

# THE PERSON AS A BRAIN MICROPARTICLE

THOMAS J. DONAHUE  
Mercyhurst College

In this article we outline and explain Roderick Chisholm's extraordinary claim that the person is literally identical with a microscopic particle in that person's brain, show that his argument for this view provides no support for it and construct a distinct line of argument which appears to establish a presumption in its favor.

In his "Is There a Mind-Body Problem?", Chisholm holds that the person is literally identical with an "intact, non-successive" microscopic particle in that person's brain.<sup>1</sup> (Henceforth we will refer to this view as Chisholm's "microparticle thesis.") What Chisholm means by saying that this microparticle is an "intact, non-successive" entity is, "at any moment of its existence, it has precisely the same parts it has at any other moment of its existence; at no time during which it exists does it have a part it does not have at any other time during which it exists."<sup>2</sup> His argument for this remarkable claim can be reconstructed as follows. There are such things as persons. A person is either a physical thing or a nonphysical thing. Nothing we know about persons justifies us in assuming that persons are nonphysical things. Therefore, persons are physical things. In addition, there are good reasons to believe the person is not identical with his gross, macroscopic physical body.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the most plausible conclusion is that the person is literally identical with some proper part of this macroscopic body, "some intact, non-successive part that has been in this larger body all along," most likely a microparticle located within the brain.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Roderick Chisholm, "Is There a Mind-Body Problem?", *Philosophic Exchange*, 2 (Summer 1978): 31.

<sup>2</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem," p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Terms such as "his" and "he" should be taken where appropriate as abbreviations for "his or her" and "he or she," respectively.

<sup>4</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem", pp. 25-30.

This sketch of Chisholm's argument requires elaboration and explanation. Chisholm opens "Is There a Mind-Body Problem?"

by arguing that there is no reason whatever to believe that in addition to bodies and persons there are such things as minds, i.e., nonphysical, substantial, mental entities. His reasoning for this contention is that everything which we want to say about persons' mental properties and potentialities can be said without positing an additional entity, the mind, for there is nothing inconsistent in saying that persons are physical entities which have the capacity to think, feel, etc. Chisholm seems to be quite right in this regard. Thus, Chisholm's assertion that nothing we know about persons justifies our assuming that persons are nonphysical things seems to be true.

However, interpreting "nonphysical things" to mean "immaterial, substantial, mental entities," as is clearly justified given Chisholm's remarks, reveals a problem with Chisholm's argument. Under this interpretation of "nonphysical things," Chisholm's assertion that the existence of persons entails that persons are either physical things or nonphysical things is false. This dichotomy is not exhaustive: there remains the possibility that the person is an entity which has both physical and mental properties but which is *neither* a physical *nor* a nonphysical thing. Indeed, this is Peter Strawson's view.<sup>5</sup>

Referring to his microparticle thesis, Chisholm challenged the philosophical community by saying, "I would suggest that if this philosophic hypothesis seems implausible to you, you try to formulate one that is less implausible."<sup>6</sup> A quick reply to this is that Strawson's view, which is not vulnerable to any of the criticisms raised by Chisholm against the positing of mental substances, is less implausible than Chisholm's view because it adequately provides for the predication of both physical and mental properties to persons without implausibly asserting that the person is *literally identical* with a microscopic particle in that person's brain.

There is another problem with Chisholm's argument. Believing he has already established that the person is a

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Peter Strawson, "Persons," in *The Philosophy of Mind*, ed. V. C. Chappell (New York: Dover, 1981), pp. 127-46.

<sup>6</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem," p. 32.

physical thing, Chisholm says there are sound arguments which show that the person is not identical with his gross macroscopic body and concludes, on this basis, that the person is identical with "some intact, non-successive part that has been in this larger body all along," most likely a microparticle located within the brain.

Chisholm's assertion is problematic because the only one of these "sound arguments" which Chisholm provides is the following:

The body that persists through time... is an *ens successivum*. That is to say, it is an entity which is made up of different things at different times... Now one could say that an *ens successivum* has different "stand-ins" at different times and that these stand-ins do duty for the successive entity at the different times...

