

ESSENTIAL INDIVIDUALITY: ON THE SOUL OF A PERSON

Abstract. Each person is perceived by others and by herself as an individual in a very strong sense, namely as a *unique* individual. Moreover, this supposed uniqueness is commonly thought of as linked with another character that we tend to attribute to persons (as opposed to stones or chairs and even non-human animals): a kind of *depth*, hidden to sensory perception, yet in some measure accessible to other means of knowledge. I propose a theory of *strong or essential individuality*, which tries to work out some inspiring suggestions by **Duns Scotus**, **Leibniz** and the phenomenologist Jean Hering, by translating them into a more modern analytical and logical language. This theory is introduced by way of a critical discussion of the standard Theory of Individuality, with a reference to the history of the Principle of Individuation. I argue that most traditional theories, sharing the features of what I call the Dominant Model of Individuality (DMI), have unsatisfactory consequences concerning personal identity and the nature of the Self, a problem which the proposed theory seems to solve more faithfully both to folk intuitions and the phenomenology of personal life.

Key-words: Ontology; Individuality; Self, Soul, Personal Identity

0. Strong or Essential Individuality

What is individuality? The core intuition of this paper is that some objects are individuals in a stronger sense than others, which are usually classified as individuals too by the standard logical and ontological terminology. For example: a person is an individual in a stronger sense than a chair or a stone; a work of art, a poem or a novel, a picture or a sonata, have a stronger individuality than, say, washing machines or refrigerators. This stronger individuality will be called *essential individuality*.

Let me add two preliminary remarks to this statement.

First of all, individuality might well be a matter of degree, so that there might be a continuum of objects, which are «individuals» to a lesser and lesser degree, from a person to a stone. But, for the sake of simplicity, most of the time we shall only deal with two clear-cut cases: essential (strong) and non-essential (weak) individuality.

Secondly, persons are not, according to this theory, the only case of individuals in an essential sense; yet they are the *paradigmatic* case of such individuality, and a condition of existence for other individuals of this kind. Now this connection to persons is what makes the study of essential individuality deeply interesting – and necessary. Even more so, since the strong sense of «individual» is practically the only one people bear in mind when using common language, and to some extent, common sense.

1. Some Good Reasons to Study Individuality

Each person is perceived by others and by herself as an individual in a very strong sense, namely as a *unique* individual. Moreover, this supposed uniqueness is commonly thought of as linked with another character that we tend to attribute to persons (as opposed, say, to stones or chairs): a kind of *depth*, hidden to sensory perception, yet in some measure accessible to other means of personal knowledge. This kind of depth is usually, although quite implicitly, felt to harbour the essence of a person as such – say, her «personality».

Each person shows a *physiognomy*, a visage and a dynamic style of her own, a global way of being there which is usually perceived as «just announcing » a personality.

Physiognomy is usually felt to be the visible part of a whole that is not directly accessible by further sensory perception, though it partially is by other ways of acquaintance, such as conversation or, more generally, communication, patient observation, psychological insight and so on.

Personal reality, or personality, is usually thought of as epistemologically at least in part accessible, and as ontologically *unshared*. Similar personalities are not supposed to allow for complete identity even in the case of monozygotic twins. The uniqueness of personality is indeed regarded as the very basis of each person's uniqueness, at least within the pre-philosophical, commonsensical frame of thought governing both attitudes or social acts concerning persons, and ordinary speech about them.

Uniqueness and depth are the main features of the notion of *strong or essential individuality*, which is the ultimate subject of this paper. It is a notion – admittedly a quite implicit one – we make use of in a massive way when dealing with people (marrying a person, for instance, or falling in love with her/him, or being in mourning for somebody), but also when thinking of people (writing a biography, studying a historical character) or addressing to them (writing a letter, entertaining a conversation).

In short, the phenomenology of strong individuality is as well assessed in our everyday lives, as its notion is in our everyday thought. Even the term «individual» and related ones, as well as their equivalents in most European languages, are meant to refer to individuals in a pretty strong sense, and in fact are not customarily applied to chairs and stones or any other middle size particulars, but almost exclusively to persons. Qualifying this notion of individuality as «strong» would be pointless, except with reference to the much wider extension of the technical *philosophical* term, used as a synonymous of «particular».

