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# Prenatal Injury and the Nonidentity Problem

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## Abstract

I argue that, given certain prominent views of personal identity and prudence, the nonidentity problem, or a very similar problem, can arise postconception. I clarify and defend this claim by considering the implications of these views for prenatal injury.

**Keywords:** Ethics; applied ethics; bioethics; prenatal injury; nonidentity problem; personal identity

## Introduction

Given certain prominent views of personal identity and prudence, the nonidentity problem, or a very similar problem, can arise postconception. In what follows, I shall clarify and defend this claim by considering the implications of these views for prenatal injury.

### 1. Prenatal injury

Consider the following case:

*Already Pregnant:* Amy is pregnant. Very early in her pregnancy, Amy uses recreational drugs. Consequently, Amy's child, whom Amy names "Ben," ends up having a lifelong disability that significantly interferes with his wellbeing but does not make his life worth not living. If Amy had not used the drugs while pregnant, then her child would not have had the disability that Ben actually has and would have lived a life much better than the life that Ben actually lives.

Consider the following claim:

(1) In using the drugs, Amy wrongs Ben.

There are conditions whose obtaining would arguably render (1) implausible. For example, if Amy's using the drugs significantly reduces the extent to which pregnancy is burdensome for Amy, then (1) is arguably implausible. But suppose no such conditions obtain in *Already Pregnant*. Then, I assume, it is a natural thought that (1) is true. More generally, it is a natural thought that people who perform acts of *prenatal injury*, such as the one that Amy performs in *Already Pregnant*, thereby wrong the patients of these acts, absent adequate justification.

Note the difference between (1) and the following claim:

(1\*) In using the drugs, Amy acts wrongly.

It is arguable that neither (1) nor (1\*) entails the other. It is arguable that (1) does not entail (1\*) because it is arguable that there are wrongings that are not wrong (e.g., certain acts of harming the innocent that prevent catastrophes), and it is arguable that (1\*) does not entail (1) because it is arguable that there are wrong acts that are not wrongings (e.g., certain acts that raise the *nonidentity problem*, which I shall describe in the next section). Of course, many would defend both (1) and (1\*), but my argument will bear much more directly on (1) than on (1\*).

Note also that (1) does not (on its face) imply that Ben was wronged by Amy *while he was a fetus* (assuming Ben ever was a fetus). One could endorse (1) while insisting that Ben is wronged by Amy only once he has acquired certain properties that make him a potential wrongee and that no fetus has such properties. So insisting would presumably allow the proponent of (1) to hold, as many would, that Amy would not have wronged Ben if Amy had, in using the drugs, *killed* Ben while he was a fetus. Thus, the view that acts of prenatal injury are wrongings, absent adequate justification, does not (on its face) entail that prenatal killings are (ever) wrongings.<sup>1</sup>

Suppose (1) is true. What makes (1) true? Consider the following claim:

(2) In using the drugs, Amy makes Ben worse off than he otherwise would have been.

There is something clearly appealing about the thought that the truth of (2), at least in combination with some other facts that we presumably may assume to obtain (e.g., that Amy knew the risks to Ben of using the drugs when she used them, that Amy's using the drugs does not significantly reduce the extent to which pregnancy is burdensome for her), makes (1) true. Thus, the following claim seems very attractive on the assumption that (1) is true:

(1←2) (1) is true at least partly because (2) is true. That is, in using the drugs, Amy wrongs Ben, and this is at least partly because, in using the drugs, Amy makes Ben worse off than he otherwise would have been.

Because it seems that if (1) is true, then (1←2) is true, I assume that views in tension with (1←2) are also in tension with (1). More generally, I assume that views in tension with (1←2) are in tension with the view that people who perform acts of prenatal injury thereby wrong the patients of these acts, absent adequate justification.

In what follows, I shall argue that two prominent philosophical views are each in tension with (1←2). The first, the *psychological continuity view of personal identity across time*, hereafter the "psychological continuity view," implies that (2) is *false*. The second, the *Parfitian view of prudence*, hereafter "Parfitianism," recommends the conclusion that (2), even if true, does not support (1). Thus, these views are each in tension with (1←2), with (1), and with the view that people who perform acts of prenatal injury thereby wrong the patients of these acts, absent adequate justification.

One consequence of my argument is that we appear to be stuck with a choice: either deny some widely endorsed theses concerning personal identity and prudence or accept a revisionary view of the morality of prenatal injury. But the main intended takeaway of my argument, to be clarified in due course, is that these theses recommend the conclusion that the nonidentity problem, or a very similar problem, can arise postconception.

## 2. The nonidentity problem

In this section, I shall describe the well-known *nonidentity problem*.<sup>2</sup> Doing so will set the stage for the argument of the rest of the paper.

<sup>1</sup>McMahan (2006b) argues that prenatal injury is morally objectionable and that prenatal killing is not. Flanigan (forthcoming) argues that neither is morally objectionable.

<sup>2</sup>The nonidentity problem is most famously presented by Derek Parfit in chapter 16 of *Reasons and Persons* (1984). See Roberts (2019) for an introduction to the oceanic literature on the problem.

Consider the following case:

*Not Yet Pregnant:* Zelda has a disease. If she gets pregnant while she has the disease, then her child will have a permanent disability and will live a life worth living but not a very good life. Zelda will no longer have her disease in a month. If she gets pregnant a month from now when she no longer has her disease, then her child will not have a permanent disability and will live a very good life. Zelda chooses to have a child now rather than wait a month to do so. She names him “Yorick.”

Ex hypothesi, the following claim is true:

- (3) If Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then her child would have been better off than Yorick actually is.

But the following claim is also very plausible:

- (4) If Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then her child would not have been Yorick.

Why accept (4)? Call the particular pair of gametes from which Yorick actually originates “GG”; and suppose (extremely plausibly) that if Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then this child would not have originated from GG. Then it seems extremely plausible that Zelda’s child would in that case not have been Yorick. So, (4) seems very plausible.

Many will be tempted to endorse the following claim:

- (5) In having a child now (rather than waiting a month to do so or not doing so at all), Zelda wrongs Yorick.

Furthermore, many will be tempted to say that (5) is true at least partly because the following claim, which might seem *prima facie* to be recommended by (3), is true:

- (6) If Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then Yorick would have been better off than he actually is.

However, given (4), it is *not* the case that: if Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then Yorick would have been better off than he actually is. For, given (4), if Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then Yorick would not have existed.<sup>3</sup> So, (4) implies that (6) is false. So, it is not the case that: (5) is true at least partly because (6) is true.

