

文化 第82卷 第3・4号 一秋・冬一 別刷
平成31年3月29日発行

The Multi-layered Concept of a Person

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1

To consider a philosophical problem, we choose a specific approach to solve the problem, so that our choice of one of an approach necessarily restricts the perspective from which we see the problem. From such a restricted perspective a theory on the subject is built. In this process, obscure and confusing conceptions in our understanding are removed or replaced them with refined concepts and lucid explanations. However, such a philosophical restriction always let us fail to grasp some aspects of the subject because the restriction is to clear away our ordinary and confusing conceptions. Certainly, this sort of restriction is necessary for constructing a theory without exception. But it is not the case that all such philosophical restrictions are correct and succeed in grasping the matter concerned. Rather many things are often dismissed inappropriately through simplifying the matter. On personal identity, there is one thing dismissed or at least paid little attention through such philosophical restrictions. What is missed in the debates of personal identity is the importance of ‘what we believe ourselves to be’¹, i.e. our ordinary understanding of a person.

Of course, it is likely that our ordinary understanding of a person is useless for constructing a theory of personal identity, and what is worse, our bare understanding often contains confusions or conceptual inconsistencies. As Parfit insists on the incorrectness of ‘what we believe’², it is probable that our ordinary understanding of ourselves is wrong. However, eliminating our understanding

¹ Parfit (1984: Ch. 10–11)

² *ibid.*

of a person from the theory of personal identity cannot be justified only if personal identity is essentially irrelevant to how we understand a person. For it is possible that personal identity is depending on our understanding of a person in some ways and, in fact, we do mention what we believe ourselves to be in answering the questions; What am I? What is a person to which we belong? In my opinion, personal identity consists in or at least depends on what we believe ourselves to be. If this conception is correct, to explicate our ordinary understanding of a person has some contribution to the construction of a new theory of personal identity.

In the debates of personal identity what is the definition of the concept of a person has been in dispute, and, roughly speaking, the three types of definition of it have been proposed. In this paper, I shall examine those three concepts in order to shed light on our ordinary understanding of a person. As we will see later, the cause of the conflict around the concept of a person is due to excessive restrictions of the concept. As mentioned above, any restriction in constructing a theory cuts down many aspects of our conception and simplify its concepts excessively, so that they are made to be univocal, namely, the concepts used in a theory is made to be exclusive with the concepts in another theory. With regard to the concept of a person, this restriction or simplification cannot be applied because the very concept is equivocal. Thus, I attempt to argue that the concept of a person is equivocal by showing a common basis of the concept and that on this basis the three exclusive concepts can and should be reinterpreted in a certain way and integrated into a comprehensive one. Consequently, we can end the conflict without giving up any important aspects that each of the three concepts contains.

2

The concept of a person has been offered in several ways in accordance with the differences in our understanding of a person. It can be roughly organized under three different concepts: the conscious person (CP), the animal person (AP), and the narrative person (NP). In the history of the debates of personal identity, each of these is supported by Lockeanism, animalism, and narrativism,

respectively.

The CP is the concept that stands for a person as a self-conscious rational being. Locke and his descendants use this definition as the concept of a person, and they refuse any existence of a person without satisfying this definition. 'self-conscious' in this definition means that an individual has the ability to be conscious or cognizant of himself or herself, i.e. 'attributes to it self; and owns all the Actions of that (thinking) thing, as its own, as far as that consciousness reaches'³. For Lockean, self-consciousness is essential for us to be a 'person'. Thus, the CP is understood as the being having the ability to be conscious of oneself, i.e. be conscious of his or her act as his or her own, and attribute it to oneself.

The AP is the concept that stands for a person as a human being. This concept literally indicates that we are and belong to a specific animal species *Homo Sapiens*. According to animalism, we are human beings throughout our lives, and we are also self-conscious rational beings for a certain period. That is to say, in our lives, we are always the AP and occasionally be the AP and the CP. So, we are essentially not the CP but the AP. This conception of ourselves reflects the notion that we exist without being the CP. It seems clear that we existed when we were embryos and fetuses and that we will still exist when we will be in unconscious states but alive as human-vegetables. we seem to exist as human beings but without consciousness or self-consciousness.

