

Parfit

“Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons”



Strategy

- Parfit examines empirical evidence about the mind and argues that only the Bundle Theory of personal identity can make sense of this evidence
- The other theory of persons, the Ego Theory, fails

Ego Theory

- The continued existence of an Ego (or subject of experiences) explains a person's continued existence over time
- A person's consciousness is unified at any one time because there is only one person having several experiences at one time
- A person's entire life is unified by there being only this one person who has all the lifetime of experiences

Bundle Theory

- The unity of consciousness over time is not explained by appeal to an Ego, unified subject of experience, or person
- Instead, the long series of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, etc. are unified by the causal relations each bit of conscious experience has with the other mental states and events
- Each causally connected series of experiences and mental events is “like a bundle tied up with string”

Bundle Theory and Persons

- Bundle Theory denies that there are persons that exist independently from one's brain and body
- There is no person apart from the bundle of causally connected mental events
 - There are no souls or spiritual substances or independent spirits
- What we call the individual is a convention of language to refer to the bundle of mental states and events

Beam Me Up, Scotty

- Imagine a transporter that
 - reads the states of all the cells in your body
 - destroys them at that instant
 - sends this information at the speed of light to another machine
 - which recreates an identical you with all your memories, experiences, etc.
- Would you enter the machine and push the button?
- Would you still be you? Would you be the same person you were before you entered the transporter?

Imagine Cell Replacement

- Imagine getting an operation where individual cells in your brain and body were replaced with exact duplicates
- Are you the same person when only 2% of your cells have been replaced?
 - What about 50%? or, 95%?
- Will you survive? Will you be the same person?
 - Is there a point in a 100% transplant surgery where you stop being you and become something new?

Is There a Critical Point?

- Natural beliefs lead one to think that there is some critical point in the replacement surgery where you stop being you and become your replica
- Parfit thinks we should discard these natural beliefs
 - “On the Bundle Theory, we should reject these natural beliefs. Since you, the person, are not a separately existing entity, we can know exactly what would happen without answering the question of what will happen to you....There are not here two possibilities, one of which must be true. These are merely two different descriptions of the very same course of events. If 50 percent of your cells were replaced with exact duplicates, we could call the resulting person you, or we could call him merely your Replica. But since these are not here different possibilities, this is a mere choice of words.”

The Problem of You

- The intuition that you as a person would cease to exist if most or all your cells were replaced reveals a reliance on the belief that there is a separately existing person or soul distinct from the brain and body which is what it means to be you
- “You fear that the abnormal cause will fail to produce a further and all-important fact, which is different from the fact that your Replica will be psychologically continuous with you. You do not merely want there to be psychological continuity between you and some future person. You want to *be* this future person. On the Bundle Theory, there is no such special further fact.”

Split Brains

- Is there evidence for the Ego Theory in split brain cases?
 - When a split-brain patient writes that she only sees one color but then each hand writes two different colors when asked what those colors are, Parfit wonders what one can conclude from this evidence of distinct awareness in each stream of consciousness
- The Ego Theory must say that there is one person with two subjects of experience
 - What unifies the experiences of one subject of experience is that all experiences are being had in one stream of consciousness, and likewise for the other subject of experience

Problem with the One-Person/Two-Subjects-of-Experience Answer

- If we identify “person” with “subject of experience” then we get two persons in one body
- If we say there’s one person but two streams of consciousness/ subjects of experience, then this notion of person is very different from what is usually meant
 - This answer “ignores the disunity between these streams” and fails as an explanation
 - Why believe this thing exists?

Bundle Theory Solution

- Both normal and split-brain patients are aware of having several experiences at once
 - e.g., you hear the car as you watch it drive down the road
- Just as we have a single memory of two sets of experience so too there can be a single state of awareness of both hearing and seeing
- Split-brain patients do not have one state of awareness of their streams of consciousness, but two
 - This does not entail that there are two separately existing persons
 - Rather, we have two distinct bundles of perceptions instead of one