Of course, it does not follow that (5) is *false*. It might be that (5) is true, just not even partly because (6) is true. (After all, it is widely thought that we can wrong people without making them worse off than they otherwise would have been, e.g., by paternalizing them.) However, once we have (6)’s falsity in view, it seems that we ought to find (5) seriously doubtful. Given that Yorick lives a life worth living and would not have existed if Zelda had not procreated as she did, how could Zelda plausibly be thought to *wrong* Yorick in creating him? Presumably, if Zelda wrongs Yorick in creating him, then it would be appropriate for Yorick to say, concerning Zelda’s act of creating Yorick, the following to Zelda: “How could you have done this *to me*?” But even if it would be appropriate for Yorick to say to Zelda “How could you have done this?”, it seems that it would be inappropriate for Yorick to say to Zelda “How could you have done this *to me*?” Adapting some terms from Michael Thompson (2004), we can say that even if a *monadic* complaint against Zelda

<sup>3</sup>Strictly speaking, (4) does not *entail* that if Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then Yorick would not have existed. One could consistently hold that if Zelda had waited a month to have a child, then although *this* child would not have been Yorick, Yorick would nevertheless have existed. But this position seems very implausible.

on Yorick's part would be appropriate, a *bipolar* complaint against Zelda on Yorick's part would be inappropriate.

Considerations such as the ones just raised have brought many to the conclusion that claims such as (5) are false and that agents who act as Zelda does in *Not Yet Pregnant* do not thereby *wrong* the people they create.<sup>4</sup> But few have drawn from this conclusion the further lesson that agents who act as Zelda does do not thereby *act wrongly*.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, many would defend the following claim, despite denying (5):

- (5\*) In having a child now (rather than waiting a month to do so or not doing so at all),  
Zelda acts wrongly.

Now I can state the *nonidentity problem*. The nonidentity problem, or at least one prominent version of it, is the following question: Do agents in circumstances like Zelda's who act as Zelda does thereby act wrongly; and if so, why; and if not, why not? The nonidentity problem would presumably be a fairly easy problem if claims such as (5) were plausible, for in that case, claims such as (5\*) could presumably be explained at least partly by appeal to claims such as (5). But because claims such as (5) are implausible or, at any rate, are widely taken to be hard to defend, the nonidentity problem is widely taken to be a difficult problem.

The nonidentity problem will strike some readers as a significant change of subject from that of the previous section. For *Already Pregnant*, unlike *Not Yet Pregnant*, seems not to raise (anything like) the nonidentity problem. Recall the following claims, introduced in section 1:

- (1) In using the drugs, Amy wrongs Ben.  
(2) In using the drugs, Amy makes Ben worse off than he otherwise would have been.  
(1←2) (1) is true at least partly because (2) is true.

It seems that Amy's use of the drugs affects her child's wellbeing for the worse, and that Amy's child would have been Ben even if Amy had not used the drugs. Thus, (2), unlike (6), seems plausible, and consequently (1←2) also seems plausible (given the assumption that [1] is true). Thus, *Already Pregnant* seems not to raise (anything like) the nonidentity problem.

But in what follows, I shall argue that the psychological continuity view and Parfitianism each recommend the conclusion that things are not as they appear. The psychological continuity view, I shall argue, implies that *Already Pregnant* raises the nonidentity problem and that (2) is false. And Parfitianism, I shall argue, recommends the conclusions that *Already Pregnant* raises a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem and that (2), even if true, does not support (1). It follows that these views each recommend the conclusions that (1←2) is false, that *Already Pregnant* raises (something very similar to) the nonidentity problem, and, more generally, that (something very similar to) the nonidentity problem can arise postconception.

### 3. The psychological continuity view

In this section, I shall identify and clarify a claim that I take to be an implication of the psychological continuity view.

The psychological continuity view is very popular, and there are many versions of it.<sup>6</sup> But all of them, as I understand them in this paper, hold that *psychological continuity is a necessary condition*

<sup>4</sup>Though many philosophers have in various ways tried to resist this conclusion. See for example Hanser (1990), Harman (2004, 2009), Hurley and Weinberg (2015), Kavka (1981), Liberto (2014), Weinberg (2008), and Woodward (1986).

<sup>5</sup>Though some, e.g., Boonin (2014), have drawn this lesson.

<sup>6</sup>See Olson (2019, sec. 3) for a list of helpful citations.

on personal identity across time. More precisely, we can formulate this implication of the psychological continuity view as follows:

- (7) A given person, *P*, who exists at some time, *t*, and a given entity, *x*, that exists at some other time, *t*<sup>\*</sup>, are identical only if *P*, as she is at *t*, and *x*, as it is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, are psychologically continuous.<sup>7</sup>

Psychological continuity is ordinarily defined in terms of *psychological connectedness*.<sup>8</sup> What psychological connectedness is, is a contestable matter. On one possible view, for *P*, as *P* is at *t*, and *x*, as *x* is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, to be psychologically connected is for *P* to have at *t* and *x* to have at *t*<sup>\*</sup> some of the *same* mental items. On another possible view, for *P*, as *P* is at *t*, and *x*, as *x* is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, to be psychologically connected is for some of the mental items that *P* has at *t* and some of the mental items that *x* has at *t*<sup>\*</sup> to be *causally related* to one another in the right way. And there are other possible views.

For *P*, as *P* is at *t*, to be *psychologically continuous* with *x*, as *x* is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, is for there to be a sequence of entities as they are at particular times, beginning with *P* as *P* is at *t* and ending with *x* as *x* is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, any two adjacent members of which are suitably psychologically connected.<sup>9</sup> What counts as *suitable* psychological connectedness is also a contestable matter. One could hold that *suitable* psychological connectedness is a matter of a *sufficient number* of psychological connections (say, enough of the same mental items), or of *sufficiently strong* psychological connections (say, enough mental items that have very strong causal relations to one another), or of *the right kinds* of psychological connections (say, memory connections), or ... We could thus reformulate (7) as the claim that some person, *P*, who exists at some time, *t*, and some entity, *x*, that exists at some other time, *t*<sup>\*</sup>, are identical only if there exists some sequence of entities as they are at particular times beginning with *P*, as *P* is at *t*, and ending with *x*, as *x* is at *t*<sup>\*</sup>, any two adjacent members of which are suitably psychologically connected.

To illustrate: (7) seems clearly to imply that a person *cannot* survive an accident resulting in sudden total memory loss along with a very dramatic personality change. Whatever psychological continuity involves exactly, it seems clear that, in such a case, the person as she is “postaccident” and the person as she is “preaccident” are not psychologically continuous and, thus, that, by (7)’s lights, the person who exists after the accident and the person who existed before the accident are nonidentical. (7) does not, however, imply that an old man who now exists and the child whom we would ordinarily say the old man “once was” are nonidentical, even if the old man, as he is now, is not psychologically *connected* to the child, as the child was, provided the old man, as he is now, is psychologically *continuous* with the child, as he was. That people *cannot* survive the sort of accident involved in the first sort of case strikes many philosophers as intuitively plausible. That people *can* survive the sort of gradual psychological change that occurs in the second sort of case strikes many of the same philosophers as intuitively plausible. That these two verdicts strike many philosophers as

<sup>7</sup>Note that my claim is that (7) is an *implication* of the psychological continuity view. Many versions of the psychological continuity view involve not just (7) but also some additional claims.

Some would prefer to (7) some claim along the following lines:

- (7<sup>\*</sup>) Some person-stage, *P*, existing at some time, *t*, and some entity-stage, *x*, existing at some other time, *t*<sup>\*</sup>, are person-stages of the same person only if *P* is psychologically continuous with *x*.