The NP is the concept that stands for a person as a character in a story, living his or her unique life, and it is not real but only a fictional entity. In the relatively recent discussions on personal Identity, this definition of a person has been emphasized due to the importance of the practical identity of a person. In our ordinary lives, we are acting out our own role depending on the situation. On some occasion, a particular man may be a child of a man at the same time the very he may be the husband of a woman and the father of a boy. On another occasion, he may be the boss in the office and one of an officer of a certain business association. These roles depend on our social position and our social

³ Locke (1975: Ch. 27, § 17)

surroundings; thus, our practical identity depends on our society. Under this understanding of a person, we persons have been created in our lives or others' lives as if a variety of characters created in many stories. On this concept of a person, we are essentially the product of our mutual narratives since we are only spelled out in one another's story. As with famous characters in fiction like Doyle's Holmes or Lewis's Alice, the person as the NP is also only a character in our narrated stories. Thus, our identity through time is described as a series of coherent narratives from the first-person, second-person, and third-person viewpoints.

It has been pointed out that there are some problems in each of these concepts. The CP may be criticized for (a) the circular account of personal identity and (b) the introduction of the unnatural entity in our ontology. (a) According to Lockean, the sameness of a person as the CP consists in the continuity of consciousness. In one interpretation of Locke's 'consciousness', personal identity consists in the remembering past experiences or the series of the memory of them. However, as many philosophers have indicated, the account based on the continuity of consciousness, namely, the memory-based account presupposes personal identity in itself because of the definition of the memory. Thus, the account of personal identity in terms of the CP is circular. It is therefore argued that the CP is an inappropriate concept to explain personal identity. (b) The CP is defined as a self-reflective conscious entity in terms of its self-consciousness. If this definition can be understood as the necessary and sufficient condition of a person and if the CP is, contrary to animalism, not supposed to be a phase-sortal (we belong to it for a certain term in our lives), we must accept the unnatural entity in our ontology whose existence depends on our maintaining self-reflective consciousness⁴. This consequence is incompatible

⁴ It is also problematic how does this entity exist where he or she is because there is also a human animal in the exact same place. For this entity is sharing all the properties with the human animal but distinguished from the human animal by its persistence condition. In any cases, the entity called 'person' coincide with a human animal but this conflicts our ordinary understanding about ourselves (This problem is called 'too many thinkers problem').

with our intuition that although we are indeed self-conscious beings, we are also able to be in unconscious states. And even if the condition of the CP is having only the realizability of self-consciousness, it is not easy to believe that we begin to exist only after we have grown to have self-consciousness. For, if this is true, a person as the CP can suddenly begin to exist in this world and can unexpectedly vanish from this world, and this mode of existence of the CP is extremely unnatural.

The AP may be criticized for (c) the possibility of our being no human animals and (d) ‘transplant intuition’⁵. (c) By the definition of the AP, we are essentially human animals belonging to a certain species of organisms. But this stipulation of ourselves seems to be false because it seems possible for us not to be just that entity. Many thought experiments on personal identity seem to suggest that we can survive as non-human entities or non-animal entities. Besides, this possibility contains not only conceivability but also realizability by our future scientific technologies. In fact, the technology for implanting artificial organs in human bodies and implementing telegraphic robots in living creatures have already existed. In near future, technologies should enable us to be non-human or non-animal entities. Thus, these facts support our idea that we could survive without being no human animals. (d) The AP’s identity through time is determined by the maintenance of life as an organism, but in the brain-transplant case, this assumption seems to conflict with our intuition. Suppose that so-called ‘Brown-Brownson Case’. In this case, the brain of the donor, Brown, was transplanted into the body of the recipient, Robinson. After the experiment, the person who has Brown’s brain and Robinson’s body spoke and behaved as Brown had spoken and behaved before this surgery. In this situation, we would feel tempted to deem this person to be Brown, not Robinson: in other words, Brown survived the brain transplant. This reaction is called ‘transplant intuition’. Nevertheless, according to animalism, if Brown’s body lives on in a vegetative state without its brain, this vegetative organism is just Brown. This is the case even if the brain is lost or transplanted into another body. This is

