatiotemporal compositions. This distinction has little to do with the Cartesian substantial dualism. Martine de Gaudemar, Leibniz's interpreter, highlights: “One monad, from the Greek monas, unity, is one unit in itself, analyzable according to an active principle named (...) *entelechy*, and a passive principle, referred to as matter or primary matter; that is, one active and one passive principle. The monad has some kind of perception and appetite. It is a simple substance, without components, having actions of its own that continually change its relationships. Each monad is a living mirror, representative of the universe, according to its point of view” [Gaudemar, 2001: p. 39].

The relationship between monad and consciousness is the line of research to follow in panpsychism due to the simple reason of how Leibniz characterizes the monad's nature — it presents an extraordinary resemblance with consciousness' own functioning. This interpretation was also suggested by one other Leibniz's interpreter, Franklin Perkins, in his guide for the perplexed regarding the German philosopher: “The model Leibniz draws on to explain how such diversity and unity [of the monad] is possible is one quite close to us — our own consciousness. As I look out on this on this coffee shop, it is undeniable that I have a multiplicity of perceptions. I see tables and chairs, the chequered tiles on the floor, a handful of people, cars passing outside the window. In fact, one could say that this one view contains an infinite multiplicity of perceptions, a fact illustrated by the simple question, how many colours am I now seeing? One wooden chair contains an infi-

nite variety of shades of brown. I could never fully describe what I see in any one of these people. I probably could not even fully describe the shades of colour on one strand of their hair. The infinite complexity of these perceptions is rooted in the infinite divisibility of any continuum — any aspect I pick out can be divided and divided into finer and finer detail. At the same time, it is just as undeniable that my perception has a kind of unity. My very ability to see a chair shows that I take all those shades of brown together as one. On a broader level, the whole view of the coffee shop seems to be distinctly mine. All these perceptions appear as a multiplicity in my one consciousness. This unity applies not only at any given moment but also over time. The multiplicity of qualities in my consciousness can change radically in a moment. I can simply turn my head, or close my eyes and picture myself lying in the sun of the beach, seeing as much detail as my imagination allows. Yet in spite of the radical shift from coffee shop to beach, it still seems to be my consciousness. These perceptions have a fundamental unity simply because they all are mine” [Perkins, 2007: p. 81–82].

Through this example, it is shown to us the common aspects between the intrinsic structure of each monad and consciousness. The monad, such as consciousness, implies a point of view, one particular perception. Yet, consciousness has the power of changing points of view and, in that way, captures the diversity, at limit, the infinity of its object (in this particular case the room of the coffee shop). Although multiple perspectives can exist, the monad, such as consciousness, guarantees the unity of perception. When observing the multiple chromatic matrices of a chair I don't turn it into multiple chairs but rather subsume the found diversity into perceptive unity. The monad, as consciousness, registers on the fundamental unity of a subject, allowing perception, in this case, that the unity about the diversity is mine and not of another monad or consciousness. Finally, it is referred the monad's capacity for changing the nature of representations, for example, the transition from the mental representation of the coffee shop room to the representation of myself lying in the sand sunbathing. The change on the mental representation is radical and yet the monad or consciousness is the same. This monad's ability of changing perceptions, of passing from one representation to another (and we know that for this author nothing exists without sufficient reason) is named by the German thinker as *appetition* or *desire*. If we assume as reasonable the identity between monad and consciousness — even if just as instrument for reflection — the non-observable and private character of consciousness finds in the metaphorical words of Leibniz a privileged moment. I'm referring to the German thinker's strange claim that the monad doesn't have windows from which to enter or exit (“*Monadology*”, §7). It is clear that the monad is a particular composition of representations, one atom representative of the world and, as such, perception is a key feature. However, with this metaphor, Leibniz wants to highlight that the monad is one indivisible, non-observable from the exterior, point, as consciousness is.