Am I an entity such that different things do duty for me at different days? Is it *one* thing that does my feeling depressed for me today and *another* thing that did it yesterday and still another thing that will do it tomorrow? If I happen to be feeling sad, then surely there is no *other* thing that is doing my feeling sad for me. We must reject the view that persons are thus *entia successiva*.<sup>7</sup>

Surely Chisholm is being very misleading here. It is absurd to suppose a person feels sad only in virtue of the fact that some other thing feels sad; however, this absurdity is not entailed by the proposition that the person is an *ens successivum* or logical construction. According to theories of this type, a person (a temporally extended series of "person-stages") is properly said to feel sad in virtue of the fact that something (a "person-stage") which *constitutes* him at the present time feels sad. Hence, such theories do not entail that a person feels sad only in virtue of the fact that some thing *other* than the person himself feels sad *for* him, because the feeling entity is simply a stage of the person himself.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, even if Chisholm previously had provided good reason to believe that the person is a physical thing, he has not given us any reason to believe that the person is identical with

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<sup>7</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem," p. 32.

<sup>8</sup>For a more comprehensive discussion of this argument, see Susan Leigh Anderson's "Chisholm's Argument To Show That A Person Cannot Be an *Ens Successivum*," *Philosophical Studies* 37 (1980): 111-13.

an intact, non-successive brain microparticle; for he has not provided any reason to reject an alternative to the microparticle thesis which clearly has greater *prima facie* plausibility, namely the view that the person is identical with his gross, macroscopic body.

Thus, nothing Chisholm has said in arguing for his microparticle thesis gives us reason to believe that his aforementioned challenge to the philosophical community cannot be met successfully. In fact, because both Strawson's theory of the person and the view that the person is identical with his gross body are of greater *prima facie* plausibility than Chisholm's microparticle thesis, there is good reason to believe that Chisholm's challenge can be answered effectively.

In order to realize that Chisholm's challenge is more formidable than it initially appears, we must turn to the other tenets of Chisholm's personal identity theory. Chisholm subscribes to the position championed by both Bishop Butler and Thomas Reid, namely, that persons remain self-identical through time in a "strict and philosophical sense." This position is composed of two related tenets:

(1) The question, "Is X the same person at time  $t$  as Y is at time  $t_1$ ?", is never a question which is properly decided by a conventional definitional decision, but rather always has a definite, "ontologically correct" answer.<sup>9</sup> (In other words, given the concepts "person" and "the same person" and the facts of the particular case, there is *one and only one* correct answer to any question of personal identity.)

(2) Persons persist in a sense which implies, "if a person may be said to exist at a certain place P at a certain time  $t$  and also at a certain place Q at a certain other time  $t_1$ , then we may infer that something existing at P at  $t$  is identical with something existing at Q and  $t_1$ ."<sup>10</sup> (In other words, a person is not merely a logical construction composed of person-stages related in certain ways [e.g., causation, contiguity and resemblance] involving certain types of continuity.)

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<sup>9</sup>Roderick Chisholm, "Identity Through Time," in *Language, Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Howard E. Kiefer and Milton K. Munitz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), p. 175.

<sup>10</sup>Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1976), p. 97.

Henceforth we will refer to these two tenets as "Chisholm's first strictness claim" and "Chisholm's second strictness claim," respectively.

Both of Chisholm's claims regarding the strictness of personal identity can be supported by a line of argument which is compatible with Chisholm's metaphilosophical and substantive philosophical positions. In his *Person and Object*, Chisholm advances his metaphilosophy of common sense: he holds that the basic premises of our philosophical inquiries should be those propositions which we presuppose in our ordinary activity and that such propositions should be affirmed until we have positive reason for denying them.<sup>11</sup>

There are many propositions we presuppose in our ordinary activity which are relevant to the issue of personal identity. Surely, one of these is that we have good reason to be concerned with our own future fortunes. If we did not presuppose this to be the case, all of our behavior which is calculated either to improve our lot in the long run or to forestall a deterioration in our long-term quality of life would be irrational.

In addition, no matter how sympathetic we are with other people, we are not concerned with their future fortunes to the same extent, with the same intensity or in the same way as we are concerned with our own. John Perry makes this point quite well:

Most of us have a special and intense interest in what will happen to us. You learn that someone will be run over by a truck tomorrow; you are saddened, feel pity, and think reflectively about the frailty of life; one bit of information is added, that the someone is you, and a whole new set of emotions rise in your breast.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we presuppose that we have special reason to be concerned about our own future fortunes.