⁵ Olson (1997: 42–4)

merely the conclusion, according to the definition of the AP, but this conclusion is incompatible with our transplant intuition⁶.

The NP may be criticized for (e) the ontological feature of the person as a fictional object and (f) the implications that our identity is revisable. (e) The NP is an ‘abstractum’ from our narratives, and it is used as a ‘theoretical apparatus’ for us to understand ourselves⁷. Given that our social role is deeply involved in our practical identity, it is certain that the conception of a person based on the NP gives us a useful understanding or classification of ourselves. But the understanding of ourselves as the NP seems to mean that our ontological status is the same as that of other fictional characters. If a person is a mere fictional character, how should we deal with our intuition that we ourselves (persons) are ‘so robust and real’⁸? How explained is our practice of ascribing a variety of attributes and properties to ourselves? And how is this fictional entity related to human beings through time? (f) The identity of the NP through time consists in our consistent narratives, but this seems to imply that our identity is determined ultimately by us, i.e. depends on our arbitrary revision. In this sense, our identity is similar to historiography whose descriptions are revisable. In the narrative theory of history, the descriptions of the history are revisable by the interpretation of historians. If our identity is just consistent narratives, the identity of the NP would be revisable by adding or correcting a bundle of narratives. Then, how can this series of narratives be our identity in spite of their incompatibility? Our narratives are revisable like other historical descriptions, but the relation of identity can never be impermanent. If we refuse this understanding of identity, and we should give up the ‘strict’ sense of identity in personal identity.

Thus, each concept of a person has some problems, even though each of them partly accords with our understanding of a person. And it is obvious that each concept of a person is mutually exclusive and incompatible one another. Any

⁶ Shoemaker (1963: 23–5)

⁷ Dennett (1992: 114–5), Velleman (2006: 204)

⁸ Dennett (1992: 115)

one of the concepts may be only correct and all the others may be false. Are we to choose any one of them and dismiss the others to construct a theory of personal identity? If we need to face this conflict straightforwardly, we ought to commit the excessive restriction because the conflict is merely a result of it. In constructing theories of personal identity, philosophers often forge their concepts being self-sufficient or self-standing through the excessive restriction and dismiss some aspects omitted from their conceptions, intentionally or accidentally. Consequently, the restricted concept of a person in their theory is defined as being simple and univocal. However, we need not endorse the application of such excessive restriction to our concept of a person. We can reject the assumption that each concept of a person is mutually exclusive, reinterpreting them as several aspects of a person, and integrating them into a comprehensive one without negating all understandings of a person.

3

Each concept of a person mentioned above is assumed to be self-sufficient and mutually exclusive since each is functioning well only in its own theories of personal identity; however, it is not clear that this assumption is true. Rather, it may be that each concept of a person would reflect different aspects of our understanding of a person, and it is probable that they would be mutually complementary. If this is the case, it seems that the conflicts around the concept of a person can be dissolved.

To argue that the three concepts of a person are mutually complementary, we must pick out the foundation on which the concept of a person rests. In this regard, we can rely on Strawson's idea of the condition for being a person. For Strawson, the person is the entity that '*both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation &c. are equally applicable to an individual entity of that type.'⁹ Apart from the full implications in this statement, it is certain that Strawson thinks any person must satisfy this condition. Thus, we can at least read this statement as

⁹ Strawson (1959: 104) italics in original.

the necessary condition for being a person. Though this condition is apparently simple (it is this plainness in Strawson's articulation of the concept of a person that is criticized by philosophers¹⁰), it is often overlooked that the condition implies Strawson's thoughts on particulars. Strawson states that a person must be identifiable and also must be ascribable two different kinds of attributes through predication.

