
MEDITATIONS

ISSUE 8

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SPRING 2021

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

MEDITATIONS

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The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal at UCLA

ISSUE 8, SPRING 2021

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The publication of Meditations is made possible by the financial support of the Undergraduate Philosophy Club at UCLA and the UCLA Department of Philosophy. A special thanks to Regina Gnam, whose generous donation was made in memoriam of William Moler, an advocate of the pursuit of education.

Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

I may or may not have been propositioned by the former UCLA USAC President.

Cheers,
JOSHUA DOLAND
Editor-in-Chief

Table of Contents

Rational Transitions and Personal Identity	1
NICOLE JINGYI AN	
<i>New York University</i>	
 What is I and who has Real?: Language, Self and Identity in Lacan and Advaita Vedanta	23
DIYAREE NATH	
<i>New York University</i>	
 Intentionality's Role in Bringing Art to Life	39
NATHAN FISH	
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Rational Transitions and Personal Identity

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Abstract. In this essay I will first present and evaluate Derek Parfit's theory of personal identity, which says that personal identity consists in psychological continuity, which consists of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness. Parfit's theory leaves out an important consideration: the transitions between one's beliefs, intentions, and other attitudes through time significantly contribute to one's continuous existence as a person. I will argue that personal identity consists in the kind of psychological continuity constructed by rational transitions between propositional attitudes. Next, I will argue that if psychological continuity consists in rational transitions, then psychological continuity and bodily continuity, which are traditionally seen as alternative theories of personal identity, cannot be independent from each other when obtaining continuous transition-prompting perspectival experiences. ^[1]

I. Rational Transitions

Derek Parfit argues that personal identity consists in psychological continuity, which consists of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness. A person *X* at one time is psychologically connected to a person *Y* at another time if and only if *X* has a psychological state^[2] that is

^[1] This essay is written for partial completion of the honors program in Philosophy at New York University. I could not have produced this paper without the help and support from Professor Paul Horwich and my peers from the Honors Thesis Workshop. The third section of this paper, titled "Bodily Continuity and Psychological Continuity," comes from a question raised by Nate Rennings during discussion. Most of all, I would like to express my endless gratitude to Professor David Velleman for his year-long guidance, numerous feedbacks, inspiring conversations, and kind support.

^[2] These psychological states, according to Parfit, can take various forms. For example, such a state may include intentions, beliefs, or a combination of both. The paradigm case of this kind of caused mental states remains to be experiential memory.

causally dependent upon some earlier mental item^[3] in the same way that an experiential memory is causally dependent upon the experience it is about. One may think of direct psychological connections in terms of retention of mental items. According to Parfit, *X* is the same person as *Y* from an earlier time if and only if *X* relates to *Y* by a sufficient amount of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness. Overlapping chains of psychological connectedness refer to the synchronically existing (although not necessarily synchronically initiated and relinquished), temporally extended chains drawn out by these causally related mental items and psychological states. Therefore, in order for *X* at present to be the same person as *Y* from three weeks ago, *X* does not need to have experiential memories of *Y*'s experience from three weeks ago. Instead, *X* may have memories of some experiences from a week ago; and a week ago, the person having the experiences later remembered by *X* also had memories of experiences from two weeks ago. . . So, although *X* may not directly remember her experiences from three weeks ago, she has overlapping chains of psychological connectedness between her present self and that person from three weeks ago. These overlapping chains constitute her sameness of persons. Therefore, if a person suffers from severe amnesia, then her personal identity is, at least, threatened if not already devastated by the loss of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness brought out by the holding of experiential memories.

Although Parfit argues personal identity consists in overlapping chains of psychological connectedness, he does not think that all direct psychological connections should be weighed in the same way since "more weight should be given to those connections which are distinctive, or different in different people."^[4] If *X* is psychologically continuous with *Y* yet no psychological connections between *X* and *Y* can distinguish that person from others or convey that person's values,^[5] then such psychological continuity seems to have little significance. It fails to account for what matters for a person's identity through time. So the psychological connections involving the person's values are more

[3] Mental items, here, differ from psychological states in this context by being specifically about some event. A phenomenological experience of *X* is a mental item regarding *X*, whereas a psychological state of *X* is simply relevant to *X* by means of *X* being part of the mental items held in that state.

[4] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 515. n.6.

[5] *Ibid*, 299.

important than other connections. Thus, when evaluating the sameness of a person, the persistence of these value-conveying connections should also be weighed equally as, if not more important than, degree of psychological connectedness.^[6]

Despite its brilliance, Parfit's theory of psychological continuity cannot account for the disturbing feeling of disassociation when forgetting about some seemingly trivial experiences. Let us examine a very common occasion in our daily life:

You plan to leave your apartment to get groceries. To execute this plan, you form several intentions and act upon them in a sequential manner: you pick up your keys and exit your door. Then you close your door, lock it up, put your keys back into your pocket, and go downstairs. When exiting your apartment building, you forget whether you have locked the door. Now you find yourself standing on the street worried and disturbed. You ask yourself: have I locked my door?

According to Parfit's view, this is a classic example of losing a trivial piece of experiential memory without disrupting the identity relation between the earlier and the later person. After all, the experiential memory of locking the door does not convey your values or distinguish you from other people. Also, when exiting your building, you almost definitely have a sufficient amount of overlapping chains of psychological connectedness with your door-locking self. Thus, Parfit would not consider this piece of forgotten experience as a threat to one's sameness of person.

Yet that is problematic. It is more than just a missing piece of experiential memory. After all, people forget about their experiences all the time. You would almost always forget about the faces that you have seen on the street, but forgetting those memories from experience is not as disturbing. So, what is so different about this particular case of forgetting whether you have locked your door that makes it bothersome?

^[6] For similar articulation of this consequence of Parfit's view, see J. David Velleman "Identification and Identity" in *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 337, n.25.

Perhaps it is disturbing because this loss of memory creates a discontinuity in living your life. You have a goal of leaving your apartment and going to the grocery store. You know what you necessarily need to *do* in order to achieve this goal. Then, you execute these actions one at a time. When acting, you are in the process of constructing a continuous sequence of action guided by practical thoughts. This is the project you are committed to accomplish in that period of time. Yet forgetting whether you have locked the door disrupts you from accomplishing your project, thus interrupts you from living your life in the way you have previously planned out, which can be seen as a form of psychological continuity *essential* for sameness of person.

Therefore, I propose that personal identity consists in the kind of psychological continuity constructed by rational transitions between propositional attitudes. To make a transition between propositional attitudes is to process the content of the existing set of propositional attitudes—like reshaping existing beliefs, forming new intentions, or discarding old plans.

A *rational* transition^[7] between propositional attitudes is made to meet two types of coherence constraints: avoiding internal contradictions and reaching means-ends coherence. Altering one's belief based on experience is a form of rational transition made to avoid contradiction. If I have the belief that I am now in my apartment when standing outside my apartment, then I am prompted by my experience to replace that belief with a new belief about my location to avoid having my belief contradict information obtained from my experience. Forming a new intention based on existing volitions is a rational transition done to achieve means-ends coherence.^[8] If I have a propositional attitude that aims for a certain end, then for the sake of coherence, I must also form the propositional attitudes that aim for its means. If I intend to get groceries, knowing that I have to leave my apartment to do so, then it is rational for me to form the intention of leaving my apartment.

This kind of rational transition can account for sameness of person. A propositional attitude can leave persisting marks on other propositional attitudes generated by rational transitions later. When an at-

[7] Rational transitions do not need to be conscious. A lot of rational inferences we perform are unconscious.

[8] Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 108–109.

titude is rationally formed or altered, it is shaped in a certain way in order to avoid generating contradictions within the present set of propositional attitudes and to achieve means-ends coherence within that set. Therefore, the pre-existing attitudes are causally related to the later formed or altered attitudes by means of shaping their contents. So, when a later formed attitude persists, it *bears the marks* of other attitudes previously held during the time of its formation without requiring the previous attitudes to be maintained also. As a result, even if some of the previously held attitudes are forgotten, they are still, by means of marking, causally and rationally related to the persisting attitudes that shape our actions and influence relevant experiences. In this way, the newly formed attitudes are continuous with earlier attitudes that have not themselves persisted. This conception of continuity subsumes Parfit's narrow conception, given that the rational thing to do in many cases is to maintain an attitude in the face of incoming information when that information presents no reason to change or replace the attitude. Thus, retention of attitudes should be considered as the default case of a rational transition.

Now, going back to our example of forgetting that you have locked your door, we may now better explain the feeling of disturbance caused by this loss of memory. This experience is particularly disturbing because the practical rational transitioning process that partly contributes to your personal identity has been disturbed by this loss of memory. As you plan to exit the door and go to the grocery store, you are performing a continuous practical rational sequence consisting of rational transitions between action, experiences, and propositional attitudes whereas the actions planned to be executed after locking your door are guided based on (either the fact or) the presumption that you have locked your door. That earlier person's action (alongside knowledge of the action having been conducted) is necessary for you to execute your plan at the present and in the future.

Thus, by enabling prior propositional attitudes to leave *persisting* marks on newly formed attitudes, rational transitions constitute psychological continuity.^[9] When you are subjectively disassociated from

[9] To respond to some potential questions that concern this point and its relation to my view of personal identity, I wish to clarify: I am not saying that in order to be considered as persons, all our transitions must be rational. For my purposes, so long as there are *some* transitions that are rational, that would suffice the requirement of being a persisting person.

your earlier self by means of memory loss, your continuous sequence of rational transitions is disrupted. In other words, this discontinuity of practical rational sequence causes you to recognize a minor interruption of your continuity as a person through time. Forgetting whether you have locked the door is minor because it is only a disruption of one rational transition process that constructs psychological continuity with other rational transitions. You are still the person who locked the door even though you have forgotten about it. But this kind of interference, when multiplied, could cause a break in your sameness of person. Thus, Parfit is right that memory loss may disrupt personal identity. But the relation between the two is not directly causal. Instead, memory loss may generate such an effect because memories serve as the fundamental building blocks for rational transitions, which then constitutes personal identity. This is why this case of forgetting an event of your practical rational sequence is more disturbing than forgetting the look of people's faces you have seen on the street.

II. Bodily Continuity and Psychological Continuity

So far, I have argued for a kind of psychological continuity that consists of rational transitions between propositional attitudes. In the example of leaving your apartment, the sequence of actions is motivated by outcomes of rational transitions prompted by egocentrically structured information gained from experiences. The perspectival experience of walking out of your room can sufficiently motivate you to reach for your keys. But rational transitions do not only happen between egocentrically structured experiences and attitudes. As a person, one has the capacity to make the kind of practical rational transition of acting based on objectively structured information.

In order to act on objective information, one needs to translate between an objective self concept and its corresponding self-notion. In his essay "Self-notions", John Perry defines a self notion as a repository for action-guiding information gained via experiences. Action can only be directly guided by egocentrically structured information. For example, when walking to the grocery store, I can be directly guided only by information framed using egocentric terms like "the store is *in front of me*," or "turn *right* and move *forward*." Similarly, experience delivers information that is egocentrically structured. When approaching the store, I am experiencing the world from my point of view. As a result, the information gained from this experience is formulated relative

to me (“there is a grocery store on my left”). Information structured in this way can figure only in an egocentric scheme of representation of my surroundings. Thus, a self notion, as a repository for action-guiding information gained from experiences, is egocentrically structured.