Everything I say in what follows could be reformulated in such “stage”-friendly language.

<sup>8</sup>See for example Parfit (1984, pt. III) and Shoemaker (1984).

<sup>9</sup>I do not mean to imply that the members of a “sequence of entities as they are at particular times,” as I use the expression, are all *different* entities. For example, Bob as he is at *t*<sub>1</sub> and Bob as he is at *t*<sub>2</sub> can be two members of a sequence of entities as they are at different times even if Bob as he is at *t*<sub>1</sub> and Bob as he is at *t*<sub>2</sub> count as the same entity.

intuitively plausible accounts for much of (7)'s popularity and, thus, for much of the psychological continuity view's popularity.

More could be said about these matters, but I believe I have clarified (7) enough for my purposes. In the next section, I shall argue that (7) implies that *Already Pregnant* raises the nonidentity problem, that the nonidentity problem can arise postconception, and that (2) is false. It follows that the psychological continuity view has these implications, too.

#### 4. The psychological continuity view and the nonidentity problem

First, some setup.

In what follows, I shall use the expression "Ben\*" to refer to the child Amy would have had if she had *not* used the drugs in *Already Pregnant*. Introducing this term might seem odd, for it might seem obvious that the child Amy would have had if she had not used the drugs would have been Ben, for whom we already have an excellent term (namely, "Ben"). But I shall argue that (7) (the claim that I suggested in section 3 is an implication of the psychological continuity view), combined with some additional plausible premises, implies that Ben\* would *not* have been Ben.

I shall assume that there is at least one time at which Ben is a person, and I shall assume that there would have been at least one time at which Ben\* would have been a person. These assumptions are neutral about whether an entity can be a person at one time and a nonperson at another time and about what a person is.

I assume that Ben is associated in some very deep way with a human organism, and similarly for Ben\*. I assume that Ben is not, for example, an immaterial soul with no relation whatsoever to any human organism, and similarly for Ben\*. In making these assumptions, I make no further assumptions about the nature of the "association" that obtains between Ben and the organism with which he is associated in the sense at issue, and similarly for Ben\*. For all my present assumptions imply, these associations might be ones of identity, parthood, constitution, grounding, causation ... I shall use "Ben's organism" to refer to the human organism with which Ben is actually associated, and "Ben\*'s organism" to refer to the human organism with which Ben\* would have been associated.

I shall use the term "psychological life" to refer to the mental items (if any) that an entity (e.g., a human organism) sustains over the course of its existence that are relevant to personal identity across time according to the most plausible version of the psychological continuity view (whatever that version happens to be). To illustrate: Some versions of the psychological continuity view imply that *memories* (or *quasimemories*) are the only mental items relevant to personal identity across time. That is, some versions of the psychological continuity view imply that memory (or quasimemory) connections are the only psychological connections that bear upon whether a given person, as she is at some time, and a given entity, as it is at some other time, are psychologically continuous. By contrast, some less restrictive versions of the psychological continuity view imply that (at least some members of) each of the following categories of mental items, and perhaps others, are relevant to personal identity across time: *memories* (or *quasimemories*), *conscious experiences*, *desires*, *beliefs*, *intentions*. The components of a psychological life (as I use the term "psychological life") are whatever mental items the most plausible version of the psychological continuity view says are relevant to personal identity across time. I shall assume that the most plausible version of the psychological continuity view is quite *unrestrictive*, but nothing I say in what follows turns on this assumption. For ease of exposition, I shall sometimes speak of *the psychological life sustained by a person's organism*, and sometimes of *a person's psychological life*. These expressions, as I mean them, pick out the same thing.

Finally, I shall assume that, for any human organism, HO, there is a period of time beginning when HO comes into existence during which HO *does not* sustain a psychological life.<sup>10</sup>

Now for my argument. My argument contains four premises, which jointly imply that if (7) is true, then *Already Pregnant* raises the nonidentity problem, the nonidentity problem can arise postconception, and (2) is false.

The first premise of my argument is the following assumption about *Already Pregnant*:

- (8) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism.

To see what I mean by (8), consider the following two figures:

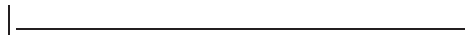


Figure 1. Psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism

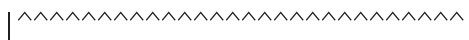


Figure 2. Psychological life that would have been sustained by Ben\*'s organism

Figure 1 represents Ben's actual psychological life. Figure 2 represents the psychological life that Ben\* would have had. The carets in figure 2 represent the fact, posited by (8), that Ben\*'s psychological life would have been massively different from the start from Ben's. Ben\* would have had, from the beginning of his psychological life, massively different conscious experiences, memories, beliefs, desires, and so forth from the ones that Ben actually has over the course of his life.

Three clarificatory points about (8). First, (8) does not imply that Ben\* would not have been Ben (or that Ben\* would have been Ben).

Second, (8) does not imply that Ben\*'s psychological life would have had *nothing* in common with Ben's actual psychological life. To illustrate: (8) is compatible with its being the case both that Ben has a belief that his mother's name is "Amy" and that Ben\* would have had a belief that his mother's name is "Amy." (8) posits a *massive* difference, not a *complete* difference, between the two psychological lives at issue.

Third, according to (8), Ben\*'s psychological life would have been massively different *from the start* from Ben's actual psychological life. To see what I mean by this, consider the following case:

*Breastfeeding:* Cate breastfeeds her child for several months while her child is a baby, and Cate frequently uses recreational drugs while doing so. As a result, Cate's child develops a permanent disability but ends up living a life worth living. If Cate had not used the drugs, then Cate's child would not have developed a disability and would have lived a life much better than the one that Cate's child actually lives.

There is (we can suppose) a *massive difference*, but not a *massive difference from the start*, between the actual psychological life of Cate's child and the psychological life that Cate's child would have had if Cate had not used the drugs. For (we can suppose) these two psychological lives are just like

<sup>10</sup>This assumption is compatible with the thesis that every human organism has some (extremely rudimentary) mental items from the beginning of its existence, e.g., some drives or sensations. For a psychological life, as I have defined it, contains only mental items that are relevant to personal identity across time *according to the most plausible version of the psychological continuity view*; and presumably that view, though quite unrestrictive, will hold that the mental items relevant to personal identity across time are more sophisticated than the mental items (if any) that a human organism has at the beginning of its existence.

one another at least until Cate starts using drugs while breastfeeding, and “deviate” from one another only after that. Thus, these two psychological lives can be represented by the following figures:



Figure 3. Psychological life actually sustained by Cate’s child’s organism



Figure 4. Psychological life that Cate’s child’s organism would have sustained if Cate had not used the drugs

(8) implies that the beginning of Ben’s actual psychological life and the beginning of Ben\*’s psychological life do not “overlap” as do the beginnings of the psychological lives represented in figures 3 and 4.