In addition to stating these conditions, Strawson proposes the categorial status of a person. He places the concept of a person on the same basic concept as that of the body whose particulars 'having a material place in the spatio-temporal framework can be distinguished and identified'¹¹. In his view, individual persons should also be identifiable fundamentally in the same spatio-temporal framework in the same way as individual bodies. Therefore, according to Strawson, a person should be understood as the object that is identifiable in our spatio-temporal framework and to which both physical and psychological attributes can be ascribed through our predication. I call each of these two requirements an individual person must satisfy, 'Identification requirement'¹² and 'Ascription requirement'.

Of course, it may be opposed that these requirements for a person are not applicable to the context of personal identity. But if these requirements were not satisfied, we could not talk about any person, much less personal identity. When we discuss personal identity, we must distinguish the object concerned from all other objects. This is satisfied because any identification necessarily includes reference to the object and some ascriptions to it of some descriptive contents, i.e. its location, characteristics or relations to others (Identification requirement). Otherwise, we fail to identify the object because we have no grounds to distinguish the object concerned from anything else. And when we discuss personal identity, we must identify the object as a person, i.e. we

¹⁰ Williams (1970b: 120–6), Frankfurt (1971: 5–6)

¹¹ Strawson (1959: 132)

¹² This is also called 'the criteria of localization in the single spatiotemporal schema'. Ricoeur (1992: 33)

identify the object as being ascribable both physical and psychological attributes (Ascription requirement). Again, this condition is satisfied because we do distinguish ourselves from mere material objects in the way that we ‘ascribe to ourselves *actions* and *intentions...sensations...thoughts* and *feelings...perceptions* and *memories*’¹³ but we ‘should not dream of ascribing’¹⁴ them to mere material objects. This fact suggests that we already have the category of a person different from that of a mere material object¹⁵. Thus, any person to whom we would refer in a discussion on personal identity, or at least an object we see as a person in the everyday conversations of personal identity, does satisfy the above requirements. In most of the debates of personal identity, these requirements are presupposed or already satisfied. Therefore, we are ready to accept Strawson’s two requirements and apply them to the concept of a person with regard to personal identity. In acknowledging Strawson’s requirements, we posit that our concept of a person must have these epistemic features: identifiability in the spatio-temporal framework and ascribability of both physical and psychological attributes.

Here I propose that these epistemic features are required for any concept of a person including the three concepts, the CP, the AP, and the NP. Leaving aside how each concept specifically satisfies those requirements, if we lay the epistemic features as the foundation of the concept of a person, we can reinterpret all of those three concepts into the three different aspects (the CP*, the AP* and the NP*) via which we identify a person and ascribe attributes to him or her, and integrate all aspects into a comprehensive one which has primitively two epistemic features. This reinterpretation of the status of the three concepts into different aspects is based on how the identification of a person is accomplished.

In my conception, the CP* is the aspect of a person which is used when

¹³ Strawson (1959: 89) italics in original.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Williams argues that this distinction never established by Strawson’s requirements, and he denies the category of a person. Williams (1970a: 66–8).

the person identified mainly from the first-person perspective and especially ascribed psychological attributes without observation. The AP* is the aspect of a person which is used when the person identified mainly from the second-person or third-person perspectives and basically ascribed physical and psychological attributes with our observation. Each aspect does not rule out the possibility of identification from another perspective and the possibility of other types of ascriptions. Therefore, the CP* and the AP* are mutually compatible.