From a phenomenological point of view strong individuality is more than an implicit commonsensical notion about persons: it is a *basic phenomenon*, a way in which our being manifests itself quite apparently, or an *ontologically well founded appearance*.

But if this is the case, a reform of the ontology (and of the epistemology) of the individual is needed to give an adequate interpretation to the thesis that *persons do exist*.¹ This paper should be read as a sketch on the way of such a new ontology, which would account for the difference between strong and weak individuality, so conceptualizing our folk intuition according to which people are *individual in an essential sense*, chairs and computers are not.

To make a long story short, “soul” is but the folk name for essential individuality; but thinking essential individuality correctly should free us from most embarrassing puzzles about the soul. Whenever we come across a being within a being, a man within a man, a soul within a body, a mind bearing a very puzzling relation to a brain, an interiority which is not properly the inside of any *thing*; whenever we try to escape dualism by even more unsatisfactory solutions; whenever we are in trouble with the very question of our identity as persons; whenever we look for our place in a “nature” which does not seem to allow for any “spirits”; whenever we try to think about our “inner life” and are left with a ghost; whenever we translate the content of moral and religious experience into bad, though still current, dualistic metaphysical language, there we just fail to provide an adequate conception of our *being*. And the reason why we fail is that we have not worked out the nature of individuality.

And yet even an accurate analysis of the different ways of being a particular (as a shadow, as an event, as a chair, as a tree, as a dog, as a person) is not easy to find within

¹ R. De Monticelli : *Individuality and Mind*, in : Proceedings of the International Conference *The Emergence of the Mind* Fondazione Carlo Erba, Milano, 2000 ; R. De Monticelli : *Andrea o dell'individualità essenziale*, in: G.Usberti, (ed), *I modi dell'oggettività, Saggi in onore di Andrea Bonomi*, Bompiani, Milano 2000.

contemporary ontology, and even less within philosophy of mind and persons. I just pointed out some good reasons to put an end to this state of affairs.

2. Individuality: Ontology and Epistemology through History.

Surprising as it may be, both the ontology and the epistemology of individuality are very weak throughout our traditions, since Aristotle's times and up to contemporary philosophers².

Recent scholarship has very well cleared up the different questions that have been raised under the label of the Problem of Individuation, more or less until Leibniz and after him, but particularly within contemporary analytic philosophy³. I shall propose a somewhat simplified view of the matter, without making any of the above mentioned scholarly sources responsible for it.

The Problem of Individuation comprises at least two questions. The first and more basic one is about the nature of individuality, namely: what it is *in objects* that makes them individual objects, or that *individuates* them. This is an ontological question, by far the most important one in medieval scholastics and Leibniz (or Wolff, for that matter⁴). The second question is the epistemological one, which comprises at least two more questions: how do we manage to single out individual objects, and to *distinguish* from each other? Is there any further knowledge of them, going beyond "individuation" in *this* sense?

Now the most striking thing, from a historical point of view, is that modern and contemporary philosophers, with few but very important exceptions, seem to have perceived the ontological question as pointless, so that, differently from their ancient and medieval predecessors, modern philosophers concentrate rather on some version of the epistemological question. This may be done quite systematically, as it is the case for Descartes, announcing in the opening paragraphs of his *Meditations* that he will suspend belief in the existence of anything not known with certainty – and therefore, in particular, of most apparent individual objects. The ontological question on the nature of individuality is more explicitly dismissed by empiricists. The problem to which Suarez had devoted about 150 pages in 1597 seems to have vanished: it does not take Locke, Berkeley, Hume more than a single sentence to dispose of it:

“All things, that exist, being Particulars [...]”⁵

“But it is an universally received maxim, that *every thing which exist, is particular.*”⁶

“ 'tis a principle generally receiv'd in philosophy, that every thing in nature is individual”⁷.

² I shall only refer to some well-known thinkers of the analytic tradition, such as P. Strawson, D. Wiggins, N. Goodman ; yet a very similar remark could be proved to be true concerning most well-known philosophers in XXth century « continental » tradition, to the exception of the Phenomenologists we refer to below.