Perry then defines an objective self-concept as a repository of non-perspectival, centerless information about the self. When walking to the store, I can directly know from my perspectival experience that I am walking forward. But I would need to translate “forward” into “south” to be able to know my objective orientation, which belongs to my objective self-concept. Having such an objective self-concept enables one to think of oneself as a person who exists in relation to this world in an objective way, which includes having a physical embodiment as well as a causal role. Conceiving oneself in such a way as being a person attributes personhood to the subject of this conception.^[10]

Consider the following scenarios to distinguish between self-notion and self-concept:

1. My friend looks at me and says: “There is a blue sticker on your forehead.” As a result, I remove the blue sticker from my forehead.
2. I overhear my peers’ conversation and hear them say “Nicole An has a blue sticker on her forehead,” which causes me to touch my forehead and to remove the blue sticker.

In both scenarios, I conduct the same act: namely, I remove the blue sticker from my forehead. But in the first scenario, my action is motivated by knowledge from my self-notion, which I obtained from the experience of being addressed by my friend in second-personal terms. I do not need to have an objective concept of myself in order to recognize myself as the one addressed in that conversation. In the latter scenario, however, my motivation is different. I am prompted by information obtained by means of having a self-concept—namely, knowing

^[10] In J. David Velleman’s essay “The Centered Self” in *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 224–225, being capable of thinking of oneself in this way is crucial to having personhood. A cat may also obtain information from an egocentric scheme of representation and act accordingly. What it lacks (unlike a person) is conception of the creature obtaining this information and conducting these actions.

that information about the person whose name is “Nicole An” is information about me.^[11] By recognizing that I am Nicole An, I am motivated to touch my forehead and remove the sticker, since I recognize that I am the subject to their mockery conversation. This latter example also illustrates the most basic level of action conducted based on the inter-translation between one’s self-notion and self-concept. How did this translation happen?

In order for me to act on the basis of objectively conceived information, my practical reason must serve as an information channel between my self-notion and my objective self-concept. If I want to use a map to get myself to the store, I have to go through three steps of translation. First, I need to translate my egocentrically conceived location and orientation (“standing *here*, facing forward”), which is part of my self-notion, into information regarding my objective location and orientation (“standing on 9th Street, facing north”), which is part of my objective self-concept. Then, I need to translate the objectively structured information into egocentrically formulated instructions applicable to me. If the map shows that the store I want to go to is 300 feet north of me, I would have to translate that objectively formulated instruction into “face forward and go straight for 300 feet” based on knowledge of my objective self-concept obtained previously when correlating my egocentric location and orientation with my objective location and orientation. Finally (and arguably most importantly), in order to further direct my actions intentionally based on my current objective self-concept, I also need to constantly update my objective self-concept by means of translating my perspectival experience into changes of my objective status—translating “I have walked forward for 300 feet” into “I have walked north for 300 feet,” for example. Thus, it is by this final step of translation, my continuous perspectival experience can be used to constantly update my objective self-concept, enabling me to generate a continuous sequence of action. Notably, perspectival experiences are continuous because they are obtained by a spatio-temporally continuous body.

[11] Self-concept is not information attached to one’s name. Instead, one’s name is a piece of information attached to one’s self-concept. Perry, in various papers, refers to self-concept as “linking concepts about the person we happen to be.” However, there can be problems associated with this definition that shall be too lengthy to be discussed in this footnote. For Perry’s own illustration of self-concept, see “Selves and Self-Concept,” *Time and Identity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

This final step, which enables me to carry out a continuous practical rational sequence, depends on bodily continuity. It is within the content of my objective self-concept that I am physically embodied in some *thing* capable of forming spatial relations with other three dimensional objects. What's more, the continuity of that physical embodiment enables me to have an egocentrically structured experience of continuous movement, which is translatable, in turn, into changes in my concept of my objective position and orientation. When walking forward, my egocentric scheme of representation of the world is constantly changing because my spatio-temporally continuous body, when walking, is constantly receiving new sensory inputs. This changing scheme of representation constructs my continuous experience, which prompts me to constantly update my centerless conception of time and space with incoming egocentrically structured information. By having such a continuously updated centerless conception, I am then able to locate myself on the map during the process and guide my future action based on that updated location. Thus, by having a continuous body, one is able to have a continuous perspectival experience that not only serves as the basis for conducting action directly from experience with the aid of practical reason but also constantly updates one's objective self-concept for producing continuous practical rational sequences that interact with an objectively structured world. Therefore, if one is to think of psychological continuity in terms of rational transitions between propositional attitudes, then psychological continuity depends on bodily continuity.

Traditionally, psychological continuity and bodily continuity have been presented by philosophers as alternative theories of personal identity. But based on the discussion above, if psychological continuity is to be thought of in terms of rational transitions, then psychological continuity cannot be independent from bodily continuity when performing rudimentary practical rational sequences.

III. Applications

In this final section, I will be responding to some thought experiments as well as some practical applications of personal identity. But before getting into those discussions, I would like to first examine the significance of thought experiments. In his *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit defends the importance of sci-fi style thought experiments:

This criticism [that science fiction cannot be a useful method in providing us with what is logically required for sameness of person] might be justified if, when considering such imagined cases, we had no reactions. But these cases arouse in most of us strong beliefs. And these are beliefs, not about our words, but about ourselves. By considering these cases, we discover what we believe to be involved in our own continued existence, or what it is that makes us now and ourselves next year the same people. We discover our beliefs about the nature of personal identity over time. Though our beliefs are revealed most clearly when we consider imaginary cases, these beliefs also cover actual cases, and our own lives.^[12]

He argues that our beliefs about our persistence are aroused by these thought experiments. Of course, what I have given so far as an account of personal identity can also be categorized as beliefs regarding the subject matter of sameness of persons. But it is important to realize that the two beliefs are different in a way that is significant to our philosophical investigation. When we form an immediate belief when encountering a thought experiment, we are most likely appealing to our intuitions. But personal identity is a metaphysical problem. When solving metaphysical problems, we are investigating the very nature of things. Such investigation often leads us to counterintuitive conclusions. Yet unless intuition can be a reliable indicator of truth, we should not take it beyond its face value, especially when investigating a topic in metaphysics.^[13] Nor should we expect a theory of personal identity to accommodate our intuitions about “who I was” or “who I will be,” since our intuitions are based on our commonsensical observations of persons, which should not be considered as a ruler for evaluating metaphysical theories. In fact, some of the thought experiments may suggest that these commonsensical observations are not reliable by showing that sameness of persons is not always perceptible (for example, it is not observable if a person undergoes brain transplant yet maintains the same body). Therefore, Quine is right to point out that our intuitions about these science fiction thought experiments cannot provide reliable indications for the nature of sameness of per-

[12] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 200.

[13] Thanks to Professor Velleman for bringing up this point.

sons. Instead, when thinking about personal identity in terms of “what it means to be a person,” I suggest that it is more reasonable to think about more practical situations, where the personhood of the subject may be unclear, and how the given account of personal identity shall be applied in those cases.

Still, it seems to be a philosophical tradition that giving an account of personal identity involves engaging with some thought experiments. In this section, I first apply my account to perhaps what is considered to be the most significant thought experiment—fission—to show that although I am not concerned with them, rational transitions combined with the Lewisian approach of seeing people as 4-dimensional objects can still account for sameness of persons in peculiar cases. Then I will shift my focus to practical applications of my account, including its application in cases of advance directives and dementia patients, where sameness of person becomes both controversial and crucial.

Thought Experiment 1: Brain Duplication (or Fission)

Imagine an evil scientist has caught me to conduct his experimental surgery. He took my brain out and made a duplication of it. The two brains are entirely identical, containing the same information since they have the same neuronal structures. Then he put the duplicated brain into my body and the original brain into the body of an android which he has made prior to the surgery. Now the android and my original body wake up around the same time next to each other. Which of them is me?

According to the given account, my body is the one that my mind can control. But which mind is mine? It is clear that my mind consists of the set of attitudes I held before entering the surgery. But now there are two minds sharing the same set of attitudes, yet identity is a privilege that can only be offered to one person at one time. Although the two identical minds will start to diverge after the surgery, when they first regain consciousness after the surgery but have not yet opened their eyes, the two persons occupying different spatial locations at the same time are qualitatively identical without being quantitatively identical. Thus, it seems that if personal identity consists of rational transitions between propositional attitudes, then it would be hard to determine which person—the android with my original brain or me with the duplicated brain—would be me.

But if we are to consider Lewis’s argument that persons are 4-dimensional creatures, then there already exists two different persons

before the surgery. In his “Survival and Identity,” Lewis claims that in cases of fission (like the one described above), there are two different 4-dimensional objects that happen to coincide for some period of their existence, experiencing this world from a shared perspective. If different person-stages are related to one another in terms of being parts of the same person and that an aggregate of person-stages, when it is contained by some other aggregate of person-stages, cannot sufficiently constitute a person, then a person is the maximal aggregate of person-stages.^[14] According to Lewis’s theory, before the surgery, there already existed two persons instead of one. The pre-fission person-stages can and should constitute the aggregates of both post-fission people. Despite having a shared existence, they are still different 4-dimensional persons because they are different 4-dimensional objects tracing different 4-dimensional paths. If we are to think of persons as 3-dimensional objects, then we may be troubled by fission cases because what is previously acknowledged as one person is now two people. But that conclusion is generated from a temporal perspective by processing information received from the present and the past. Thus, if we are to see people as 4-dimensional existences, then we are justified to think that there already exist two different people pre-fission. There is no asymmetry generated by fission.

Thought Experiment 2: Brain in a Vat

Imagine that a human being (you can imagine this to be yourself) has been subjected to an operation by an evil scientist. The person’s brain (your brain) has been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings have been connected to a super-scientific computer which causes the person whose brain it is to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. There seem to be people, objects, the sky, etc; but really all the person (you) is experiencing is the result of electronic impulses travelling from the computer to the nerve endings.^[15]

This case of a brain independent from a continuous body may seem to pose a serious threat to my previous argument that psychological

[14] David Lewis, “Survival and Identity.” In *The Identities of Persons*, edited by Rorty Amélie Oksenberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. 59.

[15] Hilary Putnam, “Brains in a Vat,” *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1–21.

continuity depends on bodily continuity. But a brain in a vat is not truly a counterexample to my argument, for it is an epistemological concern instead of a metaphysical one. First, when the perception of experiencing a world in your continuous bodily form is caused by the computer instead of the actual experiences, you still have objective representations of your position and orientation in mind in relation to the world generated by the computer. If the computer is able to make you feel that “everything is perfectly normal,” then likely all your prior objective self-concepts are left undisturbed and continuously updated after the operation.

Importantly, such a discrepancy/asymmetry only exists on an epistemological level. On the metaphysical level, the inputs to the brain that prompt rational transitions still depend on the continuity of a “body”—although it is not the body *thought of* by the mind. Instead, it is the computer that continuously sends electrical impulses to the brain that counts as the “body” in this situation. The brain is, in Shoemaker’s terms, “sensorily embodied” in the computer. What’s more, the brain is also generating outputs (after all, the computer is only creating virtual reality for it. It is not suppressing its functioning). Some of these outputs are generated to aim at producing changes in the body pictured by the mind. The computer, doing its job, would reflect these changes through its outputs to the brain. Thus, such an envisioned non-existing body is also volitionally embodied by the mind. But that is not the full picture. Volitional embodiment not only exists between the mind and its envisioned body but also the mind and the computer. In order to do a good job deceiving the brain, the computer needs to take these outputs into account when producing new electrical impulses: the illusion must fit the volition of the brain. If the brain decides to walk forward, it would send out the corresponding neural signals from its motor cortex. To successfully deceive the brain, the computer must produce a moving scheme of representation that reflects a forward-moving egocentric scheme of representations. It must have an objective representation of the world that feeds subjective experiences to that brain. In this way, the brain is also “volitionally embodied” in the computer in an unorthodox manner. Therefore, this brain can be both psychologically continuous and bodily continuous—it can be a persisting person.