Let us narrow our focus to those attitudes which we have toward our own future pleasurable and painful experiences: we eagerly await the former and dread the latter. These attitudes

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<sup>11</sup>Chisholm, *Person and Object*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup>John Perry, "The Importance of Being Identical," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 67.

manifest themselves in our numerous attempts to secure such pleasurable experiences and avoid such painful experiences.

What is the fundamental presupposition underlying these attitudes and behaviors, without which they would be irrational? Clearly, we presuppose that our "future self" (the self that will experience our future pains and pleasures) is the same subject of experience as our "present self" (the self which seeks to avoid future painful experiences and to enjoy future pleasurable experiences). If I didn't believe that I am the *same* subject of experience as the subject of experience who will undergo a given painful experience, why should I have that special and intense concern to avoid that painful experience that I so obviously do?<sup>13</sup>

What propositions regarding the strictness of personal identity can be established, given that it is a presupposition of our ordinary activities that throughout the course of our lives there persists a self-identical subject of experience? First of all, we should elaborate upon the formulation of this presupposition. It is apparent that we presuppose not only that such a self-identical subject of experience persists throughout the course of a person's life, but also that such persistence is a necessary condition of personal identity. We can see this by imagining our reaction to being told the following: "We will conduct an experiment designed to test endurance of pain. *You* will be the subject of our experiment and therefore will have to endure great pain. However, the subject of experience which has just been told that he will have to endure great pain will not be the subject of experience which will actually feel the pain." My reaction to this, which I trust would be the same as the reaction of persons generally, would be that the preceding statement was internally inconsistent because a necessary condition of my being the person who will endure painful experience X is my being the same subject of experience as the subject of experience which will endure painful experience X.

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<sup>13</sup>Even John Perry, who believes that nothing about the person remains strictly identical over time and that personal identity is merely a relation which holds among temporary psychological states, concedes that one's special concern for one's future is not fully justified if no self-identical subject of experience persists throughout the course of one's life. See "The Importance of Being Identical," p. 80.

Clearly, we also presuppose that the persistence of an identical subject of experience is a sufficient condition of personal identity. Imagine being told that there was going to be an experiment in which a person who had no continuity with you in terms of macro-bodily or psychological characteristics, but who would be the same subject of experience as you are, would be put through tremendous pain.<sup>14</sup> You would be terrified and would take every available step to prevent this experiment from taking place because you would believe that *you* would have to endure tremendous pain.

Geoffrey Madell's thought may be used to show that the proposition that the persistence of a self-identical subject of experience is a necessary and sufficient condition of personal identity implies that each question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer.<sup>15</sup> The relevant implications of Madell's work can be most readily conveyed by employing the notions of "subject of experience" and "unity of consciousness" in connection with psychological characteristics. At any given time, a person is aware of many different things. For example, if I am having a face-to-face conversation with my friend, and he happens to be talking at present, I am directly aware of at least five things. I see various things, including his face and his moving lips, and am aware that I am seeing these things. I hear various things, including his voice, and am aware that I am hearing these things. I am also aware that I am *both seeing and hearing at the same time*.

This last point involves the unity of consciousness. In any present state of consciousness that anyone has, there is a unity of which that person is directly aware. Therefore, it is an evident truth that any present state of consciousness is either wholly mine or wholly not mine: I either "have" the entire state of consciousness or "have" none of it. It is absurd to suppose that there could be a present state of consciousness which is partially mine and partially not mine, i.e., that the

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<sup>14</sup>The persistence of a subject of experience being a sufficient condition of personal identity is consistent with the truth of Chisholm's microparticle thesis provided that, as Chisholm assumes ("Mind-Body Problem," p. 31), the microparticle *is* the subject of experience.