The lack of an “overlap” between the beginning of Ben’s actual psychological life and the beginning of Ben\*’s psychological life requires that we assume that Amy used the drugs *sufficiently early* in pregnancy. For if Amy had used the drugs *sufficiently late* in pregnancy—in particular, after her child’s psychological life had begun (assuming, contestably, that Amy’s child’s psychological life began during Amy’s pregnancy)—then presumably there would have been an overlap between the beginning of Ben’s actual psychological life and the beginning of Ben\*’s psychological life.

Some might wonder how typical it is for a real-world variant of *Already Pregnant* to be such that the analogue of (8) applied to it is true. More generally, some might wonder how often prenatal injury causes the child who ends up being born to have a psychological life massively different *from the start* from the psychological life that would have been had by the child who otherwise would have been born. I shall not speculate about this issue beyond registering my suspicion that in many real-world variants of *Already Pregnant*, prenatal injury results in a psychological life massively different from the start from the one that otherwise would have occurred. At any rate, if the argument of this section is successful, then (7) implies that how often prenatal injury results in a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life that otherwise would have occurred is potentially a matter of considerable moral importance. For if the argument of this section is successful, then (7) implies that cases involving prenatal injuries that result in massively-different-from-the-start psychological lives are cases in which the nonidentity problem arises postconception.

Here is the second premise of my argument:

- (9) If (7) is true, then: Ben came into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life actually sustained by his organism began, and Ben\* would have come into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life that would have been sustained by his organism would have begun.

Why accept (9)? Suppose, for argument’s sake, that (7)—the claim I have suggested is an implication of the psychological continuity view—is true. In addition, suppose for illustration’s sake that Ben is currently a twenty-year-old man. Was Ben ever, for example, a three-week-old fetus with no, or an extremely rudimentary, mental life? (7) seems clearly to imply that he was not, for Ben, as he is now, is not psychologically continuous with any such fetus, as it was. In general, (7) implies that Ben did not start existing at least until his organism’s psychological life began, and similarly for Ben\*. Thus, (9) seems very plausible.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Olson (1997) argues that the psychological continuity view implies that we were never early fetuses and takes this fact to be an embarrassment for the psychological continuity view. Baker (1999) argues that there are well-motivated versions of the psychological continuity view that do not imply that we were never early fetuses. Thus, Baker would deny that (7) is an



Before I proceed, I shall introduce a new term and make a new assumption. Let the *original intrinsic properties* of some entity,  $x$ , be the intrinsic properties (if there are any) that  $x$  has at the first moment of  $x$ 's existence. I shall assume that Ben has original intrinsic properties and that Ben\* would have had original intrinsic properties.<sup>12</sup>

Here is the third premise of my argument:

- (10) If (a) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism, (b) Ben came into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life actually sustained by his organism began, and (c) Ben\* would have come into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life that would have been sustained by his organism would have begun, then: Ben\* would have had original intrinsic properties very different from Ben's actual original intrinsic properties.

Why think (10) is true? Let an organism's *psychological interval* be the period (if any) during which this organism sustains a psychological life. Suppose Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism. Then presumably Ben\*'s organism would have had throughout Ben\*'s organism's psychological interval intrinsic properties very different from the ones that Ben's organism actually has during Ben's organism's psychological interval. But if this is so, then it seems very plausible that Ben\* himself would have had original intrinsic properties very different from the ones that Ben actually has, given the assumptions that Ben came into existence when or after the psychological life sustained by Ben's organism began and that Ben\* would have come into existence when or after the psychological life that would have been sustained by Ben\*'s organism would have begun. Thus, (10) seems very plausible.

It is worth acknowledging two assumptions on which my defense of (10) rests. The first is that a very great difference between the psychological lives sustained by two organisms implies, or makes very probable, a very great intrinsic property difference between these organisms. The second is that a very great intrinsic property difference between two person-associated organisms implies, or makes very probable, a very great intrinsic property difference between the persons associated with these organisms. Perhaps these assumptions could be challenged, but they strike me as very plausible. At any rate, if it should turn out that the best way to resist my argument is to resist one of these assumptions, then this would be an interesting result.

Now for the fourth and final premise of my argument:

- (11) No entity could have had original intrinsic properties very different from its actual original intrinsic properties.

Why accept (11)? Suppose God creates ex nihilo a bronze perfect sphere. Call this object "Brawny." I think it plausible that Brawny could eventually *become* conic, given sufficiently gradual transformations over time. To deny this would presumably require denying the possibility of many

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implication of the psychological continuity view. I believe that Baker's view of this matter is mistaken, but I cannot argue the point here. Philosophers sympathetic to Baker's position might take the argument of this section to concern only versions of the psychological continuity view according to which (7) is true.

Some might wonder what Ben could possibly be if he comes into existence *after* his organism does, and similarly for Ben\*. One possible answer is that Ben is (a part of) his organism's brain (given that his organism's brain comes into existence after his organism does), and similarly for Ben\*.

<sup>12</sup>If time is dense in the world in which Ben exists and in the world in which Ben\* would have existed, then the letter of the argument of this section relies on the assumption that Ben does not precisely occupy a time interval open at the beginning, and similarly for Ben\*. I think this assumption is reasonable, but the argument of this section could be amended so as not to rely on it.

diachronic intrinsic property changes that are intuitively possible. (I assume that shapes are intrinsic properties.<sup>13</sup>) However, I think it extremely implausible that Brawny could have *begun its existence* conic. This is not to say that God could not have created a *bronze cone* instead of creating a bronze perfect sphere. Obviously, God could have done this. But even God could not have created a *bronze cone that would have been identical to Brawny* instead of creating a bronze perfect sphere. Nothing could have begun its existence with *conicality* that would have been identical to Brawny. Or so I am strongly inclined to believe.

Suppose Brawny could not have had *conicality* at its first moment of existence. *Why* could Brawny not have had *conicality* at its first moment of existence? Some might be tempted to explain this fact by appeal to the thought that Brawny (for some reason) *de re* necessarily lacks *conicality*. But recall my suggestion that Brawny could *become* conic, given sufficiently gradual transformations over time. If this is so, then Brawny does not *de re* necessarily lack *conicality*. Thus, the explanation just mentioned strikes me as unpromising.

Here, I think, is a much more plausible explanation of the fact that Brawny could not have had *conicality* at the first moment of its existence: in order to have had *conicality* at its first moment of existence, Brawny would have had to have original intrinsic properties very different from its actual ones; but nothing could have had original intrinsic properties very different from its actual ones; so, Brawny could not have had *conicality* at its first moment of existence. If this explanation is correct, then it appears that (11) is true. Thus, I believe that reflection on the case of Brawny lends considerable support to (11).<sup>14</sup>

Still, some might think that (11) has some implausible implications. For now, I shall take (11)'s truth for granted, but, in a moment, I shall argue that the core lessons of this section can be defended without appeal to (11).

I have defended the four premises of my argument. As a reminder:

- (8) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism.
- (9) If (7) is true, then: Ben came into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life actually sustained by his organism began, and Ben\* would have come into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life that would have been sustained by his organism would have begun.
- (10) If (a) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism, (b) Ben came into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life actually sustained by his organism began, and (c) Ben\* would have come into existence at or after the time at which the psychological life that would have been sustained by his organism would have begun, then: Ben\* would have had original intrinsic properties very different from Ben's actual original intrinsic properties.