Another point made by this case is the importance of the presumed existence of an external world to our experiences as persons. It is important to translate between objectively structured information and egocentrically formulated instructions because we think there is an

objectively constructed external world existing independent from our subjective experiences. Moreover, there must be something outside of the mind, something like an external world even if it is not what it appears to be to us.

Thought Experiment 3-1: Brain-Body Separation

In his "Where am I", Daniel Dennett describes the experience of having his brain separated from his body. Although his brain in Houston is located hundreds of miles away from his body in Tulsa, it is still, by means of advanced technology, capable of receiving inputs from that body's sensory organs and generating output to effectively control that body's behavior. But where is Dennett? Is he in Houston, where his brain is, or is he in Tulsa, where his body is?

In order to know one's location, one would have to obtain perspectival experiences and derive information from them. To begin with, my body is the one from which I obtain information. If the body is to be destroyed and a new body is provided to be controlled by my brain, despite the possibility that I may experience certain feelings of oddness if the new body is drastically different from the old one, I would still refer to the new body as my body and use it to execute actions guided by my propositional attitudes, even though many of those attitudes is formed based on the perspectival experience obtained by the previous body.

What's more, my body is the one that can be controlled by my volition. As discussed before, perspectival experiences are intimately connected to actions and propositional attitudes. To be in a physically embodied state is not just about receiving information but also involves initiating actions by means of volition. When I intend to walk forward, my legs are directed by that volition of mine. A body is mine if I have ownership to that body in the way that that body can be moved by my volition. This condition does not require my body to be able to perform every task in the way I want (for example, despite my strong will to jump, my back pain would prevent me from doing so successfully—I may only come up with a hop). Instead, a body, in order for it to be considered as my body, needs to produce volitional behavior corresponding to my will. If in the future, a patient suffering from locked-in syndrome can have a new body that can be moved by will, that new body would be his because it is owned by him.

In “Embodiment and Behavior”, Sydney Shoemaker considers the input-receiving aspect of the person as a sign that the person is “sensorily embodied” in that body and the action-directing aspect as a sign that the person is “volitionally embodied” in that body. He then argues that both sensory embodiment and volitional embodiment are criteria for being in an embodied state. Therefore, in order to say that that body is mine (which enables me to receive perspectival experiences that prompts my rational transitions), I would have to be both sensorily embodied and volitionally embodied in that body. If there is a brain that receives inputs from body *A* and assigns actions to body *B*, then the brain does not sufficiently own either body. What is required for psychological continuity is the continuity of a body owned by me.

Thought Experiment 3-2: Discontinuity of the Body

Dennett later described the incident of having his body disconnected from his brain due to mechanical breakdown. Prior to the breakdown, he was receiving sensory inputs from his body in Tulsa at T1. Then his brain went into a disembodied state from T1 to a later time T2. At T2 it was re-embodied in a new human body back at Houston, again receiving sensory inputs. Clearly in this scenario, there is a discontinuity of the body from T1 to T2. But was his sameness of person discontinued simultaneously?

As previously discussed, psychological continuity requires the continuity of an owned physical body. Then from T1 to T2, there are no continuous perspectival experiences of relocating from Tulsa to Houston generated by the traceable movement of a continuous physical body owned by Dennett. The lack of a continuous perspectival experience would make it impossible for him to update his objective self-concept, which would hamper his practical thoughts and disrupt the formation, evolution, and execution of his practical rational sequences. Recall that these rational sequences are important constituents of one’s personal identity. Therefore, this discontinuity of the body in this case seems to pose a threat to personal identity.

Yet such a threat is not devastating. When Dennett is re-embodied in Houston at T2, he is holding a set of propositional attitudes that is not only continuous (by means of rational transitions) with but also similar to the set of attitudes he was holding at T1 (after all, there is no new information gained to prompt rational transitions—the only thing that prompts rational transitions from T1 to T2 would be the *absence* of incoming information). The psychological continuity that constitutes

personal identity is not devastated, therefore leaving one's personal identity intact.

An analogy can be drawn with reincarnation. If reincarnation can truly happen in the way that the same mind is embodied in one body at one time and then in another body at a later time, then it is analogous to the above scenario. It is not surprising that change of embodiment would disrupt one's life. One would have to put up with the circumstance that they are in a position to alter their old plans as well as some other previously held attitudes. But just as Dennett says, such sudden change can be adapted quickly, and it can hardly pose any serious challenge to one's personal identity.

Think of a slightly different scenario: what if the re-embodiment is anticipated? In Dennett's scenario, walking up in the specific scientific institution in Houston is not a complete surprise—it is, to some degree, anticipated. If the discontinuation of perspectival experience is anticipated, then it would have no negative effect on personal identity at all. If you put a medieval priest in an elevator, he would not have anticipated the change of environment on the other side of the elevator door. But that is clearly not the case for any person who knows how an elevator functions. Or, if teletransportation is to become a popular way of traveling in the future, then the discontinuation would have little impact on one's anticipated continuity through time. Nor would their practical rational sequences be interrupted. The impact is marginal. After all, what matters is that I am receiving inputs from a body that is mine. Which specific body that would be is of little matter.

Therefore, no matter whether the person has anticipated their bodily discontinuity beforehand, bodily discontinuity would not break personal identity because of the persistence of my set of propositional attitudes as well as the constraints of the embodiment relation between a mind and a body.

Practical Application 1: Dementia

Cathy was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease, which caused her to forget her past experiences. As the disease progresses, Cathy eventually reaches the point that she can no longer recall any of her subjective experiences from the past as well as her past beliefs. Is Cathy, after losing almost all of her memories, still the same person as she once were?

First, it is important to note that despite forgetting her past experiences, Cathy is still able to make rational transitions between propo-

sitional attitudes. She may be deprived of her long-term memories, but her short term memory, as well as her ability to implicitly reason, are not dysfunctional. She is still able to form beliefs corresponding to her environment and uses these temporarily existing beliefs as the basis for her actions. Therefore, her personhood is still intact. It would be threatened if the disease has started to inhibit her cognitive abilities and capacities for executing rudimentary kinds of action.

Still, according to the given account, she has ceased to be the same person as her previous self. The set of propositional attitudes available for her does not consist of any attitudes left over from her pre-dementia self. Thus, her current set of attitudes no longer bears the marks of her previously held attitudes that constitute her pre-dementia person-stages.

What's more, her future personal identity is also threatened by her illness. With damage being done to her cerebral cortex and hippocampus, preventing her from forming long-term memories, there is one special kind of propositional attitude she can no longer form: long-term plans.

Plans constitute a special kind of psychological connectedness. The point of having a plan is to have it remembered in the future, which will motivate specific actions at later times in order to generate certain anticipated outcomes. The specific actions, subsequently, are motivated by intentions that are formed as sub plans. Sub plans are more detailed and specific intentions that serve collectively as means to achieve the end aimed by the plan. Thus, generating sub plans is a form of rational transition made to achieve means-ends coherence. Intentions as sub plans are often formed as conditionals—"if I have done X, then do Y." The execution of a long-term plan consists of repeated cycles of intention forming, action conducting, and information updating. If I would like to become a lawyer in the future, then I would have to first form the intention of getting into law school, which requires me to form the more detailed intention of taking the LSAT. By actually taking the LSAT and receiving my score, I can then come up with a list of law schools I intend to apply to... Such a cycle of forming intention to guide action and from which one obtains information to form future intentions occurs repeatedly in order to achieve a long-term plan like becoming a lawyer. Through the repetition of the cycle, one directs the person who she considers to be her future self to act based on the information obtained via actions done by the person who she has deemed to be her past self. Therefore, by having a long-term

plan,^[16] one is not only aware of but also anticipating her persistence as a person.

Thus, besides being psychologically discontinued from her pre-dementia self, Cathy has also lost the capacity of identifying with her past self at any future moment. For the present Cathy, her own persistence is not a subject matter that can be put under scrutiny. As a result, her capacity to navigate herself (literally and metaphorically) in this world is greatly damaged. She can no longer form the complex practical rational sequences that construct her psychological connectedness because of her disease. Recall the example of forgetting whether you have locked the door. We said it was a minor disruption because it is just one piece of memory that is missing from one practical rational sequence. But when most, if not all, practical rational sequences that construct one's psychological continuity are getting disturbed, then one's personal identity is facing serious challenges. Therefore, because of her dementia, Cathy's persistence as a person is fragmented, if not completely devastated.

But what if, miraculously, post-dementia Cathy is able to recover from her illness and regain her pre-dementia memories? That would seem to pose a threat to the given account of personal identity consisting in psychological continuity. Surely, as we just analyzed, when dementia has set in firmly at T2, Cathy is psychologically discontinued from pre-dementia Cathy from T1. Then when she recovers at

[16] One's plans, especially those that are long-term, also carry a special weight in one's personal identity compared to other direct psychological connections. The plans are formed that way because of who they are, or more specifically, what propositional attitudes are in their minds at the time they form such a plan. The temporal set of propositional attitudes can construct a person stage, which not only constitutes a continuous person but also picks out a certain person in the world—it is, in Parfit's terms, distinctive to each person. Notably, plans are normative. We plan to achieve goals that we think it would be good to achieve. Such a plan is, in this way, also laden with our values and wants.

After all, personal identity has two components: person and identity. Identity relation is a basic logical relation that does not necessarily need to be defined. When we say $A = B$, we don't really think about what the equal sign means. What makes personal identity a metaphysically interesting subject matter is because it deals with persons. This is what makes long-term planning a more interesting form of psychological connectedness than other form of direct psychological connectedness like experience-memory or intention-action: not only does it makes the person consciously aware of their psychological continuity and the resulting persistence of persons, it is also shaped by what construct a person stage in a distinctive way (like wants and values).

T3, Cathy has regained her psychological continuity with pre-dementia Cathy. So this person is Cathy from T1 to T2 and from T3 onwards. Yet she is not Cathy from T2 to T3. So who is she during that time period?

This may first seem to be a challenge. But when carefully examined, this scenario is not so different from another psychological abnormality: dissociative identity disorder (DID), also commonly known as multiple personality disorder. Patients of DID may have multiple identities coming in and out of existence, taking turns to control the same body. In such a case, each identity is not psychologically continuous with one another in the same way that two different people are not psychologically continuous. Cathy's case is analogous to the special situation of DID because that person from T2 to T3 (assuming that her illness is not too severe to devastate her personhood) is just like a different identity taking over the body that is continuous with the body of pre-dementia Cathy. Therefore, despite its peculiarity,^[17] it is possible to have different identities coming in and out of existence without negatively affecting the psychological continuity of that person associated with that specific identity. This is because such "coming in and out of existence" happens all the time in our normal life as we fall into and later wake up from a dreamless sleep. I will explain this in the next section.

Practical Application 2: Coma^[18]

Let us consider Jay, who is currently in a coma. Is Jay in the coma the same person as he was before being in the coma?

The answer here is intuitively obvious. We would hesitate to say that Jay in the coma is identical to Jay before the coma. Yet according to the given account, it seems that Jay in the coma is unable to perform any rational transitions—there is no psychological continuity because there is no psychological activity occurring.

However, whether Jay in the coma is identical to Jay before the coma depends on whether he can regain consciousness in the future. I will explain this first in terms of dreamless sleep. When you fall into a dreamless sleep, you are not participating in any form of rational

^[17] Which, I argue, really comes from the peculiar premise that a person can regain all their memories after losing all of them at an earlier time.