<sup>15</sup>Geoffrey Madell, *The Identity of Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

"mineness" of a present state of consciousness could be a matter of degree.<sup>16</sup>

The fundamental importance of this truth for the issue of personal identity will be made evident by the following example. Suppose that at time<sub>1</sub> there is a person (A) who has a given state of consciousness (X). Suppose also that there is a state of consciousness (Y) which is possessed by a person (B) at time<sub>10</sub>. If the persistence of a self-identical subject of experience is a necessary and sufficient condition of personal identity, any question of personal identity must have a definite, ontologically correct answer since any question regarding the identity of a subject of experience must have a definite, ontologically correct answer. If you ask yourself, "Will the subject of experience that I (person A) am at time<sub>1</sub> be the same subject of experience as that subject of experience who has state of consciousness Y at time<sub>10</sub>?", the correct answer must be either "yes" or "no." It could not be a matter of degree to be settled by a linguistic convention of some sort; for this would imply that state of consciousness Y is partially owned, i.e., owned to a certain degree, by the subject of experience that I am at time<sub>1</sub>. As we have seen, the fact of the unity of consciousness implies that such partial ownership of a state of consciousness is impossible. Hence, Chisholm's claim that every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer is supported by the soundness of this line of argument.

Chisholm's second claim regarding the strictness of personal identity, i.e., that personal identity is not merely the "identity" that characterizes a logical construction, but rather is characterized by the intact, non-successive persistence of something, is also supported by the soundness of the foregoing line of argument; for we have seen *both* that it is a presupposition of our ordinary attitudes and activities that there is some basis for our special and intense concern for our own future pleasurable and painful experiences *and* that the truth of this presupposition implies that there persists a strictly identical, i.e., intact and non-successive, subject of experience throughout the course of a person's life.

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<sup>16</sup>The truth of this proposition is entailed by Chisholm's treatment of the unity of consciousness. See his *The First Person* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 85-90.

Even though the presuppositions of various of our ordinary activities and attitudes in conjunction with the aforementioned truth regarding the unity of consciousness provide good reason to affirm Chisholm's first strictness claim, we may nevertheless have to deny Chisholm's first strictness claim in light of considerations adduced by Derek Parfit.

Parfit discusses David Wiggins' hypothetical case of human fission and uses it to formulate a very powerful objection to the proposition that every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer. Parfit describes Wiggins' case and poses the question raised by it as follows:

Wiggins then imagined his own operation. My brain is divided and each half is housed in a new body. Both resulting people have my character and apparent memories of my life. What happens to me? There seem only three possibilities: (1) I do not survive; (2) I survive as one of the two people; (3) I survive as both.<sup>17</sup>

Parfit says that the first alternative is implausible because it is clear *both* that I could survive if my brain were successfully transplanted *and* that people have in fact survived with half of their brain destroyed. Parfit says it seems to follow from these two true propositions that I could survive if half of my brain were successfully transplanted and the other half destroyed. He then dismisses the possibility that I do not survive the brain bisection operation with these rhetorical questions based upon the preceding line of argument:

But if this is so, how could I not survive if the other half were also successfully transplanted? How could a double success be a failure?<sup>18</sup>

Parfit then examines the plausibility of the second alternative, namely, that I survive as one of the two people. He says this is highly implausible because each half of my brain and each resulting person is exactly similar:

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<sup>17</sup>Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," in *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 200-1.

<sup>18</sup>Parfit, p. 201.

So how can I survive as only one of the two people? What can make me one of them rather than another?<sup>19</sup>

Parfit then discusses the plausibility of the third alternative, namely, that I survive as both. He says that there is the possibility that what we have been calling "the two resulting people" are not really two people. Rather, it could be that there is only one person with a divided mind.

In order to give us an idea of what having a divided mind would be like, Parfit outlines a hypothetical case modeled upon some actual cases in which, as part of a treatment for epilepsy, the bridge between the hemispheres of the brain was severed with the effect that two separate spheres of consciousness were created—each sphere having the same type of unity that a person's consciousness normally has and each sphere controlling half of the patient's body.

Parfit concludes that this third alternative is highly implausible since in Wiggins' case the "mind" in question was permanently "divided," "its halves" were housed in two different bodies and were capable of developing in quite different ways, and each of the two beings produced by the hypothesized operation possessed all the qualities of a person.