<sup>13</sup>Skow (2007) raises problems for this assumption, but variants of the present thought experiment involving candidates for intrinsic properties other than shapes could be imagined.

<sup>14</sup>*Why* is (11) true (assuming it is true)? I am tempted to think that (11) is true because nothing could have had original intrinsic properties (even slightly) *different* from its actual ones. But my argument does not require this strong claim.

If successful, my argument for (11) reveals an asymmetry between an entity's *original* intrinsic properties and an entity's *nonoriginal* intrinsic properties. Even though (11) is true, at least some entities could have had intrinsic properties, say, *one year after they came into existence* very different from the ones that they actually have one year after they came into existence. For example, even if Brawny actually has *sphericality* one year after it came into existence, presumably it could have instead had *conicality* one year after it came into existence. Thus, the modal inflexibility that I have argued applies to original intrinsic properties seems not to apply to nonoriginal intrinsic properties.

- (11) No entity could have had original intrinsic properties very different from its actual original intrinsic properties.

Now I shall show that these claims jointly entail my desired conclusion.

Suppose (8)–(10) are true. It follows that if (7) is true, then Ben\* would have had very different original intrinsic properties from Ben. So, given (11), it follows that if (7) is true, then Ben\* would not have been Ben. But if this is so, then (7) implies that *Already Pregnant* raises the nonidentity problem, more generally that the nonidentity problem can arise postconception (e.g., in *Already Pregnant*), and that (2) is false. For if Ben\* would not have been Ben, then Amy does not, in using the drugs, make Ben worse off than he otherwise would have been. And because the psychological continuity view implies that (7) is true, the psychological continuity view has the implications of (7) just described.

I said above that some might think that (11) has implausible implications. Consider *No Legs*, a variant of *Already Pregnant* in which (i) Amy's drug use causes Ben's organism never to have legs, (ii) Ben\*'s organism would have had legs (if Amy had not used the drugs), but (iii) *Ben\*'s psychological life would have been just like Ben's* (and, thus, (8) is false). (*No Legs* is hard to imagine but is arguably possible.) It might be thought that, in *No Legs*, Ben\* would have had original intrinsic properties very different from the ones Ben actually has but would have been identical to Ben. So, *No Legs* might be thought to undermine (11).<sup>15</sup>

I do not think that *No Legs* undermines (11), for I can think of no combination of (i) a way of filling in the details of *No Legs* and (ii) a respectable view of personal ontology that supports both of the following conclusions: (a) Ben\* would have been identical to Ben, and (b) Ben\* would have had original intrinsic properties very different from the ones that Ben actually has. Any combination of (i) and (ii) that makes (a) plausible (and there are many) seems to make (b) implausible; and any combination of (i) and (ii) that makes (b) plausible (and there are some) seems to make (a) implausible.

However, even if you find (11) implausible (whether because you think a case like *No Legs* undermines it or for another reason), I think you ought to accept the essentials of the argument of this section. It just seems to be a very plausible thought that, given the psychological continuity view, a person could not have had a psychological life massively different from the start from her actual one. (11) lends support to this thought, and indeed might partly explain its truth, but this thought's plausibility seems not to depend on the plausibility of (11). But this thought, when combined with (8) (i.e., the assumption that in *Already Pregnant* Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism), is enough to yield the conclusions that *Already Pregnant* raises the nonidentity problem, more generally that the nonidentity problem can arise postconception, and that (2) is false. So, even if you reject (11), I think you ought to accept that the psychological continuity view yields these conclusions.

I shall close this section by zooming out and saying informally how I have arrived at the conclusion of this section. I shall also identify some further lessons revealed by my argument.

The nonidentity problem arises from the fact that actions that affect the wellbeing of future people can also affect which people will exist in the future and have this well-being. Commonsense metaphysics holds that the only way to affect which human people will exist in the future is to affect which *human organisms* will exist in the future. This is presumably at least partly why standard nonidentity cases, such as *Not Yet Pregnant*, are cases in which people face a choice between creating *one* human organism and creating *a different* human organism.

But not all metaphysics is commonsense metaphysics. Not every view of the metaphysics of personal identity implies that the only way to affect which human people will exist in the future is to affect which human organisms will exist in the future. Some noncommonsensical views of the

<sup>15</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection.

metaphysics of personal identity, such as the psychological continuity view, at least strongly support the conclusion that one way to affect which human people will exist in the future is to affect the character of future psychological lives sustained by human organisms in certain ways, even without affecting which human organisms will exist in the future. Thus, there are cases, such as *Already Pregnant*, that do not raise the nonidentity problem given commonsensical metaphysical assumptions but that do raise the nonidentity problem given certain noncommonsensical metaphysical assumptions. In particular, given certain noncommonsensical metaphysical assumptions, e.g., the assumption that the psychological continuity view is true, there are cases, such as *Already Pregnant*, in which the nonidentity problem arises postconception, i.e., after the relevant human organism has been created.

I have argued that, given the psychological continuity view, cases in which prenatal injury occurs *shortly* after conception, such as *Already Pregnant*, are excellent candidates for cases in which the nonidentity problem arises postconception. But some versions of the psychological continuity view will imply that the nonidentity problem can also arise *quite a while* after conception. For example, a version of the psychological continuity view according to which the components of a psychological life are sufficiently sophisticated that a human organism does not begin sustaining them until some time into infancy will imply that the nonidentity problem can arise *after birth*. Given such a view, some cases of *postnatal* injury will raise the nonidentity problem. These points bring out a general lesson: given the psychological continuity view, until the time at which some human organism's psychological life begins, it is possible for the nonidentity problem to arise for this organism.

Furthermore, I have suggested that the psychological continuity view implies that the nonidentity problem arises postconception in cases, like *Already Pregnant*, in which prenatal injury brings about a psychological life massively different from the start from the one that otherwise would have occurred. But a "reverse" nonidentity problem arises in some cases of prenatal *benefit*, given the psychological continuity view. Suppose a pregnant woman uses *fetus-enhancing* drugs before her fetus begins sustaining a psychological life, which make the child she ends up delivering better off than the child she otherwise would have delivered, but which also make the child she ends up delivering have a psychological life massively different from the start from the one that would have been had by the child whom the woman otherwise would have delivered. Given the psychological continuity view, this woman does not, in using the fetus-enhancing drugs, make the child she ends up delivering *better off* than this very child otherwise would have been, for, given the psychological continuity view, this very child would not have existed had the woman not used the drugs (or so the argument of this section suggests). This fact would seem to have some revisionary implications. For example, it might seem plausible, on the face of things, that it would be appropriate for the child whom the woman ends up delivering to be grateful to the woman for making this very child better off than this very child otherwise would have been. But, given the psychological continuity view, such gratitude would seem to rest on a mistake.