³ L. B. McCullough, *Leibniz on Individuals and Individuation*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1996 ; J.E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, Philosophia Verlag, Munich 1988, 2nd ed. ; K. F. Barber and J.E. Gracia, *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy*. State University of New York Press, Albany 1994.

⁴ C. Wolff, *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* / ed. et cur. Johannes Ecole, Darmstadt : Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962 Caput II, *De ente Singulari et Universali*.

⁵ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford Clarendon Press 1975, III, 27.3, p. 409.

⁶ G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, *The Works of George Berkeley*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948, 2 : p. 192.

Individuality is no longer a problem according to this tradition, because it is just a primitive notion, and one which is thought to be equivalent to that of existence. Existence, in its turn, is only known through sensory experience. A different epistemological criterion of ontological respectability, yet no less severe than a Cartesian one.

The epistemological turn seems to have put aside the ontological question. Yet adopting the notion of an individual as a primitive one does not, by itself, amount to giving up any ontological *theory* of individuality, even if it does make the ontological *question* pointless. It amounts to adopting a very weak notion of individuality, or a theory that is represented par excellence by W. Ockham, whose nominalism is at the very root of the empiricist tradition.

Hence, even theories that apparently dismiss the ontological question in favour of the epistemological one do have an ontological layer. Reminding this point seems to be necessary in view of such quasi-Kantian assertions as Strawson's, according to which the aim of an essay on individuals is

“To exhibit some general structural features of the conceptual scheme in terms of which we think about particular things”⁸.

No more than Locke, Berkeley or Hume, Strawson does apparently not feel any need to justify the very weak sense in which he uses the word « individual » – in fact as a synonymous of « particular » - as a term of the art.

«For instance, in mine, as in most familiar philosophical uses, historical occurrences, material objects, people and their shadows are all particulars; whereas qualities and properties, number and species are not»⁹.

One will grant that a concept of individuality on which basis one cannot distinguish the individuality of a person from that of a person's shadow is a very general concept indeed.

In the same spirit of tolerance, Nelson Goodman denies that any of the ontological criteria of individuality proposed by the classics, medieval or modern, is in fact a necessary condition:

« An individual may be divisible into any number of parts: for individuality does not depend on indivisibility. Nor does it depend on homogeneity, continuity, compactness, or regularity »¹⁰.

More recently, J.J. Gracia has revived the whole topics. After close scrutiny of five traditional criteria of individuality (Indivisibility, Numerical Distinction, Capacity to divide the species, Identity over time, Impredicability) Gracia comes to the conclusion that none of them can be a necessary and sufficient condition of individuality, except for a special reading of « Indivisibility », which makes the term synonymous of « Incommunicability » in the sense in which Aquinas and Suarez use it, namely, non-instanciability (i.e. not being a Universal, a Species or a Type). This criterion allows for a notion as weak (and extensionally wide) as

⁷ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, I.I.VII, p. 19.

⁸ P. Strawson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁹ P.F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Garden City, N.J., Anchor Books, 1963, p. 2.

¹⁰ N. Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1977

Strawson's or Goodman's. In fact, it confirms the plain empiricist equivalence between individuality and existence, which can be found at the very root of both Strawson's and Goodman's accounts of individuality.

3. The Dominant Model of Individuality (DMI)

An empiricist theory of individuality is in fact a version of a model which I shall refer to as the Dominant Model (DMI), and which is actually the most popular of two opposed models of individuality. It can be shown to be the one adopted not only by most contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition, but even by most (or the most influential) thinkers in ancient and medieval times. An influential instance of this model is the theory of individuation by matter, attributed to Aristotle and more or less supported by his corpus¹¹; another is its cunning refinement by Thomas of Aquinas' theory of *materia signata*¹².