Parfit then argues that because it is the case *both* that none of these three alternatives is at all plausible *and* that the proposition that every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer (Chisholm's first strictness claim) implies that these three alternatives are jointly exhaustive and hence implies that one of them is true, we have good reason to believe that this proposition (Chisholm's first strictness claim) is false. In other words, because denying Chisholm's first strictness claim logically permits one to hold that the question of personal identity at hand (the question, "What happens to me?", as it relates to Wiggins' case) does not have a definite, ontologically correct answer and thereby logically permits one to deny the otherwise undeniable yet highly implausible claim that one of the three aforementioned alternatives is true, we have good reason for denying Chisholm's first strictness claim.

The challenge posed by Parfit's argument is formidable; however, Chisholm's microparticle thesis may provide him

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<sup>19</sup>Parfit, p. 201.

with an effective rebuttal. If his microparticle thesis is true, Chisholm could respond to Parfit in the following way: "Your conclusion (that we have good reason to believe that the proposition that every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer is false) has not been established, because you have not established your claim that none of the three alternatives is at all plausible. Given the truth of my microparticle thesis, we can assert that the second alternative ('I survive as one of the two people') is true and give a straightforward, satisfactory answer to your questions, 'So how can I survive as only one of the two people? What can make me one of them rather than the other?'"<sup>20</sup> The answer is that one of the survivors is me because this survivor is the one who has as part of his brain the microparticle which is me, while the other survivor is not me because that survivor does not have this microparticle. Thus, you have not shown that we have good reason to believe that my claim (that a question of personal identity always has a definite, ontologically correct answer) is false."

Is this an effective response to Parfit's challenge? We can formulate this question as follows: Is the microparticle thesis itself less implausible than the denial of the proposition (Chisholm's first strictness claim) which it has been used to defend? This question cannot be answered adequately without distinguishing between two kinds of implausibility. We define "scientific implausibility" as that type of implausibility which characterizes a claim or theory that either conflicts

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<sup>20</sup>Of course, in the extremely unlikely event that the brain were bisected in such a way as to sever or destroy the microparticle that is identical with the person, the person would not survive at all since the person is identical with an *intact, non-successive* microparticle. The fact that the microparticle must be *intact and non-successive* rules out the third alternative, namely, that I would survive as both persons, since it rules out "double survival" through microparticle bisection. The important point to remember is that no matter what happens to the microparticle, whether it is destroyed, bisected or preserved, each and every question of personal identity will have a definite, ontologically correct answer which is grounded upon a specifiable fact, namely, the persistence or non-persistence of a certain *intact, non-successive* microparticle in the brain. (Of course, this holds true not only for cases of brain bisection but for all cases, including those involving fission, fusion and duplication.)

with well-established scientific knowledge or should already have been verified by the relevant scientists if it were true but has not been so verified. We mean by "metaphysical implausibility" that type of implausibility which characterizes a claim or theory that conflicts with metaphysical presuppositions of our ordinary activities.

At first glance, Chisholm's microparticle thesis appears to be scientifically implausible, for one could object to it as follows: "Chisholm's microparticle thesis couldn't be correct because, given the advanced state of the science of brain physiology, brain physiologists would already have discovered this microparticle."

The objection is misguided. In order to see this, we must remember that the microparticle which Chisholm alleges to be identical with the person is a physical entity (and thereby has certain physical characteristics) which has the non-physical property of being the person (the subject of consciousness). While it is true that the microparticle's physical characteristics (e.g., its size, shape, weight, color, etc.) are empirically observable, its property of being the subject of experience is not empirically observable. Thus, if Chisholm's microparticle thesis is correct, brain physiologists may have run across such a particle but did not and *could not* have learned of its significant, non-physical property: i.e., they could not have apprehended it *as* the person (the subject of experience).

The following related objection could be raised: "Chisholm claims that a certain brain microparticle is the person and therefore that this brain microparticle performs the many highly complex psychological functions the person performs. This flies in the face of the well-established findings of the science of brain psychology which indicate that the highly complex mental operations performed by the person are not performed by a single brain microparticle, but rather by various large and highly complex parts of the brain."

This objection overlooks a fundamental distinction<sup>21</sup> made by Chisholm. According to Chisholm, the brain microparticle that is identical with the person is the *subject* of consciousness, not the *organ* of consciousness (the brain). Therefore, Chisholm is not claiming that the person's highly complex psychological functions are performed via the material stuff of a certain brain

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<sup>21</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem," p. 31.

microparticle. Rather, he believes that the person (the brain microparticle) is the subject of consciousness, i.e, the experiencer of experiences, the thinker of thoughts, the feeler of feelings, etc., but that the human brain is the organ through which such functions are performed.