Furthermore, given the psychological continuity view, it might turn out that some *severe* prenatal injuries raise the nonidentity problem (because they result in psychological lives sufficiently different from the ones that otherwise would have occurred) but some *not-so-severe* prenatal injuries do not raise the nonidentity problem (because they do not so result). If so, it might turn out that some prenatal injuries are *wrongings* despite being much less severe than some otherwise similar prenatal injuries that are *nonwrongings*.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, I have focused in this section on cases in which some way of affecting a human organism brings about a psychological life massively different *from the start* from the one that otherwise would have been sustained by this organism. But the psychological continuity view seems to imply that the nonidentity problem can arise postconception in other cases, too. Consider the following (farfetched, but presumably metaphysically possible) case: Dara, who is pregnant, uses drugs which

<sup>16</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for this point.

make the child she actually ends up delivering have a psychological life massively different *at the start* from the psychological life that would have been had by the child Dara otherwise would have had. However, although the two psychological lives at issue are massively different from one another *at their beginnings*, these psychological lives “converge” not long after their beginnings and become just like one another. Thus, the psychological lives at issue in the case could be represented by figures 5 and 6:

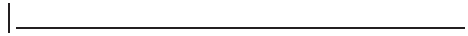


Figure 5. Psychological life actually sustained by Dara's child's organism

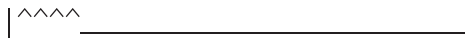


Figure 6. Psychological life that Dara's child's organism would have sustained if Dara had not used the drugs

This case is a “reverse” version of *Breastfeeding*, discussed above.

Presumably, given the psychological continuity view, Dara's actual child has original intrinsic properties very different from the original intrinsic properties that Dara's “counterfactual” child would have had. If so, then the argument of this section recommends the conclusion that, given the psychological continuity view, Dara's “counterfactual” child would not have been identical to Dara's actual child. Thus, given the psychological continuity view, it seems sufficient for the nonidentity problem to arise postconception that the relevant psychological lives be massively different from one another *at the start*. Massive difference *from the start*, as in *Already Pregnant*, is sufficient but not necessary. (Compare: suppose Brawny, the bronze object discussed earlier in this section, actually has *sphericity* for all of its existence. I find it very hard to believe that God could have created an entity that would have lacked *sphericity* for even the first millisecond of its existence and that would have been identical to Brawny, even if this entity would have had *sphericity* for the rest of its existence.)

## 5. Parfitianism

One response that some might give to the argument of section 4 would be to reject the psychological continuity view and all views that imply that (7) is true, and to endorse (say) a *bodily continuity* view of personal identity across time instead. Doing this would presumably allow one to hold that Ben\* would have been Ben, that *Already Pregnant* does not raise the nonidentity problem, and that (2) is true. Doing this might also allow one to insist that the nonidentity problem cannot arise postconception. I shall take no stand on whether this is a good response. I shall merely insist that if this is the best response to the argument of section 4, then this is an interesting result, given the psychological continuity view's popularity.

However, in this section and the next, I shall argue that the *Parfitian view of prudence*, hereafter “Parfitianism,” supports the conclusion that (2), even if true, does not support (1). Thus, Parfitianism is in serious tension with (1←2) and with (1). I shall also argue that Parfitianism supports the conclusion that *Already Pregnant* raises, if not the nonidentity problem, a very similar problem, and more generally supports the conclusion that a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem can arise postconception.

In part III of *Reasons and Persons* (1984), Derek Parfit famously distinguishes between *identity* and *what matters prudentially*, and argues that identity is not what matters prudentially. Parfit takes the following case (among others) to support his view:

*Down the Middle:* You have a disease that is about to kill you. Before it does so, your doctor removes your brain from your skull, cuts your brain in half, transplants the left half into

another human body that recently lost its brain, transplants the right half into yet another human body that recently lost its brain, and incinerates your body (i.e., the body from which your brain was removed). Following this operation, the humans into whose bodies your left and right brain-halves were transplanted—Lefty and Righty—each wake up with a personality just like yours. Each believes that he or she is you, each has your values, each has vivid apparent memories of having done the things that you had vivid memories of having done before you underwent the procedure your doctor performed, and so on. Furthermore, Lefty and Righty each go on to live for twenty happy years.

Do you survive your operation in *Down the Middle*? Parfit argues that this is an “empty question.”<sup>17</sup> What Parfit means when he calls this question “empty” and why he thinks this are not important for my purposes. What matters for my purposes is that Parfit holds that even though this question is empty, the twenty good years that Lefty and Righty get are good for you *from the point of view of prudence*. Furthermore, Parfit takes the fact (assuming it is a fact) that the twenty good years that Lefty and Righty get are prudentially good for you, even though the question whether you survive your operation is empty, to support the following conclusion: what matters prudentially is not (even partly) *identity* but is instead *Relation R*, i.e., “psychological connectedness and/or continuity, with the right kind of cause,”<sup>18</sup> which Parfit takes each of Lefty and Righty, throughout their twenty years of postoperation existence, to bear to you as you were just prior to the operation.

Parfitianism is the claim that *Relation R is what matters prudentially*. How best to understand this claim is a difficult matter. But the following claim seems clearly to be *implied* by Parfitianism, however Parfitianism is best understood:

- (12) If *P* is a person existing at some time, *t*, and *x* is an entity existing at some other time, *t\**, then: *P* has at *t* prudential reason to care about *x*, as *x* is at *t\**, only if *P*, as *P* is at *t*, and *x*, as *x* is at *t\**, are psychologically continuous.

To illustrate: (12) implies, for example, that you now have prudential reason to care about how you will be in twenty years only if you, as you will be in twenty years, and you, as you are now, are psychologically continuous.

(12) is what one gets from “transforming” (7)—the thesis I claimed in section 3 is an implication of the psychological continuity view—into a thesis about what a given person has prudential reason to care about at a given time. Furthermore, Parfitianism is at least very similar to what one gets from “transforming” the psychological continuity view into a thesis about what matters prudentially. Thus, we ought to expect that Parfitianism will have implications for *Already Pregnant* similar to the implications for *Already Pregnant* of the psychological continuity view that I identified in section 4. And in the next section, I shall argue that Parfitianism does indeed have some such implications. I shall argue that (12) supports the following conclusions: that (2), even if true, does not support (1); that *Already Pregnant* raises a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem (if not the nonidentity problem); and more generally that a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem can arise postconception. If my argument succeeds, then Parfitianism supports these conclusions, too.

## 6. Parfitianism and the quasinonidentity problem

I shall first argue that (12) supports the conclusion that (2), even if true, does not support (1). My argument contains four premises. The first premise was also the first premise of my argument in section 4:

<sup>17</sup>See Parfit (1984, 254–261). The case that Parfit discusses is called “*My Division*,” and differs slightly from *Down the Middle*, but the differences are not relevant to my purposes.

<sup>18</sup>Parfit (1984, 215).

- (8) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism.

Before I introduce the second premise, I shall introduce a term. For any given person, *A*, say that a given nonactual psychological life, *PL*, would have been "prudentially-not" *A*'s just in case *A* ought, from the point of view of prudence, to regard *PL* as though *PL* would, if *PL* had occurred, not have been *A*'s.<sup>19</sup> This terminology is neutral about *what makes it the case* that a given nonactual psychological life would have been prudentially-not a given person's. One natural view is that a given nonactual psychological life, *PL*, would have been prudentially-not *A*'s if and only if, and because: if *PL* had occurred, then *PL* would have (in fact) *not* been *A*'s. But this is not the only possible view of the matter, as will emerge in what follows.