Let's try to describe the core-intuition on which all versions of the DMI are based. A thing's individuality has nothing to do with the thing's nature or essence, no matter whether one thinks that individual things *do* have a nature (like Aristotle or Aquinas), or that they do not (like Ockham and most Empiricists): for in any case what is meant by "nature" (or essence) is thought of as something common (a "universal"), referred to (or even replaced by) a general or "sortal" concept. *Individuality is a matter of contingency*, closely bound to a thing's existence; more exactly, to the *circumstances of its existence*, such as the time, the places, the portion of matter that are taken up by its existence. So for example, Socrates is a man, and he necessarily enjoys all properties characteristic of that nature, or implied by that concept. But this represents exactly what Socrates shares with others men, as opposed to the set of his *accidental* properties – in the Aristotelian general sense of belonging to other categories than substance – which distinguish him from other individuals of the human kind: and particularly the "matter" in which the human form is actualised, the places and the times of this actualisation, from birth to death. If we try to extract the very core of this intuition, we come across the old saying: *individuum ineffabile*. I.e., an individual is a *tode-ti*, a *this one here*, that is anything which can only be pointed at or anyway referred to by an indexical expression, such as « the note sounding *now* ». This is an epistemological (or *quoad nos*) rather than an ontological criterion: yet it is founded in the intuition of existing as *instantiating* (from « *instans* ») whatever is signified by a verbal or conceptual *description*, which is thereby *common* to many things. According to this intuition, individuality is actually characterised as *non-instanciability*, or non « communicability »¹³, also in the sense of ineffability. Individuals are beyond thought and language: not because of a transcendence of some sort, but just in that they are given to the senses¹⁴. They are only "knowable" by sensible knowledge, which is in fact no knowledge by classic or modern standards, but at most "evidence" for empirical knowledge. For from Aristotle to Strawson, Goodman, Wiggins or Gracia, there is no science of the individual.

¹¹ See note 8. For a classic defense of individuation by form in Aristotle cf. Léon Robin, *Sur la notion d'individu chez Aristote*, "Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques", t. XX, 1931.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, II, 4 ; « *Materia signata quantitate* » can be read as « matter occupying this determined portion of space ».

¹³ "Unum autem numero seu singulare aut individuum dicitur, quod ita est unum ens, ut [...] non sit communicabile multis", F. Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim 1965, I, V, p. 146.

¹⁴ In so far as XIX century continental philosophy depends on Kant, it does no exception to the dominance of the DMI. Singularity is not thought otherwise as through an epistemological criterion of a kantian kind (the « multiplicity of empirical intuition »). This is particularly evident in Hegel's *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, see the Section *Bewusstsein*, the dialectics of Sensible Certainty.

4. The DMI and the Unsolved Problems of Philosophy

All versions of the DMI have very puzzling consequences, showing their limits and the high price one must pay for the lack of distinction between weak and strong individuality. These consequences are of an epistemological and of an ontological kind.

Among the former, we shall mention the model's inability to account for our knowledge of persons – living or dead, Aunt Mary or Martin Luther. As we have seen, no “knowledge” of an individual as such but *sensory knowledge* is conceivable within this tradition. In fact, it is a consequence of the DMI, in its epistemological layer, that one should identify knowledge of an individual *a* with ability to distinguish *a* from any other individual of the same kind. But this is obviously false: that “knowledge” of somebody which consists in one's ability to tell him from another person is not (yet) knowledge of either person as such. It will take me a few minutes, maybe, to learn to distinguish Peter from Paul on the basis of sense perception of them; but no less than a few years to really get to some knowledge of either.

Among the DMI's consequences of an ontological kind, one should mention its inability to account for individuals either existing but not in space or time, or just possible: such as God and the angels, but also poems and numbers on one hand, fiction characters on the other hand. In fact, most pre-modern theoreticians of this model hold a separate theory for the individuality of “separate substances” – individuation through form. Yet no new or different idea distinguishes this theory, for individuality is granted to form, once more, through non-instanciability, which in turn depends, quite *ad hoc*, on lack of matter. Angels, for example, are according to Aquinas identical with their *infima specie*, or individuated by it¹⁵.

There are three major issues in modern and contemporary philosophy: the body-mind problem, the problem of personal identity and the debate on mind and nature. The DMI is at the very root of most unsatisfying “solutions” of these problems, which seem to depend, in their own ways, from the kind of *dualism* produced by the DMI model as soon as it is applied to such individuals as persons. This dualism – such is my claim – does not allow for any other escape than milder or stronger forms of reductionism. On the other hand, the characteristic mark of the Essential Individuality Model is that it does *not* allow for either dualism (in any form) or reductionism in our theory of what a person is.