Unlike the CP* and the AP*, the NP* is the distinct aspect of a person. This aspect is only used when the person is reidentified as the person who has been already identified by the identification via the CP* or the AP*. Therefore, we never identify any person via the NP* in the same way via the other two aspects. Though the three aspects are conceptually separated, they are not mutually exclusive. A person identified via the CP* is able to be identified via the AP* and/or the NP* at the same time. For example, we can identify a person who is in pain without observation. And we can identify the same person who is in pain with an observation from a third-person point of view. Furthermore, we can reidentify the same person who was in pain through the previous identification. In this process, we identify the same person via the CP*, the AP* and the NP*, in this order. Via which aspect a person is identified is determined in accordance with what kind of identification accomplished.

Here I will draw a rough sketch of our concept of a person including three aspects. The concept of a person must have the two epistemic features as its foundation, i.e. identifiability in the spatio-temporal framework and ascribability of both physical and psychological attributes. Thus, the concept of a person consists in these two features. The aspects which satisfy these two features are the CP* and the AP* so that the very core of our concept of the person is comprised of these two primitive aspects. Though the aspect of the CP* and the AP* are not clearly distinguished in this sketch, such a distinction is not needed because they are merely two sides of the same concept. If one side of it, whether the CP* or the AP*, is available for our identification and if we can accomplish the identification of the person, it does not matter via which aspects of a person is identified. In addition, we do not have any evidence that one of

them has an advantage over the other such that either should be more primitive than the other. In order to be a person, it is necessary to satisfy only the two epistemic features mentioned above. Therefore, the CP* and the AP* are nothing but the two-side core of one concept of which our identification is made, and they do not generate any conceptual conflicts between them.

In this way, our understanding of a person had been simple at first. But after through several identifications including reidentification, the person concerned has been ascribed more than two attributes, and our understanding of him or her also has been covered with more than two layers of some concepts created by narratives. As identifications and ascriptions increase, our concept of the person is enlarged by the conceptual layers. For instance, when a particular person in front of us is identified as a man sitting in a chair, the person is ascribed the attributes that being a male and sitting in a chair. And after talking with him, we found that his name is 'Gale' and he is being in pain, and the person is ascribed the attributes being called 'Gale', being in pain, and of course being a male and sitting in a chair still. This process continues until our identification of a person stops. In this process, the person (a male and sitting in a chair) identified via the CP* and/or the AP* is (re)identified via the NP*(a male called 'Gale', being in pain and sitting a chair still). In such a way, our understanding of the person expands through a series of our identifications and ascriptions.

In this regard, the person identified via the NP* is similar to the person as the NP which is a fictional object created by our narratives. The person identified via the NP* can be understood as the creation of a bundle of descriptions through ascriptions of various attributes. Our understanding of the person is altered as in accordance with the extent of its conceptual layers. And we can accept the conception that the person identified via the NP* is 'fictional' as the creation of our descriptions. But the person identified via the NP* is not at all fictitious object, in other words, non-being. Unlike the NP, the NP* is the aspect of a person, which do not have any ontological status. This is also true of the other aspects, the CP* and the AP*. If it is questioned that what is the difference between the NP* and the other two aspects, it is their order in an accomplishment of our identification of a person. We cannot identify a person via

the NP* for the very first time; a person identified via the NP* is not identifiable in the spatio-temporal framework by itself. First of all, the person concerned must be identified via the CP* and/or the AP*. We can identify a person via the NP* only after the first identification of a person, i.e. in the reidentification of that person.

We can then understand our concept of a person as having a two-sided core, the AP* and the CP*, that is covered with multiple layers of the NP*. The original three concepts are reinterpreted into the three different aspects, and they are used as the different course of identification of a person and they are functioning mutually complementarily through identifications of a person. I call this structural concept the ‘multi-layered concept’ of a person. This concept is constructed on the basis of the epistemic features about the identification of an object and ascription of attributes to it, and these features correspond to the two-sided aspect, the CP* and the AP* via which we can accomplish to identify the object as a person. Though in this structure the CP* and the AP* are positioned prior to the NP* in accordance with merely the epistemic order of being identified, this structural order gives no conceptual precedence for any of them and bears no ontological implications. According to this concept, The CP*, the AP* and the NP* are the only different aspects of the same object, and the object as a person is identified via the correspondent aspects from within in order. Thus, this conception does not endorse animalism, i.e. the view that the AP is the whole of our being and the CP is its temporal parts. Neither does it advance narrativism, i.e. the view that the NP is our identity, the AP is the identity of a human being, and what matter is not human identity but *our* identity.