The thesis we defend in this communication is usually assigned, in the philosophy of mind's studies to the property dualism. So, the ontological rupture

introduced in the world as seen from nowhere by consciousness doesn't originate substance dualism in which the separate existence of mind and body is claimed. In this vision there is one single truth, but with two irreducible attributes: the spacio-temporal physical body on the one hand, and private consciousness, on the other hand. Differently from what happens in phenomenology, we don't consider this to be semantic dualism, or, if one prefers, speech category. One example. When I'm speaking about neurons, synapses, brain lobes, I am in one specific speech category (precisely the one able to be observed directly); when I'm speaking about intentions, feelings, or thoughts, I am in one other speech category, in this case the mental one. The referent is the same but that doesn't eliminate the semantic dualism. Yet, we can go further without falling in the Cartesian dualism. There is a reality adjusted to the conscious experience that doesn't concur with the reality of the objective facts. Conscious reality and physical reality are not the same, but that doesn't mean they cannot be concurring in the same being. After all, two, three or more individuals can move around in the same car but because it is the same vehicle it doesn't mean the individuals lose their specific reality. Thomas Nagel develops a similar thesis in "Mind and Cosmos": "I am setting aside outright dualism, which would abandon the hope for an integrated explanation. Indeed, substance dualism would imply that biology has no responsibility at all for the existence of minds. What interests me is the alternative hypothesis that biological evolution is responsible for the existence of conscious mental phenomena, but that since those phenomena are not physically explainable, the usual view of evolution must be revised. It is not just a physical process" [Nagel, 2012: p. 49–50].

We could claim that a new biology will need to have as a starting point in a way that is clear that the mental properties' reality cannot be reduced to the ones with a physical nature. But we can go further. Consciousness and the experience of the self are interconnected. To a certain extent, Tomas Nagel is aware of this problem, namely when he addressed it in his work "The View from Nowhere": "The conception of the world that seems to leave no room for me is a familiar one that people carry around with them most of the time. It is a conception of the world as simply existing, seen from no particular perspective, no privilege point of view — as simply there, and hence apprehensible from various points of view. This centerless world contains everybody, and it contains not only their bodies, but their minds. So it includes TN, an individual born at a certain time to certain parents, with a specific physical and mental history, who is at present thinking about metaphysics.

It includes all of the individuals in the world, of every kind, and contains all their mental and physical proprieties. In fact, it is the world, conceived from nowhere within it. If it is supposed to be this world, there seems to be something about it that cannot be included in such a perspectiveless conception - the fact that one of those persons, TN, is the locus of my consciousness, the point of view from which I observe and act on the world. This seems undeniably to be a further truth, in addition to the most detailed description of TN's history, experiences, and characteristics. Yet there seems no other way of expressing it than by speaking of me or

my consciousness; so it appears to be a truth that can be stated and understood only from my perspective, in the first person” [Ibid: p. 56].

## II

The first-person approach, referred by Nagel, allows us to face what is named in philosophical terms the problem of personal identity. This problem was articulated by John Locke, late in the XVII century, in his crucial work, “An essay concerning Human Understanding”, particularly when discussing the problem between unity and diversity. One can say it seeks to enlighten which criteria are necessary and sufficient to state that one is the same person, in different moments in time, whether they are past or future. No one bathes twice in the waters of the same river, stated Heraclitus, but, as a more fearless disciple might say, not even once. Very often, the problem addressed by Locke is misunderstood in the way that it doesn’t take into consideration the simplest concept about identity, that is, the logic notion of “numerical identity”. In fact, it is usual for people to sustain having become a different person or having different “selves” just because time went by in their lives. This is a legitimate statement if one is claiming that the essential or secondary properties of a being have changed but it misses the target when questioning the identity of the subject of those properties. When we talk about individual changes we ask about the “qualitative identity”. However, in the case of personal identity — and in this situation the question is similar in any object — what is questioned is the permanence of the self across time. Due to the constant property change, that is, changes in qualitative identity, the problem of knowing what criteria allows the maintenance of the feeling we have about ourselves emerges. The psychological and physical changes that a person experiences across time, from the moment that person was playing in the beach until late old age, raises the question of knowing why, in spite all differences, it persisted in time.

