

Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons”

Emma Bowman

Main Claims:

There is no self.

Contrast:

Ego theory:

postulates a subject, self, beneath experiences

Parfit's Version of Bundle Theory:

postulates only a series of mental states and events (thoughts, sensations, etc.) unified by causal relation (such as the relation between experiences and later memories of them, etc.)
with no underlying haecceity

The Split-Brain Case

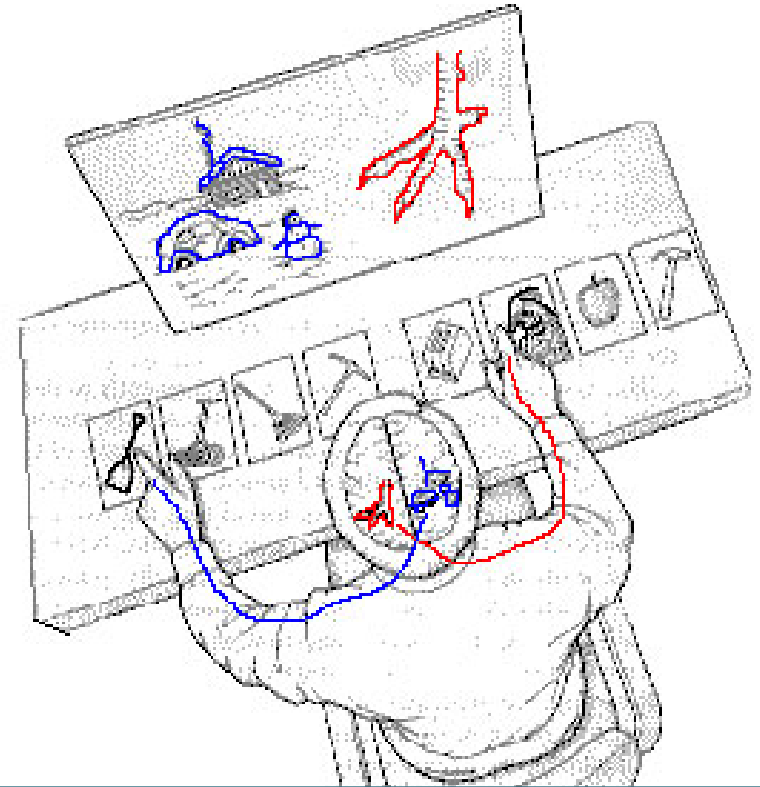
Scenario: the hemispheres of the brain have been disconnected. The left half of a screen is red and right half is blue.

"How many colors do you see?"

With both hands write **"only one color"**

"Which color?"

One hand writes **"red"** and other writes **"blue"**



Possible Conclusions:

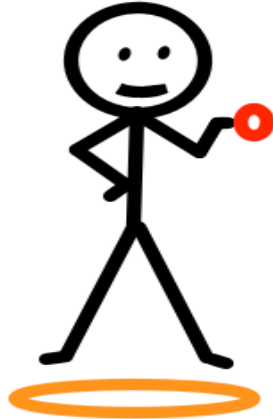
- Conscious Experience Theory is wrong
- There is a difference between "person" and "subject of experiences", and there are two subjects in this one person
- There are not two streams of consciousness in this patient
- There is no such thing as 'personhood' or 'self'* ← **PARFIT**

WHICH CONCLUSION DO YOU FIND MOST CONVINCING?

Gradual Replacement

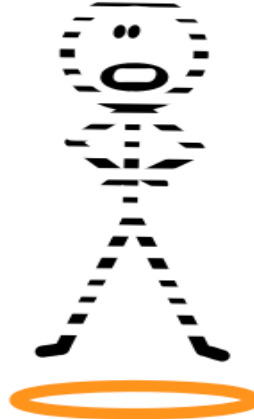
Step 1.

Victim steps into transporter/death chamber



Step 2.

Victim is disintegrated



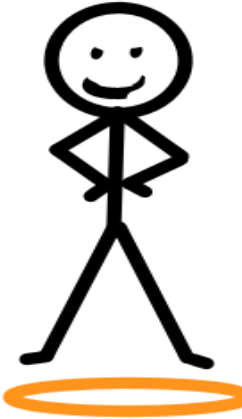
Step 3.

Data sent to destination



Step 4.

Doppelgänger lives out your life



Why Teleportation is EVIL

ChrisG.org

What if **20%** of your molecules are **destroyed** and then **replaced by exact replicates**? Are you the **same person**?

What if **50%** of your molecules are destroyed and then replicated?

What if **100%** of your molecules are destroyed and then replicated? (The 100% scenario, as long as the cells are replicated in a different place, is, essentially, teleportation.)

In ego theory: At low levels of cell replacement, the person waking up would be us. At high levels of cell replacement, the person waking up would be a Replica.

But what is the critical percentage at which this changes?

Revived Club

- 1.) A club has regular meetings for a while.
- 2.) The club stops meeting.
- 3.) A few years pass.
- 4.) A club with the same name and the same rules as the previous starts up.
- 5.) Did these people revive the same club? Or did they start up a club that is exactly similar?

Parfit: We know what happened without answering this question. Quite simply, “who cares?”

Do you think there is a reason to care about whether this club is the same or not?

Wiggins Divided Brain

Scenario: A person's brain is divided, and the two halves are transplanted into a pair of different bodies.

The two resulting people live quite separate lives.



Note: We can't know for sure what would happen in this case, as this scenario has never actually occurred.

Parfit: Neither of the resulting people will be the original person, but this way of ceasing to exist is "about as good or as bad as ordinary survival".

Buddhism and the Bundle Theory

"Anatta" : Persons are merely combinations of other elements

Theravada Buddhists: clinging to the idea of a composite thing instead of on the independent elements that make it up causes suffering.

Mahayan Buddhists: there is no independent importance to a composite idea; only the elements that make it up are important.



The similarity to Western claims might show that the anti-person claim is not as unintuitive as it first appears?

Who might have a problem with this?

Reid: "I am not a series of events but a person."
That's only a fact about our grammar, or our language.

Descartes: Thought proves self.
There is just thought..

Locke: Consciousness implies self. – (Two streams might mean two selves, not no selves)

Note: Parfit never fully explains why there are not two persons in split-brain cases

Plato: There is a soul
We never sense our selves.

Me: Do we know enough about brains to be sure about our interpretations yet? What does self-interest mean in this context? Why does being split into two different people seem "worse than survival" for most of us?



WHO ELSE MIGHT HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THIS VIEW?

Benefits of the Theory/People Who Might Agree

Material theorists who respond “who cares?” to Theseus’ ship
“Who cares?” can also be applied towards the self.

Berkeley: argued that an apple was just the name for a collection of sensory experience

The self is also a collection of experience

Reid again: Consciousness and memory and every operation of the mind change all the time, have no continued existence, are transient and momentary

So there is no constant thing called “self”

Avoids Locke's problem with sleep

There is no “self” which depends on consciousness

IN SUM:

There is no such thing as “self”.

Parfit updates Hume’s essential ideas (that people are just a collection of mental states unified by causal relation) with neuroscience and thought experiments.