^[18] Thanks to Professor Horwich for initially bringing this up as a potential objection.

transitions: both your sensory experiences and your conscious activities are paused. However, when you wake up the next morning, your sensory organs are restarted, enabling you to have perspectival experiences. More importantly, you wake up with largely the same set of propositional attitudes you hold before going to sleep. There is direct psychological connectedness between the person waking up and the person going to sleep the night before, constituting the persistence of the person throughout that time frame.

A coma, for our purpose of discussion, can be thought analogous to a dreamless sleep. Thus, when the person wakes up from the coma and holds most of his pre-coma attitudes, he has persisted as the same person. But if he wakes up with amnesia, then his degree of sameness of person may be lowered. If he never wakes up from the coma, then since the time he falls into the coma, he can no longer persist as a person. Different from the dementia case, the subject in question is no longer sameness of person but Jay's personhood. How can one be the same person if their personhood is no longer intact?

IV. Conclusion

To conclude, I have first argued that in Parfit's theory of personal identity, the important consideration of practical sequences formed by rational transitions that significantly contribute our continuity as persons is overlooked. Then I offered an account of psychological continuity that consists of overlapping rational transitions between propositional attitudes, which include not only direct retention of past mental items but also the rational alteration or formation of new attitudes. Then I proposed that in order to have the kind of psychological continuity I have accounted for in terms of rational transitions, psychological continuity has to depend on having a continuous body providing continuous perspectival experiences instead of being independent from bodily continuity. Finally, I addressed some thought experiments and practical scenarios where personal identity is both controversial and crucial.

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What is I and who has Real?: Language, Self and Identity in Lacan and Advaita Vedanta

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'I': it is possibly the most significant signifier in language. It is a foundational word and a foundational concept—one that determines and distinguishes an individual, one that creates an identity. Once there is the 'I', by natural law, there is the 'not-I', or the 'other'. Some questions then arise: what, if anything, precedes the I/not-I distinction? What is its nature? What becomes of it after the division of I/not-I has happened? Can this division ever be undone, and what would happen if it were undone? Logically, a division is preceded by a plenum^[1]—here, it must be something that is neither 'I' nor 'not-I'. It has long been philosophized that the subject as 'I' and the objects as 'not-I' are born of a plenum which is unknown and unknowable, beyond language and beyond signification.^[2] It is entirely ineffable, but it has been given names throughout history: Spinoza called it 'Substantia', Herbert Spencer the 'Unknowable'; it is Kant's *ding an sich*, and Emerson's 'Over-soul'; it is what can be called the Lacanian Real and the Vedantic Brahman. This paper shall explore the concepts of the Self and identity as developed in Lacanian psychoanalysis and Advaita Vedanta; provide a consideration of the ineffable Reality as conceptualized through Lacan's register of the Real and the ancient Upanishads' Brahman by showing how both signify a Reality that transcends and simultaneously pervades the experience of the world; and discuss whether that Reality is attainable or irretrievably lost.

Before beginning a comparative discussion of the ideas of Jacques Lacan and the Vedanta with respect to their respective philosophies about the nature of the Self and identity, a brief account of the La-

[1] Plenum: an absolute wholeness devoid of any breaks or gaps.

[2] The process of indicating or naming things in the world by using signs or other symbolic means, e.g. words, symbols, etc.

canian theory of psychological registers is provided in the following paragraphs:

According to Lacan, the three psychological registers—namely, the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic—are what build and comprise the entire human identity.^[3] It is in and through these three registers that one creates, establishes, and maintains one's identity throughout the lifetime. The Real is a complex and ineffable sense of wholeness that is carried over into the neonatal state from the foetal state^[4] It is the experience that one has until about six months of age. This period is characterized by an undifferentiated experience of the world: the child does not “identify” itself as anything and cannot differentiate between itself and the world. The world is not experienced as comprising distinct and distinguishable objects within which the child is another limited body amongst many. The child has no ability to distinguish the boundaries between objects for it cannot sense: “*This* is a table! *That* is a spoon! *This* hand is *mine*!” The inability to give separate, identifying names to different concepts, sensations, or perceptions leaves the child with an experience of all concepts, sensations, and perceptions as one. As a result, the experience is one of complete, pure, undifferentiated wholeness.

This sense of oneness is lost in the Mirror Stage of the Imaginary Order, the second register, at about six to eighteen months of age.^[5] It is here that the child recognizes itself in a mirror and develops the concept of an ‘I’ as well as an identification of that ‘I’ with the body. It is by consequence of this event that the Real is irretrievably lost—an irreversible division is created in the wholeness since now the child is able to identify itself as a distinct body separate from everything that comprises the ‘not-I’. This loss of the Real becomes a haunting lack that torments the established, fictive ‘I’ for the rest of the lifespan.

The Symbolic Order begins when the individual acquires language, which further solidifies their created identity. Upon entrance into language, the mental concept of identity as an ‘I’ is eternally locked through signification. Having a signifying sign—the word ‘I’—for the concept of self as a distinct and contained body permanently solidifies the conception. Therefore, identity as ‘I’ is entirely contingent upon

[3] Identity as ‘I’ with a particular narrative.

[4] Felluga 2011.

[5] Lacan 2008, 76.

language since it is through the linguistic signifier (in English, it is 'I'; in French, 'Je'; in Hindi, 'Main') that the conception of self as distinct and separate is stabilized. Language is what enables the identity as 'I' to develop a concrete form—I becomes a tangible linguistic position.^[6] However, the loss (lack) of the Real is an underlying decisive factor for the movements of the identity functioning in the Symbolic Order, that is, in the period of life post language acquisition. Language, Lacan describes, is a surrogate for the Real, but does not provide the fulfilment of the wholeness of the Real.^[7] The lack of the Real gives rise to an endless desire—material, sexual, or otherwise—through which the fictive 'I' tries to repair the sense of alienation initiated in the Mirror Stage. The sense of the lack, the separation, can be overcome by the loss of the fictive 'I', and Lacan theorizes that such a loss can be obtained only through sex^[8] (the moment of the orgasm) and death.^[9]

Returning, now, to the subject of the paper, the Mirror Stage is when the subject identifies, or rather, misidentifies (*méconnaissance*), the *imago-Gestalt*^[10] that is reflected in a mirror as well as in others' actions, as the 'I'.^[11] Besides being the causal event for the creation of the I/not-I divide, the Mirror Stage is also crucial to the creation of the distinction between the true subject and the ego. In Lacanian philosophy, 'the ego, despite conscious senses to the contrary, is not a locus of autonomous agency, the seat of a free, true "I" determining its own fate'—the ego is distinct from the subject: it is an object; that is, the 'I' is not the true subject, rather there is a true subject that perceives

[6] Felluga 2011.

[7] Johnston 2018, 5–6.

[8] Lacan describes the moment of orgasm as *jouissance* and *le petit mort*—a short moment of ego-death caused due to the satisfaction attained by sexual pleasure. Lacan holds this *jouissance* to be greater than simple bodily pleasure, it is an acceptance of death. The subject, by submitting themselves to the Symbolic Order of language, sacrifices some *jouissance*, since "*jouissance* is forbidden to him who speaks". The moment of orgasm is a short, temporary and incomplete experience of *jouissance*, according to Lacan, and which is the object of desire that is never attainable and therefore, it perpetuates desire.

[9] Evans 2003, 93.

[10] *Imago* means "image" and *Gestalt* refers to the perception of a form whose meaning is greater than the sum of its parts, that is, the infant recognizes its image in the mirror not only as an assemblage of different bodily parts but a meaningful form. For example, the terms "school" or "home" have a meaningful form that is greater than and beyond the comprising parts that may be material buildings, people (teachers or family), etc.

[11] Lacan 2008, 76.

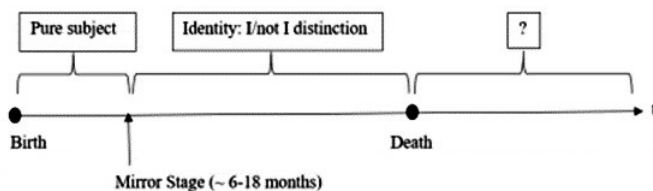
the fictive 'I' as the self.^[12] However, there is a period in infancy when the child—lacking the recognition and linguistic signification of itself as 'I', a distinct body—is pure subject. That is the stage of the Real: 'Lacan tends to speak of the Real as an absolute fullness, a pure plenum devoid of the negativities of absences, antagonisms, gaps, lacks, splits, etc.'^[13] In this period, as aforementioned, the child has no sense of the 'I', and consequently, no sense of the 'not-I'. Lacan characterizes this as a period of wholeness—the pure subject sees no distinction between itself and the world because it has neither the concept of 'itself' nor of 'distinction'. The Mirror Stage facilitates the idea of identity with the body. Identification of the ego with the body determines the limitation of the 'I' and establishes all that is 'not-body' as 'not-I'. What should happen to identity in the absence of the body? If identity is contingent on the body, should one assume that what precedes identity is also contingent on the body? It is known that the body disintegrates after death, and it is unknown what death truly means. However, one can hypothesize certain possibilities:

1. Death is an end of the body as well as the subject, in which case it is plausible that the subject and the body do share an identity fact.
2. Death is an end of the body; however, if Lacan's distinction of the subject and ego is true, and if it is the ego-as-object that identifies with the body, then the end of the body suggests the end of the ego-as-object. What, then, are the whereabouts of the subject? If the subject precedes identity, and if it is distinct from the body, then it should be possible for the subject to exist even in the absence of identity and the absence of the body.

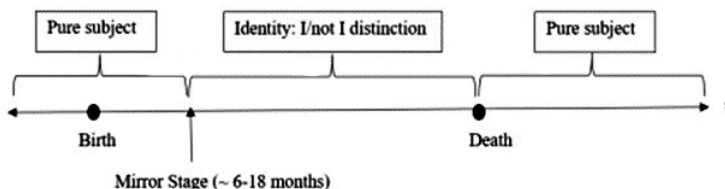
This latter possibility recalls Cartesian dualism: the subject and the body are distinct, separable, and of entirely different natures. Presently, we are going to assume this substance dualism. Upholding this dualism, and holding time as a constant, we shall consider this diagram:

[12] Johnston 2018, 8.

[13] Johnston 2018, 7.



Here, during the lifetime of the body, the period until the Mirror Stage is characterized by a lack of identity with the body. Despite the body, the child is pure subject. This is the period of the Lacanian register of the Real. The Mirror Stage onwards, there is a misrecognition of the 'I' as the ego and the body, and the I/not-I distinction is created. However, this scenario assumes the origin of the body (at birth) to be the origin of the subject, which would imply that the subject is somehow still causally contingent upon the body. This again raises the question of the subject's existence independent of the body, i.e. after death. Let us consider another scenario where the subject, entirely independent of the body, can precede, and therefore succeed, the body, thereby creating a timeline such as this:

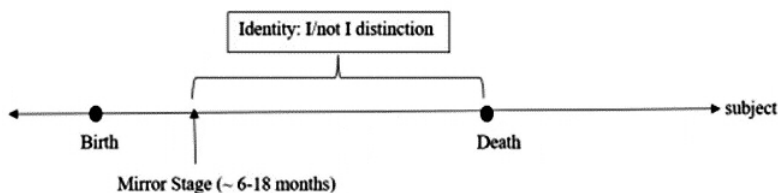


In this case, the subject exists in time before and after the lifespan of the body. If the subject and the body are indeed of a substance dualism, then it can be said that the physical substance of the body exists for a temporary period in the span of existence of the non-physical subject. In both the aforementioned scenarios, time has been taken as an external constant within which the physical body and non-physical subject exist.