On this matter, the question applies to all possible objects and not just people. One simple example: the glass I have in front of me can undergo deep changes in its properties; for instance, I can paint it in several colors, in the same way that the corrosive action of time would not go unnoticed. Was I to paint this glass in red, or blue, with white dots, it would still be *the same* glass undergoing those changes. Even if I would break it to pieces, we could still say, precisely, that the myriad of pieces one could see was just the outcome of one same and only glass. This numerical identity would only be broken if we were able to multiply it in two, three, or whatever number we liked. But I also think that it is clear that numerical identity will never be a sufficient condition to personal identity. After all, this glass, very much like any other object in this room, keeps, as any of us, its numerical identity not implying that such criterion endows it of any personal dimension. We need to face the question of knowing if changes in the properties alter the identity. Evidently, in some cases it happens but most important is that people, as all objects, can suffer deep changes without even slightly scratching their numerical identity. With a logical reasoning, we say that two beings are one and the same when share the same

properties. It is the so-called Leibniz's Law or identity of indiscernibles principle. When applying the Leibniz's Law to temporal entities, the problem gets complicated as we can witness simultaneously the existence of time continuity and the change of properties, in a faster pace. Any temporal entity keeps its attributes and yet it makes sense to say, as we have seen, that we are facing the same being in different moments of time.

Facing this dilemma, responsible for instance for the big suspicion of Wittgenstein about the identity notion (as example, a statement quoted in § 5.05303 of "The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", "to say about two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say about one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all") usually, the followed reasoning strategy is to address identity, not so much as a logical sameness, but as similarity. This way, identity when applied to temporal entities, as people are, wouldn't be a rigid identity. Two temporal states would be so similar we would be compelled to assume an identity link between them. This notion was explored in cinema as in philosophy. In this specific case, we can notice a significant influence of cinematographic narratives over the philosophical dilemmas concerning personal identity. Consider the familiar scene of teleportation in popular science fiction movies as the case of the adventures of captain Kirk and Commander Spock in "Star Trek".

The theme will be one of the main arguments of the philosopher Derek Parfit to undermine our intuitive trust on the idea that personal identity is central to ethical decisions and our survival. In his crucial work "Reasons and Persons", Parfit constructs the following famous puzzling-case: "I enter the Teletransporter. I have been to Mars before, but only by the old method, a space-ship journey taking several weeks. This machine will send me at the speed of light. I merely have to press the green button. Like others, I am nervous. Will it work? I remind myself what I have been told to expect. When I press the button, I shall lose consciousness, and then wake up at what seems a moment later. In fact I shall have been unconscious for about an hour. The Scanner here on Earth will destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact states of all my cells. It will then transmit this information by radio. Travelling at the speed of light, the message will take three minutes to reach the Replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and body exactly like mine. It will be in this body that I shall wake up. Though I believe that this is what will happen, I still hesitate. But then I remember seeing my wife grin when, at breakfast today, I revealed my nervousness. As she reminded me, she has been often teletransported, and there is nothing wrong with her. I press the button. As predicted, I lose and seem at once to regain consciousness, but in a different cubicle. Examining my new body, I find no change at all. Even the cut on my upper lip, from this morning's shave, is still there. Several years pass, during which I am often teletransported. I am now back in the cubicle, ready for another trip to Mars. But this time, when I press the green button, I do not lose consciousness. There is a whirring sound, then silence. I leave the cubicle, and say to the attendant, "It's not working. What did I do wrong?" "It's working," he replies, handing me a print-

ed card. This reads: “The New Scanner records your blueprint without destroying your brain and body. We hope that you will welcome the opportunities which this technical advance offers.” The attendant tells me that I am one of the first people to use the New Scanner. He adds that, if I stay an hour, I can use the Intercom to see and talk to myself on Mars.

“Wait a minute,” I reply, “If I’m here I can’t also be on Mars”. Someone politely coughs, a white-coated man who asks to speak to me in private. We go to his office, where he tells me to sit down, and pauses. Then he says: “I’m afraid that we’re having problems with the New Scanner. It records your blueprint just as accurately, as you will see when you talk to yourself on Mars. But it seems to be damaging the cardiac system which it scans. Judging from the results so far, though you will be quite healthy on Mars, here on Earth you must expect cardiac failure within the next few days.” The attendant later calls me to the Intercom. On the screen I see myself just as I do in the mirror every morning. [...] While I stand here speechless, I can see and hear myself, in the studio on Mars, starting to speak. Since my Replica knows that I am about to die, he tries to console me with the same thoughts with which I recently tried to console a dying friend. [...] My Replica assures me that he will take up my life where I leave off. He loves my wife, and together they will care for my children. And he will finish the book that I am writing” [Parfit, 1984: p. 199-201].