A third objection could be raised: "According to Chisholm's view, there is a microparticle which persists uncorrupted throughout a person's life. This runs contrary to the scientific finding that cells in various parts of the body are periodically replaced by a process of cell division (reproduction) and cell death."<sup>22</sup>

This objection ignores the scientifically established truth that many brain cells (the neurons in the brain) never reproduce themselves through cell division after birth and hence that all the many brain neurons which a person dies with were present throughout that person's entire life.<sup>23</sup>

Despite initial appearances to the contrary, this would not be an effective response as presently formulated, for it does not address the question of whether or not such brain neurons or any of their parts are intact, non-successive entities. Of course, only if any of these entities were intact and non-successive would their existence ground the possibility of the "intact, non-successive brain microparticle/person" posited by Chisholm's theory. However, I am not scientifically qualified to interpret the latest findings of brain physiology and related sciences to determine what, if anything, they would imply or suggest on this highly technical question of whether or not brain neurons either contain or are themselves intact, non-successive entities.

Thus, while it has become obvious that Chisholm could answer at least some of the scientific implausibility objections that could be raised, it is unclear whether or not he would be able to answer the last of the aforementioned objections or, more generally, whether or not he could effectively rebut all objections owing to some alleged scientific implausibility of his microparticle thesis.

Is Chisholm's microparticle thesis less metaphysically implausible than the denial of Chisholm's first strictness

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<sup>22</sup>Richard F. Thompson, *The Brain* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1985), p. 271.

<sup>23</sup>Thompson, p. 271.

claim? This is very difficult to pronounce upon with confidence; however, we can offer the following considerations.

As we have seen, Chisholm's claim that *every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer* is implied by presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes relating to our future pleasurable and painful experiences which are fundamental to our conception of the person. In contrast, Chisholm's microparticle thesis speaks to an issue on which common sense does not testify univocally.

In response to the question, "What is the nature of the person?", the presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes provide conflicting answers. On the one hand, we presuppose that the person's survival is dependent upon the survival of that person's body as a functioning organic entity. This presupposition underlies many of our ordinary activities and attitudes, including many of our medical practices and our attitude of grief in response to the bodily death of a loved one. On the other hand, many of us tend to identify the person with an immaterial soul which is somehow separable from his or her physical body and thereby believe that the person can survive the death of his or her body. This belief is presupposed by such activities as attempting to communicate with deceased persons through any one of a number of occult methods (e.g., seances) and praying for the souls of dead people; and by a believer's attitude of fear, joy or uncertainty as he or she nears death and looks forward to his or her anticipated fate in the afterlife.

It is important to note that Chisholm's microparticle thesis is compatible with some of these presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes. While the microparticle thesis is incompatible with the claims that the person is identical with an immaterial soul and that the person's survival is dependent upon the survival of that person's body, it is clearly compatible with the view that a person can survive the death of his or her body. As Chisholm notes, his microparticle thesis implies, "that the destruction of the gross physical body does not logically imply the destruction of the person," since the intact, non-successive persistence of a certain brain

microparticle is necessary *and sufficient* for the existence of personal identity.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Chisholm's microparticle thesis appears to be less metaphysically implausible (i.e., appears to conflict to a lesser degree with the metaphysical presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes) than the denial of his first strictness claim; for the microparticle thesis is logically incompatible with *only some* of the *conflicting set* of relevant presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes, while the denial of the first strictness claim is logically incompatible with the *most fundamental* of the relevant presuppositions of our ordinary activities and attitudes.

If it is the case *both* that Chisholm's microparticle thesis can deal as effectively with all scientific implausibility objections as it did with the first two of the aforementioned ones *and* that it is less metaphysically implausible than the denial of Chisholm's first strictness claim (as it appears to be), then the microparticle thesis is less implausible than the denial of Chisholm's first strictness claim. As such, employing the microparticle thesis to defend Chisholm's first strictness claim against Parfit's argument makes more sense than affirming Parfit's conclusion (the denial of Chisholm's first strictness claim). Clearly, Parfit has not shown that we have good reason to reject Chisholm's first strictness claim if Parfit's argument (the soundness and, indeed, the entire logical force of which presupposes the falsity of the microparticle thesis) can be undermined by the truth of a theory (the microparticle thesis) which is less implausible than Parfit's conclusion.