In the second scenario, the subject exists indefinitely in both directions of the timeline. This brings us to the question: What is it to exist? Is it an experience of time? Does existence necessitate time? Is 'I exist' an experience of a progressing present moment wherein there is a present in which I am, a past in which I just had been, and a future in

which I will just be? Clearly, this contingency of the experience of existence upon time is predicated on the fact that there is a concept of an 'I' and that there is a faculty that enables experience. What happens to existence when there is no concept of an 'I', and no faculty that enables the experience of existence? How can we say that the 'subject exists in time before and after the lifespan of the body' if it has no concept of an 'I' and no body that enables experience?

On a tangent whose relevance will soon become clear, there arises another question: if existence is dependent on time, what does it mean, then, to say that time exists? Does time require an experience of time in order to exist? Classical physics would consider it unlikely that the existence of time is dependent on an experience of time (although according to the theory of special relativity, time is not an absolute—it is something that exists, the experience of which is relative and flexible). Irrespective of how it is experienced, both physics and common sense will say: time *is*. Therefore, if time is an independent entity whose existence does not depend on any experience of existence, and if the subject can exist without facilities that enable an experience of existence, then the subject, like time, is an independent entity whose existence does not depend on any experience of existence. With this in mind, one can propose a rather audacious third scenario:



Here, the only absolute existence is of the subject. The subject does not exist *in* time. The subject does not *experience* time. The subject *is*. The existence of the subject is not dependent on anything; the subject does not derive its existence from any source. Entirely self-sufficient, it exists as an absolute, independent substance. What Lacan calls the Real is the neonatal experience as pure subject which precedes the Mirror Stage. From the aforementioned argument about the consequences of death for the subject, the identity, and the body, we have shown that upon holding Lacan's identity philosophy true, the existence of the subject can be concluded as absolute. The Lacanian Real is, in fact, the absolute subject.

A substance duality had been assumed previously which was based on time as an 'external constant within which the physical body and non-physical subject exist'. Now, since the subject has been shown to be the only absolute, time is no longer an external constant. The absoluteness of the subject, therefore, negates substance dualism. There can only be one, non-dual substance—that of the subject.

It is this non-duality that is the central philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The pure subject, the absolute non-dual substance, is termed 'Brahman' in the Upanishads. Adi Śaṅkarācārya, the ancient Indian scholar, summarized the entire philosophy of Advaita in a sentence: 'Brahman is real, the world is an illusion, the self is Brahman itself and not different' (Śaṅkarācārya). The following is the line from his work *Brahma Jnanavali Mala*:

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः ।

Brahma satyam jaganmithya jivo brahmaiva naparaha

Brahman, the non-dual reality, the 'Ultimate Truth', is defined as *Satyam Jnanam Anantam*, or infinite existence and consciousness.^[14] It is indescribable and ineffable; 'one without a second', it is beyond language, speech, and mind: 'The Absolute Substance or Brahman is beyond space and time, consequently it is formless and unchangeable... it is our true Self'^[15] The Katha Upanishad mentions: 'The all-knowing Self was never born, nor will it die. Beyond cause and effect, this Self is eternal and immutable. When the body dies, the Self does not die'.^[16] According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the Self (*Aham Brahmasmi*)—the subject—and the sole absolute substance of the universe: one cannot say it 'exists', for it is existence itself. It is pure existence and pure consciousness: 'Consciousness can never be the object of knowledge. It is always the subject'.^[17] Therefore, it can be said that Brahman is the same as the absolute subject previously described.

What both Brahman and the Real seem to signify is a pure, undifferentiated subject which is 'without fissure' and which 'resists sym-

[14] Śaṅkarācārya 1995.

[15] Abhedānanda 1992.

[16] Śaṅkarācārya 1987.

[17] Abhedānanda 1992.

bolization absolutely'.^[18] It is an absolute wholeness or oneness that precedes the Lacanian Mirror Stage when the subject misidentifies itself as an object: 'I', and consequently divides the plenum into the 'I' and the 'not-I'. The true subject is neither 'I' nor 'not-I'. Vedanta conveys this through the concept of *neti-neti* ('not this, not this'). It mentions that the subject is not the 'I' and not the 'not-I'; however, the subject is that within which the 'I' and the 'not-I' arise. Similarly, one can say that as the Real underlies the realm of reality as constituted by the Imaginary and the Symbolic Orders—the 'I' and the 'not-I' of the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders arise within the Real, i.e. the absolute subject.

What happens to the pure subject—the Real or Brahman—once identity is established in the Mirror Stage? Lacan and Advaita Vedanta provide slightly different answers. According to Lacan, the Real is irretrievably lost upon entrance into language. The Real is entirely beyond language: the very signification of it as 'Real'—a word in language—marks our irrevocable separation from it. Lacan would hold that its signification—as the 'Real' or as 'Brahman'—makes it eternally elusive. However, Lacan mentions that the Real, underlying the realm of the Symbolic and Imaginary, can appear to erupt in guises of "limit experiences", namely, encounters with that which is annihilating, inassimilable, overwhelming, traumatic, or unbearable'.^[19]

The eruption of the Real is fleeting and incomplete, either pleasurable (for example, at the moment of orgasm) or traumatic in case of events that cause the experience of the world to become gravely shaken. In Seminar XI, he mentions: 'Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?'^[20] When the fabric of the Symbolic is ruptured, the Real seemingly erupts, and it is perceived as traumatic because it threatens the known and consolidated reality of the 'I' and the 'not-I'. Despite that annihilation of the fictive 'I' being the very object of desire, the threatening nature of that destruction and the fear that it evokes in the individual is the same as the fear of death and the unknown that

[18] Fink 1997, 24; Lacan 1988, 66.

[19] Johnston 2018, 13.

[20] Lacan 2005, 55.

lies beyond. Therefore, the individual remains in a lifelong struggle between desiring and fearing that where the 'I' and the 'not-I' are no longer separate, where language and signification no longer exist; that which is unknown and unknowable; that which is beyond death.

Advaita Vedanta, however, states that Brahman is never lost—it is ever present—but we do not realize it due to ignorance: 'Though the Self is Brahman, there is not the knowledge of the Self (being Brahman). That which obstructs the knowledge of the Self is Ignorance.'^[21] According to the scriptures, Brahman can be realized primarily through the practice of focused and meditative *vicāra* (discrimination) which allows one to discriminate between what is truly the Self and what is not.^[22] Brahman is beyond language, but it can be realized despite language, and also through language: '*Aum*, the word, is all this... *Aum* is the means to the knowledge of Brahman on account of its having the closest proximity to Brahman'.^[23]

Is it possible to regain the Real or realize Brahman in the lifetime of the body, once again like the neonatal pure subject? Can the misidentification of the subject as the object 'I', and the subsequent I/not-I division, be reversed? Can identity ever truly be lost? Is the ineffable really irretrievably lost when we enter into language, as Lacan states? Is the only way to enter the state of pure subject once again (while having the body and sense perceptions, i.e. before death) to lose language? Let us introduce a thought experiment to consider the possibilities: Soham is an adult who has lost all their acquired knowledge of language. Their severe aphasia is a result of acute and irreversible cerebral damage. Not only are their Broca's and Wernicke's areas for language production and comprehension in the brain completely damaged but also their entire store of knowledge and memories of ever having learnt language has been erased. They are now exactly how they had been before being introduced into language. However, they still retain their sense perceptions which allow them to perceive the world just as before; but the world has no meaning to them since they have no way of signifying their perceptions such that one perception is differentiated from another. Now, what should be the impact of this severe loss on their identity?

[21] Hariharānanda 2002.

[22] Dhīreśānanda 2014.

[23] Śaṅkarācārya 1995.

Identity, besides being a sense of an 'I', is certainly dependent on memory: the knowledge and events that provide a history to the 'I'. The erasure of all knowledge of language can have a severe impact on Soham's memories, especially semantic and episodic. It is implausible that without a process of signification that would allow them to differentiate perceptions (even memories of past perceptions), Soham retains the normal memory functions. Therefore, due to Soham's inability to signify and differentiate objects, their memories can become entirely redundant. This will have a severe impact on their identity as Soham. The effect of losing memories on a person's identity is evidenced by real cases of severe dissociative amnesia; therefore, Soham's autobiographical identity should, as a result of losing memory function, also be lost. Having lost a major portion of what defines his identity, the question now is whether they retain the sense of an 'I'.

One possibility is this: since the Mirror Stage appears to precede entrance into language, it is possible that Soham entirely retains the sense of identity with the body. The loss of language has no effect on the consequences of the Mirror Stage they experienced as a child. Therefore, they are still aware of their bodily integrity. Furthermore, the loss of language will not hamper their ability to still recognize their body in a mirror. However, one can be skeptical of this possibility: how do they identify themselves if they do not have the faculty of signification? Without any faculty of signification or learning signification (they do not comprehend when others tell them that what they see is a mirror, and that the mirror reflects, and that what they see in the mirror is themselves) seeing themselves in a mirror would make no sense to them—it would be just another perception that cannot be signified and differentiated. Still, one can argue that the effects of the Mirror Stage remain from the memory of the childhood experience; however, since the loss of language can render episodic memories redundant, it is unlikely that the memory of the childhood event will have any consequences on present-day Soham. This scenario, therefore, is quite unconvincing.

Here, second possibility can be considered. Although Lacan's text of 'The Mirror Stage' seems to suggest that the Imaginary Order precedes the Symbolic Order, his later emphasis on the role of other human beings in the process of identification with the *imago-Gestalt* suggests that the effects of the Imaginary and Symbolic registers occur simultaneously. The Mirror Stage of the Imaginary Order cannot be considered to be an event that occurs outside of the influence of

language:

if anything, socio-linguistic variables (for instance, the words and body language of parents) are the causal triggers of the child's investment in select sensory-perceptual experiences (such as the body image in the mirror)... this means that the imagistic nucleus of the ego is suffused from the get-go with the destinal "discourse of the Other"—in this case, fateful significations ("unary traits") coming from caregivers' narratives articulated simultaneously along with their encouragements to the child to recognize him/her-self in the mirror.^[24]

It is extremely important to consider that 'socio-linguistic variables... are the causal triggers of the child's investment in select sensory-perceptual experiences (such as the body image in the mirror)'.^[25] If language is the very 'causal trigger' for the Mirror Stage, then with their redundant memories and inability to signify anymore, Soham can be said to have reverted from the consequences of the Mirror Stage. Not only have they reverted but also cannot undergo the Mirror Stage event again because the very 'causal trigger' has been taken away. Can it be said, then, that they no longer have any sense of an 'I'? Has the I/not-I divide now been reversed? Is Soham now purely the absolute subject, despite retaining their body? It is plausible that through this extreme separation from the Symbolic, Soham reverts from the effects of the Mirror Stage and Imaginary Order and resists undergoing the same effects again. With the Symbolic and the Imaginary removed entirely, only the Real remains. And, Soham has regained the Real—they are pure subject.

This thought experiment considered the Lacanian view, and it appears that language is indeed the fundamental factor that determines identity. The Self as the Real—or Brahman—cannot be regained as long as one remains in language. The Self shall remain entirely out of reach unless a person is subject to a loss of language as radical as Soham's. Lacan points out this elusiveness of the Self due to the established identity and the faculties of signification in *Écrits*: 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think. I am not when-

[24] Johnston 2018, 9.