To see the point of this line of argument, consider the following. One might think that Locke's theory of personal identity is, among other things, a criticism of a Cartesian dualism, and particularly of a theory founding personal identity on mind being a substance. Yet the whole problem of the identity of things lasting through time, and particularly of persons, arises as a consequence of a Lockean principle of individuation, which is such as to induce *a splitting apart of individuality and identity*. Such a principle is, as it is known, spatio-temporal location.

Locke's theory has the disadvantage that individuality and identity over time fall apart in most cases, beginning with plants and ending with persons. What Locke calls “the unity or identity”, e.g. that in virtue of which something stays “one and the same” over time (though going through partial changes), is in such cases different from what constitutes its individuality. For example, it would be absurd to say that Socrates stays one and the same throughout his life because of his spatio-temporal location, such location being on the contrary one of the things which keep changing over the time of his life. But even a plant stays the same, according to Locke, in virtue of its “form”, i.e. of the persisting organisation of its changing parts, and not in virtue of its permanent location.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I Prima, Q. 50, Art. 4.

Yet if this falling apart may be tolerable in the case of a plant, it is much less so in that of a person. In the former case, we might admit that a plant should not have any other “unity or identity” than a *specific* identity, shared by any other plant of the same species. Remark that, even if not admissible by modern biological standards, it is a conceivable hypothesis, and it is in fact the one which is implied as well by Aristotle’s “theory” of individuation by matter, if there is such a theory¹⁶. Anyway, a *shareable* “unity” of “nature” is what one is committed to by taking spatio-temporal relations as the only individuating principle of things: bare numerical difference is indeed allowed for by such a principle. But this is the very reason why this falling apart of individuality and identity is not acceptable in the case of a person. Socrates nature cannot possibly be shared by Plato. Humanity can, of course. Not personality, or not entirely.

Locke does indeed provide us with a special theory for personal identity, which seems in fact designed to the purpose of avoiding shareability, i.e. of obtaining uniqueness:

“For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or in different substances, the personal identity is preserved”¹⁷.

But this is a quite unsatisfying theory, in many respects. First of all because it does not solve the problem. Personal identity and individuality keep being apart, since a “personaliser” – a set of contents of consciousness and memory – can in principle be separated from an “individualiser”, that is from a particular body with its spatio-temporal location (as Locke’s amusing thought-experiments certify: the personality of a prince can be injected in the body of a cobbler and vice-versa). And indeed, after showing that mind as a substance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of personal identity, Locke is forced to admit a form of dualism, although a functionalistic rather than an ontological one. It is on this basis that Locke’s theory is rejected by Leibniz. Actually, Leibniz’ theory of essential individuality provides automatically, as we shall see, a *non-dualistic theory of personal identity* – which is no minor reason to approve of it.

It is no sheer chance that Hume, sharing the same theory of individuality as existence or spatio-temporal location, is induced to scepticism about personal identity. Hume’s position, as revived and explored in all its possible consequences (including the ethical ones) by Derek Parfit, is still well represented in contemporary philosophy of mind.

What scepticism is to personal identity, reductionism or sheer eliminativism (P. Churchland, D. Dennett and others) is to mind. In both case, the background and the starting point is a form of dualism: a dualism of a functionalistic kind in the case of a Locke’s theory of personal identity; a sheer dualism of substances (for example in the Popper-Eccles version) in the cases of mind’s reduction to brain (identity theories of mental and brain states) or of the sheer elimination of subjectivity and its world from ontology. This is *the Classic Triangle of Ontological Dualism, Functionalistic Dualism, and Scepticism, which still haunts contemporary philosophy of mind and person*. One side of this triangle – the Lockean-Humean side - is based on the spatio-temporal principle of individuation, which still is by far the favourite one among contemporary philosophers.

5. The Essential Individuality Model (EIM)

¹⁶ There is more than *one* theory in the Aristotelian corpus ; for individuation by matter see *Metaphysics*, I, 8, 1034a 5-8 ; V, 6, 1016b 32 ; VII, 10, 1035 b 27-31 ; XII, 8, 1074a 33; See also B. Pinchard : “Le principe d’individuation dans la tradition aristotélicienne”, in: P.N. Mayaud (éd.), *Le problème de l’individuation*, Vrin, Paris 1991, pp. 27-45.