At this juncture, it will clarify the matters under discussion to define some of the basic concepts of Chisholm's theory of epistemic preferability:

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<sup>24</sup>Chisholm, "Mind-Body Problem," p. 31. It appears that Chisholm's position is that such a microparticle's being in a brain is not a necessary condition of the existence of personal identity since he says that the person is *literally identical with* an intact, non-successive microparticle ("Mind-Body Problem," p. 31). Thus, the person would persist if the microparticle persists, regardless of whether the microparticle is located within a brain. This irrelevance of microparticle location to the possibility of personal identity implies that the existence of personal identity is logically compatible with the destruction of the gross physical body.

*h is beyond reasonable doubt for S* =<sub>df</sub> Accepting *h* is more reasonable for *S* than is withholding *h* [i.e., neither accepting *h* nor accepting not-*h*].

*h has some presumption in its favour for S* =<sub>df</sub> Accepting *h* is more reasonable for *S* than accepting not-*h*.

*h is acceptable for S* =<sub>df</sub> Withholding *h* is no more reasonable for *S* than accepting *h*.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, in Chisholm's terminology, we have shown that, given that Chisholm could effectively rebut any remaining scientific implausibility objections, it appears as if his microparticle thesis can be used to defend his first strictness claim against Parfit's attack in such a way as to establish a presumption in favor of his first strictness claim; for we have seen that it appears to be more reasonable to accept Chisholm's first strictness claim by defending it with the microparticle thesis than to accept with Parfit the denial of Chisholm's first strictness claim.

We may now address our central concern: Is there a presumption in favor of Chisholm's microparticle thesis? In order to answer this question we must determine whether there is a less implausible way to successfully defend Chisholm's first strictness claim against Parfit's challenge. Since it is clear Parfit is correct in asserting *both* that the proposition that *every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer* implies that one of the three alternative answers to the question posed by Wiggins' case is true *and* that the utter implausibility of all three of these answers counts heavily against the truth of this proposition, we can accurately determine whether there is a less implausible way to defend Chisholm's first strictness claim against Parfit's argument by ascertaining whether there is a less implausible way to rebut Parfit's contention that all three alternatives are highly implausible.

Although it is impossible to conclusively answer this question without examining all the possible theories of personal identity, there are good grounds for asserting that there is no less implausible way to rebut Parfit's contention. After all, the standard and normally effective ways of deciding questions of

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<sup>25</sup>Chisholm, *Person and Object*, pp. 177-78.

personal identity--having recourse to considerations involving bodily identity or psychological continuity (including facts about memory and character)--are incapable of furnishing any plausibility for any of the three alternative possibilities in Wiggins' case. If these standard and usually effective types of considerations are impotent, what other types of considerations could reasonably be expected to render any one of the three alternatives plausible?

Given *both* that Chisholm's claim that *every question of personal identity has a definite, ontologically correct answer* has some presumption in its favor *and* that there is no more plausible way to defend this claim against an otherwise decisive objection than by using Chisholm's microparticle thesis to do so, the microparticle thesis must itself have some presumption in its favor.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, notwithstanding initial appearances to the contrary, it now appears that Chisholm's challenge to the philosophical community, "I would suggest that if this philosophic hypothesis [the microparticle thesis] seems implausible to you, you try to formulate one that is less implausible," has not been met to this day; for if the microparticle thesis has some presumption in its favor it is more plausible than its negation and hence more plausible than any alternative theory which entails its negation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Thus, Chisholm can provide an effective rebuttal to each of the following claims alluded to earlier: (1) Strawson's theory of the person is more plausible than Chisholm's microparticle thesis and (2) the view that the person is identical with the gross macroscopic body is more plausible than the microparticle thesis. These claims can be effectively countered by the reply that neither of the views referred to can be used to save Chisholm's highly plausible first strictness claim (the denial of which apparently is more implausible than Chisholm's microparticle thesis itself).

<sup>27</sup>I would like to thank Peter Hare, Ken Lucey and Dennis Dwyer for their constructive criticism and many helpful suggestions.