[25] Johnston 2018, 9.

ever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think'.^[26] If language binds us in identity, how does one undo the I/not-I divide and return to the state of pure subject, according to the Upanishads? Advaita Vedanta advocates for the realization of the Self as Brahman—pure, non-dual subject—through the *jñāna yoga*, or the way of knowledge. Through knowledge and rational *vicāra*^[27], one can realize the true nature of the Self. The ancient text of the *Yogavāsiṣṭhasāraḥ* mentions:

The firm immediate knowledge of the Self arises due to discrimination by means of *manana*^[28] and *nididhyāsana*^[29]... By that discrimination the veil, which causes non perception of Brahman and the projection, or the reflected consciousness with gross and subtle bodies and their properties... gets obscured and that leads to liberation. People have their strong ego-identities in their bodies; if such a strong ego-identity in Brahman comes and obstructs the body-identity, it is called *immediate (aparokṣa)* and unmov-ing direct Knowledge of Brahman.^[30]

This excerpt suggests that the identity that one feels with one's body can be replaced by an 'ego identity in Brahman'. One can realize this through wisdom and earnest reflection upon the *vicāra* which allows one to see that the apparent world is not the true Reality. Focused meditation on the 'unreal' nature of the world allows one to realize that the I/not-I divide is an illusion, and that the Ultimate Truth is Brahman^[31] The *Yogavāsiṣṭhasāraḥ* continues to say that the *jīvanmukta*'s (liberated person) 'unreal worldly behaviors continue, with the help of the false body, senses and the like' due to his material body.^[32] He continues to live as he did before his knowledge of the Self as Brahman; however, he no longer identifies himself as his body—he is aware of the fact that the 'I' and the 'not-I' are unreal.

In the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan mentions:

[26] Lacan 2008, 166.

[27] Discrimination.

[28] Intellectual reflection.

[29] Internal contemplation.

[30] Dhireśānanda 2014.

[31] Śaṅkarācārya 1995.

[32] Dhireśānanda 2014.

'it is the subject who introduces division in the individual [habit of saying I], as well as into the collectivity that is his equivalent [others]. Psychoanalysis is properly that which reveals both the one and the other to be no more than mirages'.^[33] Vedanta calls 'illusion' precisely what Lacan calls 'mirages'. What Lacan says psychoanalysis reveals is precisely what Vedanta says is revealed through the *jñāna yoga*. However, does the knowledge of Brahman equate to the true experience of Brahman? Is knowledge of the Real equal to true experience of the Real? Is knowing of the falsity of the I/not-I divide equivalent to undoing the division?

It appears that realization through knowledge and realization through experience (like Soham's) are quite different. In the former mode of realization, one recognizes the I/not-I divide to be unreal but continues to remain and function in the world without the actual experience of pure subject. The latter realization is difficult to be termed as a realization since that would require the ability to compare, which further requires the faculty of signification. The pure subject experience of Soham comes at the cost of complete impairment of functioning in the world. The body becomes irrelevant to Soham; therefore, the presence or absence of the body should not affect Soham's state as pure subject. Soham's state before body-death is exactly the same as their state post body-death. One can say that what they have achieved in life is precisely what they would have achieved in death. The knowledge of Brahman—or the Real—entails that one identifies oneself as Brahman: this can be quite superficial in comparison to the actual experience as pure subject (like Soham's). To say that one identifies oneself *as* something, is to employ the faculties of signification. To say that one identifies as Brahman or the pure subject is a consolidation of the 'I' and the 'not-I', not an eradication of the 'I' and the 'not-I'—which is what is necessary in order to regain the Real.

There is much that can be said about the philosophies which speak of the ineffable plenum—call it Brahman or the Real—which is the Ultimate Truth, and that very endless discourse is what makes it elusive. It escapes us for as long as we can think of it, and it embraces us the very moment we escape thought. Perhaps, as Lacan and the Vedanta have said, as long as we have the faculties of signification and the body, we can only reach as far as knowing that there is something

[33] Lacan 2005, 80.

beyond the illusion of the 'I' and the 'not-I', and that the Self is greater than what the ego and the body suggest it to be. Perhaps, it is with knowledge, that is the consolidation of the 'I' and the 'not-I', that one should live numerous peaceful years, and it is in anticipation of the complete dissolution of the 'I' and the 'not-I', that one should welcome death.

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Intentionality's Role in Bringing Art to Life

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We often say of art, 'It seems as though it's coming to *life* before me!' This is an aesthetic judgment—it requires a sort of sensitivity and attention to qualities different from a normal or descriptive attitude toward objects. I will term the aesthetic property attributed in this judgment *livingness*; to say of an object that it comes to life before you is to attribute livingness to it. This essay explores what specifically is happening when we say of art that it appears living to us, with the explanation proceeding via psychological and representational capacities of the viewer or reader. My main argument will be that an experience of the artist's *intentionality* can play a large role—though certainly not the only role—in having an aesthetic experience of livingness. My primary case will be poetry as, in spite of its long and weary history with intentionality and the use of the term in literary analysis, it is the art form in which an author's psychology is most exposed—which is likely why it has caused so much trouble.

To these ends, I will first explicate the terms *livingness* and *intentionality*. I will address the former in the first section and clarify precisely how livingness functions as an aesthetic concept in Frank Sibley's sense.^[1] The second section will then explain intentionality and how it relates to livingness. This will be connected to experiments in developmental psychology which show how attributing life and intentions to objects is a natural and fundamental psychological capacity. I will further push this connection as it pertains to art in the contrast between what is cliché and what is original, as it is in originality that authorial intention becomes most evident and makes a poem seem most alive.

[1] Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts".

I. The Aesthetic Concept of Livingness

As stated, I use the term *livingness* to mean the quality someone is attributing when they say, in the aesthetic sense, that something appears living to them.^[2] It's an odd term – rarely ever do people say 'this painting has livingness'; they'll rather say 'this painting is living' or 'this painting appears to be living'. But for reasons soon to be discussed, it is important to distinguish livingness from common conceptions of what is merely *living*, as this word can be construed in a non-aesthetic sense (namely, a biological one). As such, I will use livingness when speaking of the *aesthetic* attribution of living.

Since livingness is a term used to convey an aesthetic judgment, livingness is an *aesthetic concept*. In his essay "Aesthetic Concepts", Frank Sibley formulates a schematic definition of the term. He writes an aesthetic concept is "a word or expression such that taste or perceptiveness is required in order to apply it..."^[3] I will explain more of Sibley's view below, as I think he is spot on in his understanding. Presently however, I hope to expand this rough outline in ways he does not, as it will help flesh out our understanding of how aesthetic experiences and concepts function.

I take "taste or perceptiveness" to specify the certain way in which we represent objects aesthetically. It is a different attitude than that of a descriptive, or "existential" attitude, in the words of Husserl.^[4] Descriptive attitudes are concerned with *what* an object is, and lead a subject to connect their representations to some degree of actuality and objectivity in the world. When concerned with aesthetics, however, we can roughly say the attitude is an imaginative, interested, and perhaps pleasant or otherwise emotionally significant approach to experiencing an object. This attitude is less concerned with what an object is but

^[2] It might seem that inventing the word *livingness* just serves to unnecessarily obfuscate the matter. This is not the case; there really isn't another word that properly captures the judgment "coming to life" in the noun form. Words like *lively* are too linked to ideas of joyousness or spring-like themes, which are not necessarily related to livingness. Indeed I think poetry, and art as a whole, can come to life to a subject when it is deeply still, eerie, morose, and so on.

^[3] Sibley, 1.

^[4] Husserl, "Letter to Hofmannsthal". In one of his few mentions of aesthetics, Husserl compares the aesthetic attitude with the phenomenological attitude, in that both are concerned with how objects appear. This is contrasted with the "existential" attitude, which I will usually term "descriptive" or "normal" to avoid unnecessary confusion.

more so how it strikes us. Thus, I'll say the experience of livingness, i.e., 'this is coming to life!', is an experience of this aesthetic nature. For example, you might say it of a mountain because it is poised stalwartly on the horizon, "greeting" the sunrise.^[5] In this way we personify the mountain, attributing intentions (of course, we are not speaking of any artist's intentions in this case yet) based on how it appears to us, making it seem as though it possesses livingness.

It is illustrative to provide an example of *living* in the non-aesthetic sense; this contrast will bring to light a number of points that differ between the aesthetic and descriptive attitudes. The non-aesthetic representation of living is a descriptive fact, attributing the basic feature of living to an object due to the way it behaves in the world.^[6] Attribution of just "living" can be uninterested and unsurprising, or quite surprising indeed, yet in a different sense than an aesthetic one. For example, you might think it of a lizard because of its endogenous motion and responsiveness to the environment—no one would find this a surprising attribution, except for perhaps a young toddler who had never seen a lizard. However, attributing "living" to something (in the non-aesthetic sense) that is *not* living can be surprising or interesting, such as a hat that seemingly floats of its own accord. In this case it would be incorrect to believe and say 'this is living'; rather, we would say 'this *appears* to be living'. Yet this is *still* different from saying 'this has livingness' or, equivalently, 'this appears living *in the aesthetic sense*'.

An example that teases this apart fully is as follows. Imagine that two viewers behold a painting in a museum. One comments, 'Isn't it amazing how it just comes to life before you?' This is clearly an aesthetic judgment attributing the term livingness, which could be explained in reference to some characteristics in the painting. Before the other can reply however, at just that moment the painting actually

^[5] Citing only pleasant and appreciative experiences such as these would mischaracterize the complexity of aesthetic experiences. For example, when things come to life in, say, genres of horror, such as a haunted forest or an uncannily life-like doll, it can be quite disturbing, but nonetheless striking and capture our interest. This further specifies that aesthetic experiences are not merely what are *pleasing* to us or to our taste, but something that pierces us and demands attention in a way different than a descriptive attitude toward the world.

^[6] This alludes to the experiments in developmental psychology that will be covered later (Simion et. al., "A predisposition for biological motion") demonstrating the fundamental capacity we have in identifying objects that show life-like qualities, or "biological motion" in their words.

begins to slide along the wall in a zig-zagging motion seemingly by its own volition – let's say because of some contraption an impish museum curator installed. At this moment the viewers might judge that the painting certainly *appears* as though it is coming to life (at least for a few fractions of a second), but they do this in the non-aesthetic, literal sense. This may be surprising to the viewers, yet it is still unlikely they would believe the painting really is alive. They would search for a cause, such as the contraption moving it.

The two judgments differ in ways that are illustrative of the difference between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic. The first way they differ is that they point to different facts about the object. One picks out certain characteristics in the work that are of aesthetic interest to the viewer; the other picks out the spontaneous motion of the painting. Second, the aesthetic attribution of livingness does not require any sort of belief in how the thing actually is—indeed you suspend disbelief to talk about such judgments. Yet the case of the painting literally moving requires the viewers to search for an explanation as to why the painting is not *actually* living. Further, while the aesthetic case is appreciative and delightful because it contradicts expectations, the non-aesthetic case would be upsetting and disturbing for the same reason! Thus, there are meaningful and distinct ways in which the attribution of living might be used in the aesthetic or non-aesthetic sense.

You'll note that this exposition has often pointed to the fact that we attribute livingness *because of* some perceived or represented characteristics. Indeed, when Sibley speaks of aesthetic concepts requiring "taste and perceptiveness" it is necessary that there are some characteristics of the object that provide the basis of this exercised taste or perception. This prompts the question: on what basis or in reference to what characteristics do we employ the concept of livingness, or all aesthetic concepts for that matter? What qualities contribute to or cause such experiences? It seems fairly obvious how we attribute living—we judge based on its capacity for internal motion, whether it grows, if it reacts to its environment, etc. It's clear given any object (with the exception of the odd case here and there, like a virus) that we could determine it living or non-living. This is not so when determining livingness.

