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’ \( \leftrightarrow \) 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. Doppelganger lives out your life

Why Teleportation is EVIL

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?
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?
**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”.

---

*Wiggins Divided Brain*
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.