The purpose of this imaginary case, not possible of empirical prove *for the time being*, but conceivable, is to undermine, not only the traditional criteria of identity assessment, namely, the criteria sustaining a set of properties (for example, the permanency of the same glass or the same memory) but also the notion of a true self identity. The strength of this puzzling-case is in the possibility of transference to our own lives. Assuming the cells of our body, as our life experiences, are in constant change, it means, in Parfit’s reasoning, we don’t have anything truly identical, even in a given period of time, and, this way, in each moment of time we became a copy of previous states. There is a clear analogy with Theseus boat: the famous case conceived by Plutarch about a boat remaining the same in its functions in spite the entire substitution of all its wooden boards. The renewal of our cells implies the death of the older ones, the process is slow, however — in opposition with teleportation — and it will create the illusionary notion of a constant being, when, in fact, what exists is, according to this view, immediate states of consciousness and perception. The self is like a ghost, of similar nature as the image created by Alan Watts according to which the flight of birds creates the illusion they are drawing an invisible line in space but that is just the subject-observer illusion.

Uncovering the English philosopher strategy, Ricoeur highlights: “the feedback shock of the undetermined answer is the impairment of believing identity is (...) precise/defined at all times; if the answer is uncertain, says Parfit, it’s because the question is empty; leading to the conclusion that identity is not what matters” [Ricoeur, 1988: p. 300]. In fact, according to Parfit, it is possible to conceive situations

in which postulating personal identity is falling, at the end of it, in a conceptual mistake. Let's analyze, for example, this medical scenario: the splitting of one brain hemispheres and, then, the transplantation of each hemisphere into different people: what is the accuracy of stating the persistence of a personal identity if the first person was the origin of two other different persons? This, certainly showy but conceivable, thinking experiment, this puzzling case, according to Parfit's words, creates a suspicion on rooted identity beliefs. In fact, according to the English philosopher, what this experiment highlights is the sudden indetermination of a unified personal experience, that is, identity, something that within our daily lives, doesn't occur in such distinctive ways, but still it is similar, through the psychophysiological changes due to passage of time or the result of a decision that in action excludes other possibilities. According to Parfit, in both situations is conceptually incorrect to state that a given person is, or isn't, the same person as the past one. To sustain personal identity would be as absurd as wonder if, in face of a bifurcated line, the two generated lines are identical to the first one. If one prefers a biological analogy, according to Parfit, it would be the same as questioning if the amoebas produced by bisection are or aren't the same as the original one.

According to the philosopher, when we face this type of dilemma, the answers are partially positive and partially negative, which shows, according to him, the vague and imprecise nature of the question. David Bain (from Glasgow University) puts the problem in a nutshell: "Consider a photo of someone you think is you eight years ago. What makes that person you? You might say he she was composed of the same cells as you now. But most of your cells are replaced every seven years. You might instead say you're an organism, a particular human being, and that organisms can survive cell replacement — this oak being the same tree as the sapling I planted last year. But are you really an entire human being? If surgeons swapped George Bush's brain for yours, surely the Bush look-alike, recovering from the operation in the White House, would be you. Hence it is tempting to say that you are a human brain, not a human being. But why the brain and not the spleen? Presumably because the brain supports your mental states, e.g. your hopes, fears, beliefs, values, and memories. But then it looks like it's actually those mental states that count, not the brain supporting them. So the view is that even if the surgeons didn't implant your brain in Bush's skull, but merely scanned it, wiped it, and then imprinted its states on to Bush's prewiped brain, the Bush look-alike recovering in the White House would again be you. But the view faces a problem: what if surgeons imprinted your mental states on two pre-wiped brains: George Bush's and Gordon Brown's? Would you be in the White House or in Downing Street? There's nothing on which to base a sensible choice. Yet one person cannot be in two places at once. In the end, then, no attempt to make sense of your continued existence over time works. You are not the person who started reading this article"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Four philosophical questions to make your brain hurt (2008). BBC news, November 20, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7739493.stm>.