To return to the works of Sibley, this is not an easy issue to resolve. Sibley argues that aesthetic concepts are hardly "condition governed", that is, they are not the sort of concepts that are decided by necessary or

sufficient conditions.^[7] There is no formulation in which one can say 'If *X* possesses the aesthetic concept *Y*, it will necessarily follow that it has characteristics *A, B, C*, and so on' nor is there a formulation 'If *A, B, C*, etc., are present, then *X* possesses the aesthetic concept *Y*'. Therefore, we do not have a complete catalog of characteristics that we can readily point to such that we decide the case that something has livingness (or is joyous, or tortured, or warm, and so on). Indeed, characteristics that might be said to commonly lead one to judge an object to have some aesthetic quality can deny that judgment in another object. A pertinent example Sibley provides is when he writes, "One poem has strength and power because of the regularity of its metre and rhyme; another is monotonous and lacks drive and strength because of its regular metre and rhyme."^[8]

Nonetheless, we can say that there are some characteristics that can *likely* connect to an aesthetic concept. For example, orange and red shades found in sunsets are likely to characterize a painting as warm. To return to livingness and poetry, I argue that an author's intentionality, especially when exercised in an original and novel way, often counts for and not against livingness in the Sibleyan sense. You should always keep in mind, when it is not explicit, that this is no guarantee. Indeed, if an author intends to write a poem that is entirely formulaic or unvarying from the cliché, or a poem that has no adherence to structure and poetic conventions, it is very likely the poem will seem *lifeless* or too disorganized to be a coherent, living thing. Intentionality is no decisive factor that a poem possesses livingness. Before I draw these connections, however, it is time to clarify precisely what I mean by intentionality in this context.

II. Representations of Intentionality

When speaking of a reader's representations of an author's intentionality, I will have four distinct notions in mind. I believe a reader can represent all four notions of intentionality when reading a work (or viewing other forms of art), sometimes stratified, sometimes blended together. When reading, we can certainly form ideas about

^[7] Sibley, 4.

^[8] Sibley, 7.

1. the general mental contents of the author, either presented in the work or underlying it;
2. what the author *meant* while writing;
3. their goals to communicate their meaning; and
4. what moods and phenomenological states they underwent while writing, what writing it was *like*.^[9]

We can state these representations as unspecified descriptive facts about the work. For example, we might say or think ‘the author had some mental contents while writing this’ (this is in the first sense) or ‘the author had some conscious experience of these mental contents in a certain way while writing this’ (in the fourth, phenomenological sense). When we do this, we are certainly pointing out objective facts relating to the work.^[10] However, when we interpret the intentionality or regard it in an aesthetic attitude—that is, approach it in an imaginative and curious manner, interested in how it *seems* to us – this is when we represent intentionality as an aesthetic characteristic. For example, if we were to say, ‘the author must have been reminiscing of his mother’ or ‘it is clear through his tone that he voiced this with deep passion and pain’, we place our own interpretation on the latent intentionality in the work and form aesthetic judgments on these grounds.

I believe it is these interpretive representations of intentionality that contribute, in some cases, to an aesthetic experience of livingness. When a reader represents intentionality, especially in the phenomenological sense, they may feel as though the author is coming to life through their work. This can come about in many different ways, of which I will only discuss a few to provide sufficient examples.

The first is when one connects with the emotions they believe are portrayed in the poem (through the speaker, the tone, the diction, etc.)

^[9] This use of phenomenology is in a fairly standard sense: “Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith, “Phenomenology”).

^[10] There are of course fringe cases in which we would be *mistaken* to do so, such as if a robot randomly generated a poem, or some ant accidentally tracing a haiku in the sand. I am not so interested in these complications; I am dealing with typical poetry and artwork in which intentionality is some constitutive feature of the work, i.e., it was made by someone.

and attributes them to the author's intentionality. In such a way they might be attributing all four uses of intentionality above. The reader can imagine the following beliefs distinctly or in conjunction:

1. the author was feeling x or thinking of x while writing;
2. the author meant to communicate they were feeling x or thinking of x ;
3. the author conveyed x to make us feel y or to make the poem seem z ;
4. writing of x must have been like or felt like experience y .^[11]

These beliefs might lead the reader to regard the author as a friend, a confidant, a suffering companion, and so on. They are moved to empathize or sympathize with these emotions or thoughts they believe the author had. As a result, the attributed livingness in the poem is due to the reader having a genuine and organic experience with a seemingly living entity, communicating with them as they would with the people around them.

In a second case, a reader can be impressed by the brilliance or expertise of the poet, making judgments such as 'the way in which they describe the scene makes it come to life before me' or 'their cutting language pierces through me'. In these ways, we might say they are representing the author's intentions to *be* understood and to be seen as an artist. By fulfilling this imagined desire of the author, the reader has a pleasant or emotional experience in this mutual communication and understanding. In these two cases, the intentionality is explicitly and immediately represented, becoming a primary contributing factor to the experience of livingness. It is an experience more common

[11] It is worth specifying here and later that the reader doesn't need to be correct about their representations of the author's intentionality to have an aesthetic experience. Indeed the author could have been feeling joy or relief when voicing something tragic—or they could have felt indifferent and smug, just hoping to bag some money through their flowery words. Whether or not a reader "gets it right" in their interpretation has no bearing on their appreciation of a work. To further complicate the matter, the reader could even imagine the author meant to have such insincerity, that the author is cleverly disguising their emotions or speaking through some character's voice for dramatic effect. These representations can also enhance or detract from the aesthetic experience of livingness in a poem.

in confessional and Romantic poetry, in which the author has full expressive power and is received as such by their audience.

But what of poems that don't put the spotlight on the poet? This more complex example is when we experience livingness and it is not *immediately* in virtue of the author's intentionality. In this case there are other elements in the poem that appear living; it seems most common when the poem surprises us and deviates from a cliché that it springs to life. I argue this surprise can lead us to *search* for what caused the poem to jolt us so, which leads us to the author's intentionality as the "animating force", so to speak. It leads us to puzzle over what they meant, what they were thinking as they wrote, and whether they meant to surprise and delight us. This phenomenon will require more explanation, and I think it will be best to draw a comparison once again between attributing living in the non-aesthetic sense and livingness. This comparison will be centered on studies in developmental psychology, particularly the work of Simion et. al.^[12] and Luo & Baillargeon.^[13]

Simion et. al. have determined that infants attribute what they call *biological motion* as early as two days old (likely to be innate) with very minimal conditions.^[14] When shown animated dots on a screen in the shape of moving animals (in this case, a dotted outline of a walking chicken), the infants show a preference and interest in what appears to have biological motion over displays that show random motion not organized in animal shapes.^[15] It of course would be too far to say the infants "represent" something as complex a concept as "living" at this stage. Nonetheless, this example demonstrates just how fundamental and natural it is for us to see something as living and take interest in it.

Now we can take this further and see how biological motion figures into *goal attribution*. In Luo and Baillargeon's study, they found that infants as young as 5 months old expected a self-propelled box to have "preference" for the object it was shown to move toward and

[12] Simion et al., "A predisposition for biological motion".

[13] Luo and Baillargeon "Can a self-propelled box".

[14] See note 11.

[15] This is of course to say they show preference and interest in the *descriptive*, not *aesthetic* sense. While we usually talk of preference and interest in an aesthetic sense, it's understandable that an infant would have interest in a descriptive attitude because everything is novel and surprising to them.

touch versus an object that the box had not moved toward.^[16] They would be surprised if, when the objects' positions were switched, the box moved toward and touched the object it hadn't been previously seeking. Again, it is too far to say the infants develop representations of intentionality from this. Nonetheless, we can reason that the infants attribute some sort of rough goal to the self-propelling box, that the box "prefers" or seeks out an object. We can use this to explain how we detect intentions and goal-setting in the non-aesthetic sense. It is very natural as adults, even when we know better, to imagine an object to have life and intentions when it exhibits some sort of endogenous motion and consistent action.

Here's how we can connect this to aesthetic experiences in poetry. As explained above, one of the simplest criteria for representing something as living (and further, attributing intention) is that it can exhibit biological motion, i.e., self-propel, move without outside forces or even act against outside forces. Let us then equate common poetic structure, such as a sonnet, with regular, non-organic motion, like a ball rolling down a ramp. Imagine an author who takes the structure of the sonnet and then, with an utter lack of inspiration, formulaically plugs in words to compose the sonnet. They make trite rhymes such as 'fly' and 'high', 'love' and 'dove'. They write about an over-worn theme, such as their beloved. Their volta is awfully bland, predictably lamenting over how their love was spurned. In no way do they vary from the sonnet tradition, written and rewritten for hundreds of years. It's very likely that to one who has read a few sonnets, this poem will seem to be dull and *lifeless*; it will fail the conditions needed to have the aesthetic quality of livingness. Rather, it will fall with an uninteresting thud, like a rock dropped from a balcony. There is no variation in the law-like motion. Now, if a rock were to turn around and vengefully return to the one who dropped it, scoring a nice bruise on their brow, this certainly would be cause for surprise. We might imagine that the rock was *living*, and had a rather spiteful goal or intention.

In this sense, a poet who varies from the scheme of a poetic genre does exactly this. In creative strokes they intervene in the predictable motion of the poem, interjecting slant or off-rhymes, varying the syllables or spacing, enjambling lines or breaking them abruptly. These variations surprise the reader, and stand out as distinct experiences,

[16] See note 12.

notably differing from the “non-biological” motion of unoriginal poetry. The poem seems as though it comes to life in this way. This surprise prompts the reader to think about what *causes* such surprise, which can lead them to the author.

An artist’s intentionality is most noticeable to the reader when they break clichés or norms. A reader can choose (or intuitively be led) to represent these moments of intentionality in the aesthetic and interpretive sense. They engage with and playfully imagine what the author’s psychological state might have been when introducing these unique and idiosyncratic moments. The reader may feel *as though* they’re peering into the head of the author. As such, they have an aesthetic experience of livingness, constituted by two experiences. The first is the initial surprise when the poem varies from what the reader expected, making it seem “alive”. This surprise can lead one to attribute this to the author, at which point they represent and engage with their intentionality as though they were still living.

With all the pieces set, we are now ready to see this aesthetic experience in practice. I will examine two analyses of sonnets, both of which are centered on the author’s use of enjambment to break cliché sonnet structure. Enjambment is when, in a poem, two separate lines run together without pause, such as if it lacks a comma or the clause is only completed by reading on to the following line. My goal in citing these analyses will show how a reader can notice the specific techniques an author uses to break clichés and surprise them, prompting the reader to reflect on the author’s intentionality. I will further argue that the reader’s capacity to do so enables them to judge the poem on the grounds of the aesthetic concept of livingness, and that this phenomenon contributes to their aesthetic experience of the poem as a whole.