¹⁷ J. Locke (1690), *An Essay Concernin Human Understanding*, II, XXVII, 13, Collated and annotated by A. Campbell Fraser, Dover University Press , New York 1959, vol I, p. 454.

Strange as it may appear, a *really* coherent alternative model of individuality is not easily available throughout the history of philosophy. Yet there are at least three (and quite probably more than three) major exceptions, namely, Duns Scotus, Leibniz and, in more recent times, the «realist» phenomenologists of Munich and Goettingen, in particular Jean Hering¹⁸. My research owes much to the pioneering work of *these thinkers of strong individuality*, and to their passionate struggle to lay the foundations of what I shall baptise the *Essential Individuality Model*.

The core intuition that this model tries to capture concerns the two phenomenological features characterising persons in our common perception of them: uniqueness and depth. According to ordinary thinking and acting, both features are somehow grounded on personality. How can we conceptualize these intuitions *correctly*? The critical idea underlying our model is that personality must not be thought of as a being separate or separable from whatever appearance it has – bodily appearance and its circumstances in the case of human persons. More generally, essence and its appearance cannot be separated according to phenomenology, in spite of the fact that essence does never manifest itself completely in real things. So far, ordinary perception and phenomenology converge – in the very notion of physiognomy. We should not divide what appears one in those individuals which appear provided with a hidden depth. “Socraticity” and the visible part of Socrates – his face, his nose, his way of walking about in town – seem to me to belong to one and the same reality. His visible and his invisible part (which keeps revealing itself in different aspects) appear as *indivisible* parts of a whole. Being faithful to this intuition means conceiving of a person’s depth as the way of being real, or appearance-transcendent, of those individuals which apparently do have a depth. Interiority must be thought of as “furtherness” (*ulterioritas*); *soul or personality must not be thought as entities, nor even as separable (multi-realizable) functions, but as the way of being of a special class of individuals, as their individuality*. This is why an ontology of the individual, giving account of strong or essential individuality, is the foundation of a theory of persons and personality.

According to this critical intuition, whenever we find a dualism of body and soul, of an ontological or even of a functionalistic kind, we can be sure, on one hand, that the phenomenon of essential individuality is at stake, and on the other hand, that it has been put into concepts *incorrectly*. One of the subtlest misinterpretation of this phenomenon is in fact a splitting apart, in Locke’s style, of an ontology of individuality (that of the DMI) and a theory of personal identity.

Actually, “personal identity” is a quite ambiguous expression, whose sense swings between “registry identity” and “personality”. Here are two notions corresponding, respectively, to individuation by space-temporal circumstances of existence (place and date of birth and related circumstances) and *content of a self* which persists over time. The notions of registry identity and of personality are logically and epistemologically independent. I might have got to know something of your personality though ignoring all the personal data filling your identity card, or vice versa. Actually, much less of a knowledge of personality, or of those features of it which would constitute a self persistent over time, is needed to provide people with identity cards!

¹⁸ J. Hering, “Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee », in : *Jahrbuch für philosophie und phäenomenologische Forschung*, IV, Halle 1921. The idea of individual essences was in fact circulating among phenomenologists of the first generation, in particular those among them who worked at the foundations of a personology – and of the regional ontology appropriated to it. We find relevant insights on the ontology, as well as on the epistemology of essential individuality in Max Scheler’s and Edith Stein’s works. Cf. R. De Monticelli (ed.): *La persona : apparenza e realtà. Testi fenomenologici 1911-1933*, Cortina, Milano 2000)

Yet splitting apart registry identity and personality is one of the ways to produce dualism, and hence to misinterpret the phenomenon of essential individuality. It follows, as a first requirement to be fulfilled by our Essential Individuality Model, that registry identity and personality, that is Circumstantial Accidents and Essence, must be thought of as *ontologically non-independent*¹⁹.

But there is more to say. The DMI harbours a truth which we could not miss without serious consequences. This truth is the inescapable link between individuality and contingency. This link is not all the story, but surely part of it. Socrates' personality is not really separable from Socrates' life, the circumstances of his birth or of his death, the time and place of his life – although it is not *reducible* to all that. Individual *nature* cannot be denied in favour of pure contingency of existence, as the DMI would do, but contingency of existence cannot be dismissed from a correct concept of individuality either.