To Parfit, what we designate as people is not in itself different from other kind of entities, such as nations, clubs, which identity is conventional in the way its existence is dependent mostly on postulations made by its own members whose singularity is changing with time. As we have seen, this view on personal identity aims to highlight it just as an extreme case of distinct state moments but sufficiently similar to create the illusion of a phantom entity, somewhat similar to Tarkovskii's "Solaris" phantoms with an oscillating existence between pure hallucination and true permanent existence. In "Solaris" (1972), Hari's phantom is not just a hallucination from Kevin's guilty consciousness, but an ambiguously real and illusion projection from Solaris planet. Tarkovskii's narrative appeal is, in the feedback it brings to our lives, particularly when we question ourselves, like Pindar, if we are just the dreams of a shadow. This is a dear notion to the Russian director as it is present in "Zerkalo" / "Mirror" (1975). The reflection games between Maria, the mother; Nathalia, the wife; and the florentian aristocrat Ginevra d'Benci (in Leonard's famous painting) are one of the many examples in the movie. In *Solaris*, this mirror game allows Tarkovskii to approach the troublesome question of knowing if human action is driven by the constant amplification of what we are, in first place. As Dr. Snaut reflecting on the main human dilemma would say: in one way searching for the Other and on the other, submitting that Other to what we already are. "We don't want to conquer space at all. We want to expand Earth endlessly. We don't want other worlds; we want a mirror. We seek contact and will never achieve it. We are in the foolish position of a man striving for a goal he fears and doesn't want"<sup>4</sup>.

To analyze identity in terms of similarity not only doesn't solve the problem as, in a certain way, complicates it. People become phantom entities in the way that their reality is to be a copy of other, or, if one prefers the cinematographic language — I'm talking about a capital movie about personal identity, Ridley Scott's (1982) "Blade Runner" — about being a *replicant*, a simulated being.

However, there is, in my opinion, a particularly promising way of thinking personal identity. As we have seen earlier, narrative identity might be a good frame to think about the problem. This hypothesis was considered, in different ways, by many philosophers shining out the published work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, Daniel Dennett, Maria Schechtman, David DeGrazia, among others. One could even question, in MacIntyre, if the narrative isn't a transcended operator of our thoughts, something sensed by Wittgenstein in "Philosophical Investigations". About this, we quote the following *After Virtue* passage: "I am standing waiting for a bus and the young man standing next to me suddenly says: The name of the common wild duck [Harlequin Duck] is *Histrionicus histrionicus*. There is no problem as to the meaning of the sentence he uttered: the problem is, how to answer the question, what was he doing in uttering it? Suppose he just uttered such sentences at random intervals: this would be one possible form of madness. We would render his action of utterance intelligible if one of the following turned out to be true. He has

<sup>4</sup> Solaris (1971). Quotes. *IMDB*. Retrieved from: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069293/quotes>.

mistaken me for someone who yesterday had approached him in the library and asked ‘do you by any chance know the Latin name of the common wild duck?’ Or he has just from a session with his psychotherapist who has urged him to break down his shyness by talking to strangers. ‘But what shall I say?’ Oh, anything at all. Or he is a soviet spy waiting at a prearranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact. In each case the act of utterance become intelligible by finding a place in a narrative” [MacIntyre, 1985: p. 210].

The meaning of any natural language word always depends on the context it is enounced in, to such a degree that, as Austin’s suggestion, not only can we do things with words but also many different things with the same language expression, from fact verification, to action imperatives or psychological effects in the person we are speaking to. It is sufficient to think about the simple enunciation of “I promise you” and the multiple things we do when we say it.