4

What does the multi-layered concept offer? And how the conflict surrounding the three concepts can be resolved with this concept? First, we could avoid giving a univocal definition to the concept of a person. The concept of a person is made up of the two epistemic features related to some course of identification, and via which aspects the CP*, the AP* or the NP* we do identify the object

depends on the perspective of our accomplishing the identification. And it is never solved that the question which one concept among the CP, the AP or the NP is appropriate for the concept of a person. But we need not give up important roles of the three concepts since they are only the different aspects of the same object via which we identify. In this sense, the concept of a person is inevitably equivocal. Each aspect of it is associated with one another through the identification of a person so that they are functioning mutually complementarily on the common basis of the identifiability of an object and the ascribability of attributes. Thus, the conflict between the three concepts never occurs in a picture of the multi-layered concept of a person.

Second, we could end the confusing discussion about the definition of the concept of a person. In the debates of personal identity, various concepts of a person, the CP, the AP, and the NP are proposed by many philosophers. Even though philosophers are apparently enquiring about the same subject, the identity of a person, they seem to hold very different ideas about the concept of a person. If their proposal is about the concept of a person itself, their debates get nowhere because of the gap of their understanding of the subject. The possibility is that they are talking about completely different subjects under the same title 'personal identity'; otherwise, they are talking about the same subject but from completely different viewpoints. And I suggested above the possibility of the latter case. If this is correct, the different concepts of a person can and should be reinterpreted as the three different aspects of the concept of a person and integrated into the multi-layered concept. This structural concept will offer an explanation of why the debates around some different definitions of the concept of a person cannot be solved.

Nevertheless, there seems to remain a problem of disagreement about the results of identification. Our individual identifications via any aspect and/or individual ascriptions of the attributes via any aspect are fundamentally consistent with one another; however, it is possible that as a consequence of accomplishing identifications and/or ascriptions, they have different objects or incompatible descriptions about the object and thus the results become inconsistent, even though the object concerned is, in fact, one and the same

person. We can identify a person whose spatio-temporal location can be specified from the third-person point of view at the same time we can identify one and the same object as a person whose exact location we could not specify from the first-person point of view. This is a case of disagreement of individual ascriptions of attributes. It can also occur that our individual identifications have different results, namely, an identification of a person via the AP* is accomplished but not accompanying identification of the person via the CP*. In these cases, however, we do not encounter any conceptual conflicts; we merely view the same object from different angles. Of course, the problem remains as which aspects should a person be identified, but I do not deal with it here because it is an only empirical problem.

It may be argued that the multi-layered concept does not provide a solution because it does not indicate which aspect is appropriate for the conversation of personal identity. Thus, it does not end the controversy over the concept of a person. But this objection makes sense only if there is but one true aspect of a person that should be used in the discourse of personal identity, and I argue against this assumption. If we could judge which aspect of a person is appropriate for the discussion of personal identity, we should have understood the other factors, i.e. the contexts in which a person is identified that enable us to privilege one of these aspects for the discussion. We can identify a person via any aspect through identifications and ascriptions in accordance with each context. Therefore, the appropriateness of the aspect is justified only by its context of use, and we cannot choose just one aspect and disregard the others before the context of the discussion is given.

It could be opposed to accepting the multi-layered concept because it does not provide a solution to the problems of personal identity. The structural concept appears to get rid of the problems, but it does only hide the problems. Even worse, the concept simultaneously inherits the difficulties from the three concepts of a person: the CP, the AP, and the NP because the structural model includes all the concepts in it though altered them into the aspects.