Here too, the conclusion is that extrinsic and intrinsic properties must somehow belong to one and the same individual *essentially*. Taking only the first ones as “individualizers” would amount to miss *depth*, i.e. the “soul” or “interiority” or “hidden reality” of a person; but taking just intrinsic properties as essential to the person would amount to miss his or her *uniqueness in principle*. For there is absolutely nothing which could prevent us from conceiving of “the same personality” (the same soul, the same interiority, the same hidden reality) as instantiated in different individuals, i.e. as existentially replicable, *unless contingency and circumstances of existence are thought of as equally essential* to the personality of a person, i. e. to his/her way to be an individual.

True enough, common sense and common language don't allow us to decide whether the uniqueness they acknowledge to persons should be conceived of as a contingent or as a necessary property of persons. Yet we claim that it should be thought of as *necessary*, and this is our theory's progress, so to speak, on the mere phenomenological description of the apparent features of a person.

Here is the most “Leibnizian” part of our theory, consisting to show that strong or essential individuality is there *if and only if numerical identity necessarily implies uniqueness or being non-replicable* (which is definitely not the case for weak individuality, such as that of molecules, bricks and glasses of the same set).

This necessity, though, should not be conceived as absolute, but as conditional upon certain features of the actual world. Given that the actual world is in some relevant features as it is – at its non personal level of reality – then personality, or the way of being of essential individuality is possible; and whenever persons exist, they are necessarily unique. Admitting of a factual condition for a necessary property amounts to asserting that persons do not exist in *all possible* worlds, even though they are not necessarily restricted to the actual world²⁰. Maybe they did not exist in the past, maybe they could exist on different biological or even physical basis than ours own.

The picture such a theory provides of a person is that of *a being capable to transform contingency into individual nature* – to internalize contingency, so to speak. The idea of such a being introduces contingency at the very root of essential individuality, thereby safeguarding the precious core-intuition of the DMI, and going beyond the limits of this model.

¹⁹ This ranges “strong” individuals in the class of the Husserlian Pregnant Wholes, opening up a new perspective on ontology, as a theory of things developing the pioneering work of the Third Logical Investigation. *On Parts and Wholes* (Husserl 1900-1910)

²⁰ This conditional necessity is perfectly formalized in Hughes Cresswell's T modal system (G.E. Hughes and M.J. Cresswell,(1968), *An Introduction to Modal Logic*

A model of essential individuality which would meet these requirements would present us with a theory of persons as such *producers of (individual) essence out of circumstances*; and hence of *novelty*, because of the uniqueness of each internalized existence, and of *destiny* – for the same reason.

And this theory would allow us to answer the question: is the concept of a person reducible to that of the biological species *homo sapiens*, and if not, why?

Our answer is indeed that it is not. Why not? Because it is not as an exemplar of a biological species that an individual could be unique in principle, or necessarily unique. It seems to us that on the basis of a biological, hence of an empirical concept, one can at most affirm uniqueness as a factual property of the individuals belonging to a given species, hence as a contingent, not as a necessary or ontological property. Hence if we affirm that uniqueness is a necessary or ontological property of persons, then we must admit that persons cannot be reduced to their actual biological reality.

This answer qualifies our rejection of dualism, which is a position common to reductive theories. Our theory aims indeed to give a rigorous content to the folk intuition of ourselves as a “something more” than the biological layer of our reality. “Something more”, though, in the sense of an actual *supplement of reality* relative to the biological layer. A supplement of reality – personality - which must not be divorced from the grounding layers of reality we certainly happen to share with other creatures (including inanimate things): or else we would fall in the dualistic or spiritualistic sin. On the other hand, this “something more” cannot be deflated to culture, or a set of representations, or of social habits and conventions, without ceasing to be a supplement of *reality*. This deflationary attitude, pretty frequent in the XXth century continental philosophy, would amount to reducing the notion of a person to a *socially useful fiction*, a kind of status designator corresponding to rights and duties one takes on when entering a human community.