Here is the second premise of my argument:

- (13) (12) supports the following conclusion: For any given person, *A*, any nonactual psychological life that would have been massively different from the start from *A*'s actual psychological life would have been prudentially-not *A*'s.

Less formally, and a bit imprecisely, but not so imprecisely as to cause confusion, we might say that, according to (13), (12) supports the conclusion that a person ought, from the point of view of prudence, to regard an outcome in which his psychological life would have been massively different from the start from his actual one *as though* he would never have existed in such an outcome.

(13) is not a claim about what (12) *entails*. For all (12) entails, it might be (for example) that I ought, from the point of view of prudence, to regard any nonactual psychological life that would *in fact* have been mine as though it would have been mine, regardless of the extent to which it is dissimilar from my actual psychological life. Nevertheless, I take the clear spirit of (12) to *recommend the thought* that if I had had a psychological life massively different from the start from my actual one, then things would have been, from a prudential perspective, as though I had never existed. Hence (13).

In defense of (13), suppose (12) is true. Now imagine some way that your life could have gone that would have been psychologically massively different from the start from your actual one but in which you would have been better off than you actually are. What reason, of a broadly self-interested character, could you have to *wish* that you had had this counterfactual life instead of your actual one? The most obvious candidate for such a reason would seem to be *the fact that you would have been better off in this counterfactual life than you are in your actual life*. But, if you accept (12), then it would seem strange for you to take this fact to be such a reason. After all, if you accept (12), then you will *not* take the bare fact that *you* would be better off in some epistemically possible future or past to be a reason, of an even broadly self-interested character, to want to have or to have already had this future or past, or to prefer it to another one, or to do any other such thing. Taking this fact to be such a reason seems to involve presupposing that *identity matters*, contrary to (12). Rather, if you accept (12), then you will take *the fact that there would be or would have been some individual appropriately psychologically related to you as you are now* to be a reason to want some epistemically possible future or past, to prefer it to some other one, and so on. Given that you accept (12), then, why would you take the bare fact that *you* would have been better off in some counterfactual life than in your actual life to be a reason of a broadly self-interested character to wish that you had had this counterfactual life? It seems that to do this while accepting (12) would be to combine an "identity doesn't matter" attitude toward how it is epistemically possible one's life will go in the future or went in the past with an "identity matters" attitude toward how one's life could have gone but did not. Although there is no contradiction involved in this combination of attitudes, I do not think that it is an attractive combination of attitudes, for it seems to apply different standards of

<sup>19</sup>The term "prudentially-not" is a mere stipulated term. It does not mean, say, *both prudential and not*.

prudential rationality to different things without justification. Thus, I think that (12) supports the thought that one ought to have a broadly Parfitian attitude not just toward (say) one's epistemically possible futures and pasts, but also toward how one's life could otherwise have gone. Thus, I think (13) is true.<sup>20</sup>

Note that (8) and (13) both employ the expression "massively different from the start." It is important for the validity of the argument to follow that this expression is employed univocally between (8) and (13). However, some might worry that, given some legitimate readings of "massively different from the start," there are versions of *Already Pregnant* about which (8) is plausible but for which (13) has implausible implications. Consider a version of *Already Pregnant* in which Ben actually suffers severe pain for all of his psychological life, Ben\* would not have suffered severe pain for all of his psychological life, but otherwise these two psychological lives are very similar to one another from the start.<sup>21</sup> (This case might be hard to imagine, but it is very arguably possible.) This is clearly a version of *Already Pregnant* about which (8) is true, given some legitimate readings of "massively different from the start." However, it might be thought that even if (12) is true, this is *not* a version of *Already Pregnant* in which Ben\*'s psychological life would have been prudentially-not Ben's. For it might be thought that even if (12) is true, Ben has (say) good prudential reason to wish that Ben\*'s psychological life had occurred instead of Ben's actual one. Thus, it might be that given some legitimate readings of "massively different from the start," there are versions of *Already Pregnant* about which (8) is plausible but for which (13) has implausible implications.

If you are moved by the worry just presented, then please assume that the first premise of my argument in this section is not (8) but the following, arguably more demanding claim:

- (8+) Ben\*'s organism would have sustained a psychological life massively different from the start from the psychological life actually sustained by Ben's organism, *in a sense of "massively different from the start" that makes (13) is plausible.*

In general, if you think that there are legitimate readings of "massively different from the start" such that, for some versions of *Already Pregnant*, (8) is true but (13) has implausible implications, then please assume in what follows that the first premise of my argument in this section is (8+), not (8). I shall ignore this complication in what follows.

The third premise of my argument involves the expression "bipolar complaint" introduced in section 2:

- (14) If the psychological life of Ben\* would have been prudentially-not Ben's, then: even if (2) is true, Ben does not have a justified bipolar complaint against Amy that is grounded in the fact that (2) is true.

I take (14) to be very plausible. Suppose (for whatever reason) Ben\*'s psychological life would have been prudentially-not Ben's. And suppose (contrary, I have argued, to the psychological continuity view) that (2) is true. Then Ben ought, from the point of view of prudence, to regard Amy's making him worse off than he otherwise would have been as she did *as though it were the reason why he ever came into existence at all*. But if this is so, then, given that Ben lives a life worth living, it is hard to believe that Ben has a justified bipolar complaint against Amy that is grounded in the fact that Amy did what she did. That is, it is hard to believe that it would be appropriate for Ben to say to Amy, concerning Amy's making him worse off than he otherwise would have been as she did, anything like "How could you have done this *to me*?" On the contrary, perhaps Ben ought to be grateful to Amy for doing what she did. Thus, I take (14) to be very plausible.

<sup>20</sup>My thinking on this matter is similar to that of Meier (2019).

<sup>21</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for this case.



My present point does not rely on the (highly controversial) principle that if *A* performs some action, *X*, the patient of which is *B*, then *B* has a justified bipolar complaint against *A* that is grounded in the fact that *A* performed *X* only if *B* has prudential reason to wish that *A* had not performed *X*. If Wanda paternalizes Xavier in a way that is unqualifiedly good for Xavier, then, for all I assume here, Xavier has a justified bipolar complaint against Wanda even though Xavier has no prudential reason to wish that Wanda had not done what she did. But in ordinary cases of paternalism, it is neither the metaphysical literal truth of things nor the prudential nonliteral truth of things that the paternalizee *owes his very existence* to the paternalizer's act. By contrast, if Ben\*'s psychological life would have been prudentially-not Ben's, then it is the prudential nonliteral truth of things (even if not the metaphysical literal truth of things) that Ben owes his very existence to Amy's act. Thus, I think we ought not say about *Already Pregnant* anything like what we ought to say about ordinary cases of paternalism if Ben\*'s psychological life would have been prudentially-not Ben's.