III. Two Cases of Intentionality Experienced Through Enjambment

In Hobbs’ book *Literature and Cognition*, he applies coherence theory and discourse analysis used in cognitive science and AI research to the understanding of literature. He analyzes “Sonnet 20” by John Milton, often referred to as “Lawrence of virtuous father virtuous son”. His review is quite thorough and splits each line into two or three segments; as such, I will only deal with his analysis of two lines, 5 and 6, that will suffice to illustrate that paying attention to the intention of the author

does yield fruitful discussion and aesthetic representation. His focus is to use these lines to argue for an interpretation of the meaning of the poem. My goal is to use his insights to demonstrate that such sensitivity to the intention of the author contributes to an *aesthetic* experience. The two lines in question are 5 and 6, and I've included the first four to give context. I also recommend settling in to a space of receptivity and thoughtfully engaging with the poem—the attitude of reading philosophy can often detract from an aesthetic one:

Lawrence of virtuous father virtuous son,
 Now that the fields are dank, and the ways are mire,
 Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
 Help waste a sullen day, what may be won
 From the hard season gaining; time will run
 On smoother, till Favonius re-inspire

The first four lines of the poem provide the setting and characters: the speaker and the one he addresses are facing a harsh winter (the “hard season gaining”) and sometimes meet by a fire to spend leisurely time together. It seems that the semicolon in line 5 above concludes the discussion and establishment of time, place, and the meeting of the characters. In this context, the statement “time will run” is a stoic and bleak statement about the season; Hobbs writes, “The reader’s first impression is that the same idea is being repeated and emphasized.”^[17] However, once they proceed to line six the reader realizes that line five and six are enjambed, and withholding a comma until “smoother” suggests the complete clause is “time will run on smoother”. This changes the interpretation to the exact opposite of what one first expects. The statement “time will run on smoother” is a wishful and expectant statement rather than a bitter one. The characters hopefully await until Favonius (a Roman god of spring) reinspires the earth.^[18]

This change in the interpretation surprises a reader. By varying from the traditional sonnet structure in which each line pauses at the end and contains a complete clause (see lines 1 and 2 as an example), Milton lulls us into believing that this poem will follow standard, law-like sonnet structure. However, he anticipates this and plays off of our expectations. He varies the lines and makes the poem seemingly

^[17] Hobbs, 121.

^[18] Hobbs, 120-121.

“jump” out of this uninteresting progression, analogous to something with endogenous, biological motion. This captures our interest, as we are naturally predisposed to take interest in things that appear living.

It is clear that what underlies the reader’s shift in interpretation is their grappling with what the *author* meant. One thinks Milton’s meaning is to reinforce the theme of the poem, but he really intends to introduce the turning point with the enjambment from lines 5 to 6. We might ponder over what he was thinking and feeling when writing this, if he hoped a clever reader would notice and delight in this move, if he anticipated our surprise at this moment. This is where the aesthetic experience of livingness is reinforced in the context of intentionality and we pleasurably connect with the poem in a distinct way. By representing this intentionality, we might feel as though we share in communication with Milton, like we understand some private, clever utterance he shared with us. Hobbs sums up this sentiment in one of the very last statements in his book: “Then what distinguishes poetic discourse is not so much the shape of the work that the writer executes. Rather, it is the special relationship he establishes with his reader, demanding the best of both writer and reader, communicating important insights, and demonstrating the depth to which we are understood.”^[19]

Let us examine another case then, this one presented in Timothy Steele’s *All the Fun’s In How You Say a Thing*. This will focus less on the surprising aspects of a poem, but on a poet’s use of enjambment to match up with the sensory qualities of the poem. This reinforces the analogy between the perceptual and physical attribution of *living* and the metaphorical representation of livingness. The poem in question is Browning’s “My Last Duchess”. Steele writes, “In most instances, he [Browning] uses the run-ons [enjambment] to suggest rhythmically the thing he is describing. For example, when he writes

The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her. . .

the enjambment—the breaking of the pentameter over into the next verse—serves as a rhythmical analogue to the activity of the branch-snapper.”^[20] When we read such descriptions in a poem, indeed we

^[19] Hobbs, 171.

^[20] Steele, 99.

imagine the scene before us and engage in sensory representation. This may be enough to constitute some experience of a scene playing in a life-like manner before us. However, such representations are enhanced and focused by literary techniques such as the one described. Poems do not just convey scenes through words; poets control the spacing, meter, and punctuation in ways unique to the art medium such that they parallel what is being said. When a reader represents the poet's intentionality such that the poet purposefully employs these techniques, there's an additional layer of livingness appreciated. The reader might feel as though they're in private and subtle communication with another's brilliant mind, working with the author to construct meaning.

Steele presses on and cites a few more lines in which Browning employs this technique. This analysis centers on the phenomenological representation of intentionality. He quotes the lines:

...all and each
 Would draw from her alike...
 and when he refers to the calling of
 ...that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek...

and follows it with commentary: "the enjambments convey the Duchess's warm responsiveness to—and her spontaneous and candid delight in – the world around her. Reading these lines and reading through their turns, we may remember getting off a plane or a bus and catching sight of someone we loved whose eyes lit up and whose face blushed happily to see us."^[21] We have representations of intentionality in many layers in this analysis. First, the most immediate representation, and the one provided by Steele is of the *character's* phenomenal states—the Duchess. Her mental states are being directed in such a way as being joyous, "warm", delightfully regarding her environment. We enter into an empathetic state and share in the Duchess's way of seeing the world, leading to an aesthetic experience of not only, say, joyousness, but of livingness *as well*, in that we feel we are relating to a character coming to life before us.

However, this intentionality is not of the author's; it is of the fictional character or the poem's contents. We connect with Browning's

[21] Steele, 100.

phenomenal states when we represent him thinking of such a beautiful sight—perhaps he thinks of his wife, or a love from his youth. We feel his excitement and heart ache, sharing again in an empathetic state in which we feel as though we connect with the author in mutual understanding. Finally, we have a representation of intentionality in the second and third sense (as described in Section II), as in Hobbs' example above. We take notice of Browning's enjambment and see how he ran these lines together to convey this passionate regard for the world expressed by both the Duchess and the speaker. We can delight in this manipulation and appreciate it, producing yet another representation of livingness derived from the author's intentionality.

IV. Some Counterarguments and Their Responses

In what has been said above, I have shown that livingness is a specific aesthetic quality that captures the sentiment of when something comes to life (in a non-literal, aesthetic sense) to someone. I have further argued how intentionality ties into livingness, particularly using examples in which the author's intentionality serves as an "animating force" so to speak; their manipulation of a reader's expectations surprise us and impress us, making the poem seem as though it is a living, acting entity. I illustrated this with analogies to biological motion and attributing intentionality to non-living, moving objects, which seems parallel to attributing intentions to art that surprises us and varies from law-like, inorganic, cliché motion.

In the examples I have given, one could certainly point out that the author's intentionality does not *need* to be represented at all to have these experiences of livingness. A few scenarios could show situations in which this is the case. A reader may skim through the poem and not take notice of any of these technical literary elements. They could be, at worst, disinterested in the poem and have no aesthetic experience. In a slightly better situation, the reader takes note that the poem indeed felt a little "alive" to them, but can't put their finger on exactly why. With a yet more sophisticated experience, the reader might have a reaction to the livingness and cite qualities that are *not* attributed to the author's intentionality, such as the life-like and realistic descriptions, or strictly the intentionality of the characters in the poem. It is true that aesthetic experiences are often immediate and emotional, and to accurately describe what is happening when we have such experiences, it may be unnecessary to reference these sorts of intellectual and

interpretive filters.

I do not need to refute the possibility of these counterexamples to still conclude what I have thus far. The instances of other aesthetic experiences do not deny our capacity to render the particular judgment I have explicated here. Nonetheless, running through each of these other cases might elucidate some clarifying points. The first case in which someone is entirely unimpressed does not require much discussion. As Sibley writes, "...a man need not be stupid or have poor eyesight to fail to see that something is graceful. Thus taste or sensitivity is somewhat more rare than certain other human capacities; people who exhibit a sensitivity both wide-ranging and refined are a minority."^[22] This is not to commit to some elitism—Sibley argues that most people employ aesthetic concepts in day to day life. However, it does require some experience and knowledge to point to what makes a poem good or bad, and further I believe it requires the right disposition. If one thinks poetry is a waste of time altogether, they will be ruling themselves out of such experiences. If someone is tired, hungry, stressed, has been reading for too many hours, etc., then regardless of their aesthetic sensitivity, they may miss a nuanced judgment they would have otherwise had.

I can treat the second and third counterexamples at the same time. My first point of defense is that if one does not reference the author's intentionality but nonetheless has an aesthetic experience, this in no way denies their capacity (or anyone's capacity) that they *can* represent authorial intentionality. Someone who does not make this connection in one poem might see intentionality as a contributing characteristic in another, or when revisiting the same work come across this discovery.

My second point is that even if someone does not know why they feel as though a poem is alive, or if they cite characteristics other than intentionality, this does not exclude the possibility that authorial intentionality was an *implicit* factor in their judgment. Indeed, a critic might explain to this reader why they believe the author's intentions are what animate the poem, and the reader could say, 'Yes! That's exactly it' or 'I hadn't thought about that, but when you put it that way, I certainly agree.' It would be too strong for me to argue that therefore authorial intentionality *always* implicitly underlies these sorts of judgments—this is not the case. We must keep in mind Sibley's argument that there is

[22] Sibley, 3.

little that is logically guaranteed or necessitated in aesthetics. There is nothing wrong with having aesthetic experiences of livingness that do not involve intentionality. Nonetheless I have made a case for why and how we can have these aesthetic experiences, and I further hold that these judgments are not uncommon due to our fundamental predispositions to personify and imagine things to be alive.

Now, if you take little interest in the world of aesthetics or literature, this may seem like an unimportant or modest claim. So I have established what it's like to have an experience of livingness, the way in which we represent such experiences, and how intentionality can play a major role in contributing to this phenomenon. What of it? I have three responses to this cynicism. The first is that this is a move in arguing, in small steps, for a valid place for intentionality in aesthetic experience. Prejudice against intentionality is still alive, usually in pop or overzealous interpretations of "The Intentional Fallacy" or other New Criticism era thought.^[23] However, my argument lives comfortably within the conceding points of anti-intentionalists, of whom Lamarque writes, "Indeed Wimsatt and Beardsley readily admit that an author's 'designing intellect' might be 'the *cause* of a poem'; they deny only that it is a *standard* for judging the poem. Also they are happy to acknowledge intentions *realized* in a work."^[24] My thesis is a specification of *how* intentions are realized in a work, and the aesthetic impacts they have. As such, I see this as elaborating on the common ground and showing how intentionality can function in interpretation and aesthetic experience even in a post New Criticism era. Further, I do not argue that this use of intentionality is a "standard" for judging a work. I am merely pointing to the fact that we *do* have such representations, and that these *can* figure into our appreciation of the work. It may be that one wishes to exclude these sentiments in formal critique, that citing intentionality when analyzing a poem will lead one astray due to subjectivity and the elusiveness of "really" knowing an author's intentionality. This is fine in those contexts, but when our goal is to describe how experiences of livingness (and other aesthetic qualities) work, it is disingenuous to count intentionality out.

My second claim is that this is a model exercise in approaching aesthetics. Despite our strivings, the realm of aesthetics is not yet a

[23] Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy".

[24] Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, 119.

mastered frontier, let alone a coherent and well-explained sphere of human thought. It is hard to get specific about how we make aesthetic judgments and what their nature is. We should not appeal to universal principles as the classical, medieval, and early modern tradition did. Historically, this gets us more turned around than clear about the matter. We ought to provide examples that can be understood and are common to our experiences—building a bottom-up theory of aesthetics. This essay is the long version of one such example.

Finally, my third response is less philosophically established, but a belief I hold dear to my heart. Paying attention to how we personify and have a unique capacity for imagining and sharing meaning with others promotes an appreciation and recognition of beauty in the world. As Hobbs writes, “Much of what is most powerful in literature is a conjunction of the two categories—the fictional narrative. It is an author’s invitation to the readers to a mutual imagining, to delight and instruct, by the creation of a possible world and possible characters striving toward goals, told in a way that directly reflects our own experience as we plan our way toward our goals in a world that denies us so much of what we desire.”^[25] Explaining how intentionality functions to deliver livingness can give one a heightened sensitivity in employing this capacity. So I invite you, mutually imagine and delight in the intentions of others and the world around you, fictional or not. It may just serve to increase your appreciation for what surrounds you.

[25] Hobbs, 40.

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