The most well known thesis about personal identity and narrative was formulated by MacIntyre. One experience contributes to personal identity once it is part of someone’s life history. It doesn’t mean the Scottish philosopher narrows the person to a passive set of events united in the memory. If that was the case, we would be facing a fragile version of Locke’s argument stating that the mnestic unity of different states of conscience forms the person and not it’s biological nature. On the contrary, MacIntyre thesis focuses the agency of the person in unifying the diversity of experiences and considers narrative the process of identity constitution through those events. According to Ricoeur, narrative identity is about our temporal experience, while personal identity translates the unique singularity of being a person. “We can address two different points of view: (...) our relation with time — we’re talking about *narrative identity* — from the point of view of the irreplaceable perspective that colors singularity we’re talking about *personal identity*” [Ricoeur, 2001: p. 91]. We are not rushing to identify personal identity or narrative identity, but we intend to show the contribution of cinematographic narrative to the acknowledgement of our place in the world. Narrative identity allows us to recognize our private self, without it meaning that personal identity is the same as narrative identity or that the last one is just a combination of biographic events. In an excellent essay on John Locke, Ricoeur underlines the hasty reflection on personal terms of identity as the root of the problem [Ibid: p. 121-123]. According to him, the philosophical mistake about identity is to consider it as a statement of equal properties, substantial or not. The misconception is considering identity as sameness, common error in Cartesian cogito, Locke’s view on memory permanence and even in Parfit’s reductionist denial of identity. According to Ricoeur, the key is to clearly distinguish the two identity aspects, and adopt openly the thesis that selfhood (*ipse-identity*, ipseity) is not sameness (*idem-identity*) [Ibid: p. 296]. We are experiencing identity as selfhood (*ipse-identity*) when assuming responsibility, when we are available for the other, when we advise or warn. Even when we talk, not in a distant or neutral way, about the other in a narrative it is implied that the person might have similar experiences to our own.

It is, precisely, around this argument we can grasp Ricoeur's thought about the centrality of narrative identity in unraveling personal identity's philosophical dilemmas. Narrative identity concept solves, epistemologically, one of the main problems of contemporary philosophy, that is, as designated by Ricoeur but also Thomas Nagel, the oscillation between the first person and third person perspective. Western reasoning foundations, sustained by impartiality and objectivity notions, lead to devaluation of phenomenon such as personal presence because the first person perspective is thought to accomplish, only, a putative intimate and particular confessional speech. The dilemma stands as follows: our experiences are private but reason, the one adopted by science, is neutral and impersonal. Ricoeur suggests we aren't condemned to any of the two alternatives: one's silent assertion, in one end, and the universal, neutral and impersonal voice, on the other. The alternative to this dilemma is narrative identity. The antagonism between silence and neutral voice is mentally overcome when telling a story or building fiction.

In a narrative we can take the place of the other, imagine possible scenarios, teaching our sensibility in complex problem solving. Biographic, historical or fiction narrative is a privileged instrument of knowledge, allowing us to explore people's identity and nature without falling in the extremes of introspection, self-indulgent on many occasions, or impersonal neutrality. Personal identity is, consequently, the questioning on the final unique particularity of each one of us and a privileged instrument of access to that experience.

Narrative allows us to discover our personal identity as a means of separation of two types of approaches; the one narrowing self to sameness and the one addressing the acknowledgment of the other self as an end in itself. "Narrative's reorganization asserts a self-knowledge dimension that transcends (*dépasse de loin*) the narrative field" [Ibid: p. 304].

Why is narrative capable of increasing our self-knowledge? Because, as in Proust's metaphor, it offers us a lens through which we can perceive that the "non-existent answer" to identity "far from declaring the empty questioning, goes back to it and sustains it" [Ibid].

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#### CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

In this essay we study the nature of consciousness and its relation to personal identity. We argue that the best cognitive strategy to investigate the self implies the notion of narrative identity, though we find it wrong to identify self-consciousness with a narrative.

In a narrative we can take the place of the other, imagine possible scenarios, teaching our sensibility in complex problem solving. Biographic, historical or fiction narrative is a privileged instrument of knowledge, allowing us to explore people's identity and nature without falling in the extremes of introspection, self-indulgent on many occasions, or impersonal neutrality. Personal identity is, consequently, the questioning on the final unique particularity of each one of us and a privileged instrument of access to that experience.

*Keywords:* consciousness, personal identity, self, narrative.

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