Now for the fourth and final premise of my argument:

- (15) If it is the case that, even if (2) is true, Ben does not have a justified bipolar complaint against Amy that is grounded in the fact that (2) is true, then: (2), even if true, does not support (1).

I take (15) to be extremely plausible. It is extremely hard to see how (2) could plausibly be thought to support (1) if Ben has no justified bipolar complaint against Amy that is grounded in (2)'s truth (assuming [2] is true).

I shall now show that the four premises of my argument jointly yield my desired conclusion. (8) and (13) jointly yield the following subconclusion:

- (13.5) (12) supports the following conclusion: the psychological life of Ben\* would have been prudentially-not Ben's.

(13.5) and (14) jointly yield the following subconclusion:

- (14.5) (12) supports the following conclusion: even if (2) is true, Ben does not have a justified bipolar complaint against Amy that is grounded in the fact that (2) is true.

And (14.5) and (15) jointly yield the following conclusion:

- (16) (12) supports the following conclusion: (2), even if true, does not support (1).

But if (16) is true, then Parfitianism supports the conclusion that (2), even if true, does not support (1).

Now let the term "quasinonidentity problem" refer to the following question: Does a person, *A*, who performs an act, *X*, that adversely affects the well-being of a future person, *B*, thereby do anything wrong if (i) *B* lives a life worth living and (ii) the psychological life that *B* would have had if *A* had not performed *X* would have been prudentially-not *B*'s? If the argument of this section is successful, then Parfitianism supports the conclusion that *Already Pregnant* raises the quasinonidentity problem (if not the nonidentity problem). Furthermore, because Parfitianism supports the conclusion that the quasinonidentity problem (if not the nonidentity problem) can arise post-conception and the quasinonidentity problem is very similar to the nonidentity problem, Parfitianism supports the conclusion that a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem (if not the nonidentity problem) can arise postconception.

Some might think that the argument of this section ought to be of interest only to philosophers who endorse Parfitianism. But many philosophers have endorsed the view that a person who lives a life worth living lacks prudential reason to wish that she had had a life very different from her actual

one even if she would, in that case, have had a better life.<sup>22</sup> And one can endorse this view without accepting Parfitianism.

Consider, for example, the following passage from a classic essay by Robert Adams:

Would it have been reasonable for Helen Keller, as an adult, to wish, for her own sake, that she had never been blind or deaf? I think not. Let us suppose that she would have had an even better and happier life if her sight and hearing had been spared... . But whatever its excellences, that life would not have had one day in it that would have been very like any day of her actual life after the age of 19 months. [...] Her never having been blind or deaf would have been very like her never having existed. Why should she wish for that, given that she had reason to be glad she existed?

What we are attached to in ourselves, in a reasonable self-concern, is not just our bare metaphysical identity, but also projects, friendships, and at least some of the most important features of our personal history and character. If our lives are good, we have the same sort of reason to be glad we have had them rather than lives that would have been even better but too thoroughly different, as we have to be glad that we exist and not better and happier people instead of us. (1979, 60)<sup>23</sup>

Presumably a person sympathetic to the view that Adams defends here will have great sympathy for the view that people who live lives worth living cannot have good prudential reason to wish that they had had psychological lives massively different from the start from their actual ones. And it seems that a person can be sympathetic to Adams's view without being a thoroughgoing Parfitian.

Views similar to Adams's also appear in some philosophers' writings on *Lucretius' Puzzle*, i.e., the question whether we have good reason to prefer later death to earlier death but not to prefer earlier creation to later creation. Some philosophers have argued, by way of partial response to *Lucretius' Puzzle*, that we lack prudential reason to wish that we had come into existence substantially earlier than we actually did, even if our having come into existence then would have resulted in our having lives better than our actual ones, because in that case we would (very probably) have had lives very different from our actual ones.<sup>24</sup> Again, presumably a proponent of a view of this sort will be sympathetic to the view that people who live lives worth living lack prudential reason to wish that they had had psychological lives better than but massively different from the start from their actual ones. And it seems that a proponent of a view of this sort need not be a thoroughgoing Parfitian.

In general, I do not think that one must unqualifiedly hold that Relation R is what matters prudentially in order to be attracted to the view that a person can have decisive prudential reason to regard certain lives that he could have lived as though they would not have been his own. Furthermore, it is natural to think that if this view is correct, then, even if Ben\* would have been Ben, the life that Ben would have lived if Amy had not used the drugs would have been a life of this sort. If so, then, even if Parfitianism is not exactly correct, it seems that *Already Pregnant* raises the quasinonidentity problem; more generally, that a problem very similar to the nonidentity problem can arise postconception; and that (2), even if true, does not support (1).

One final point. Parfit's main defense of his view of prudence is in part III of *Reasons and Persons*, and the best-known presentation of the nonidentity problem occurs in part IV of that book. The

<sup>22</sup>This view is consistent with the claim that people have strong *moral* reasons to wish that things had gone in ways that would have precluded their existence or caused them to live extremely different lives. See Smilansky (2013) for relevant discussion.

<sup>23</sup>This passage appears in an essay largely about the nonidentity problem. However, Adams clearly does not hold that Keller's being deaf and blind was a condition for her existence. Note Adams's claim that Keller's "never having been blind or deaf would have been *very like* her never having existed" (emphasis mine). For a seemingly more metaphysically loaded take on a very different, though relevantly similar, case, see Velleman (2020, chap. 4).

<sup>24</sup>Harman (2011), Kaufman (1996), McMahan (2006a), and Meier (2019) defend versions of this view.

argument of this section suggests that part III is in tension with part IV, for the very idea that there is a nonidentity problem of the sort displayed by part IV seems to presuppose that identity has an ethical significance that part III seems to imply it does not. To be sure, it is plausible that the vast majority of nonidentity cases are *also* cases in which the psychological lives of the creatable individuals are massively different from one another from their starts. Consequently, one who affirms the conclusions of part III can say that a special moral problem arises in the vast majority of nonidentity cases. However, Parfitianism recommends the conclusion that when this special moral problem arises, this is *not* because the creatable individuals are nonidentical but, rather, because the psychological lives of the creatable individuals are sufficiently different from one another. Furthermore, there are arguably metaphysically possible nonidentity cases that Parfitianism suggests do *not* raise any special moral problem, e.g., nonidentity cases in which the psychological lives of the creatable individuals are *just like* one another from the start. At any rate, part III seems to imply that Parfit ought not have spoken in part IV of the “nonidentity problem” except as a bit of loose talk.

## 7. Conclusion

The arguments of the preceding sections imply that the psychological continuity view and Parfitianism are each in serious tension with (1←2). Thus, these views are each in serious tension with (1) and with the general view that people who perform acts of prenatal injury thereby wrong the patients of these acts, absent adequate justification. These views also imply that the nonidentity problem, or a very similar problem, can arise postconception.

Some readers might take this paper to amount to a reductio for the psychological continuity view, for Parfitianism, and for all relevantly similar views. Others might take this paper to amount to a defense of a revisionary view of the morality of prenatal injury and of the pervasiveness of (something like) the nonidentity problem. I take no stand on which of these ways of interpreting the paper is more reasonable.

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