I shall give accounts to the way how the multi-layered concept avoids the difficulties related to the three concepts, and show the plausibility of the account

with the multi-layered concept even though I cannot explain away them all here. As for the difficulties related to the CP, the circular account of personal identity is indicated. According to Locke, consciousness makes the same person¹⁶. Locke's 'consciousness' has been understood as the remembering of something from the past, i.e. the memory of past experiences. The concept of memory contains, however, that we can remember our own past only; thus, it presupposes personal identity. Therefore, the account of personal identity with the CP implies circularity in its assumption, and such an account is regarded as a disqualified explanation for personal identity.

The multi-layered concept can provide an alternative interpretation of Locke's 'consciousness'. Although 'consciousness' can be interpreted in multiple ways, given the concept of a person must satisfy the two requirements, Identification requirement and Ascription requirement, we can, therefore, consider Locke's 'consciousness' as the cognitive action to identify and reidentify a person as the subject of experiences. In this identification, we certainly have the same experience that we had in the remembering, but it need not be a true memory. It can be mere 'quasi-remembering' (the remembered content by a subject is not necessary to be the true memory whose owner is the remembering subject) because we can identify and reidentify ourselves as the subject of past experiences phenomenally appeared in our remembered content. In this interpretation, the issue is not admitting the possibility of quasi-remembering but admitting that we necessarily identify oneself (a person) as the subject of experiences via the CP* whether a remembered content is a true memory or a false one. Thus, this account needs only the accomplishment of self-identification for personal identity and does not include any circularity; therefore, it avoids the problem associated with the CP.

The difficulties associated with the NP is its ontological status and its revisable identity. However, these problems never occurred in the account with the multi-layered concept. As previously stated, the NP* is the aspect via which we identify and ascribe attributes to a person, so that the NP* is essentially

¹⁶ Locke (1975: Ch. 27, § 16)

irrelevant to any ontological debates. Again, the NP* is the aspect of a person who had been already given a particular place in our conceptual framework through the identification via the AP* and/or the CP*. A person identified via the NP* has been characterized in terms of several descriptions. Suppose we think or say: ‘Is the person standing before us, John?’ In this thought or utterance, we are referring to and identifying a certain person as being perceptible, or at least recognizable, by the description ‘the person standing before us’, and by ‘John’ we are referring to and identifying the object concerned in our conceptual framework previously identified as the person who is called John. This person ascribed more than two attributes (standing before us and being called John) can be ascribed further attributes. In this process, our understanding of the person has been overwritten repeatedly. What revisable is not the identity of the person but some narratives containing a contradiction ascribed to that person. If there is a conflict among inconsistent narratives, we should not deny the identity of the person but ensure the consistency of narratives by examining their truth. Thus, in this way, the account with the multi-layered concept can avoid ‘revisable identity’ problem pertaining to the NP.

It is certain that our identification and reference of the person are unstable under some extreme conditions such as thought experiments, e.g. fission or brain transplant cases. In the debates of personal identity, philosophers face the problem of the indeterminacy of the identification of a person in such borderline cases, and they are urged to provide solutions by creating alternative concepts of a person, i.e. the CP, the AP, or the NP. However, the indeterminacy of identification seems to indicate that our concept of a person cannot be simple and univocal but be equivocal and have each role of those concepts as the different aspects.

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The Multi-layered Concept of a Person

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So far, mainly three different concepts of a person have been developed in the debates of personal identity. However, each of them has been made to be mutually exclusive by the excessive restriction in establishing their own theory. In this paper, it is shown that any concept of a person should be based on the same conceptual foundation. And it is argued that the three concepts of a person can be reinterpreted into three corresponding aspects of a person and maintained them as parts of the comprehensive concept of a person. Finally, the author shall make it clear that our understanding of a person is constructed of several conceptual layers through identification and ascriptions of attributes obtained via those aspects, then the concept of a person should be the multi-layered concept.