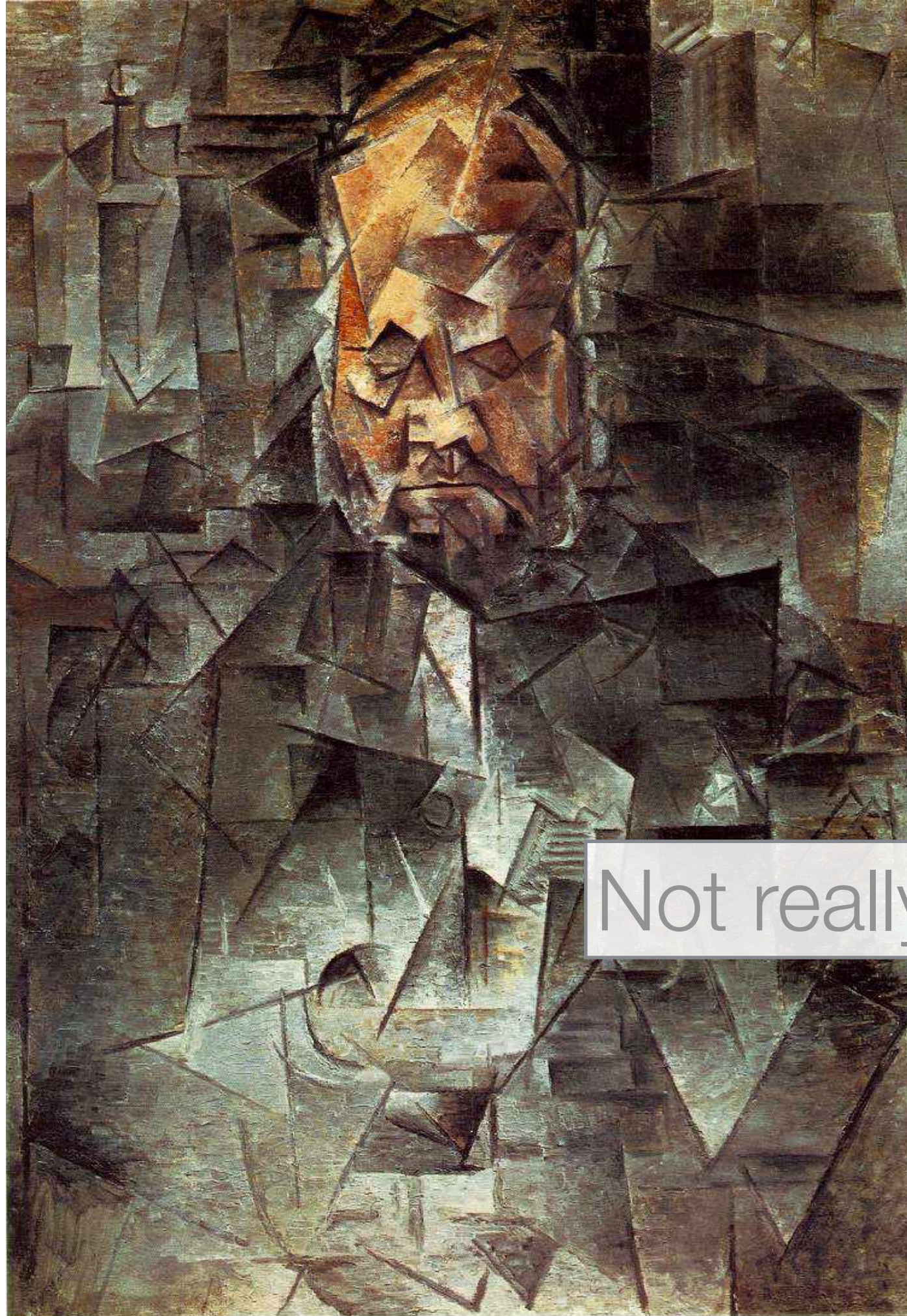


What am I?



Not really a thing

Last time we saw two arguments against the psychological theory: Williams' argument from fear of torture preceded by memory replacement, and the argument from fission.

Both of these arguments might seem to count in favor of a the materialist theory of persons.

However, one can generate problems for materialism quite similar to the problems to which teletransportation gives rise for the memory theory.

Suppose that instead of stepping into a teletransporter, our subject decided to undergo an ambitious new form of surgery.

In this surgery, one's body is sawn in half. The left half is then joined with a perfect replica of the right half, and the right half is then joined with a perfect replica of the left half.

Let's call the original person Oldy, and the resultant persons Lefty and Righty. It is obvious that Lefty \neq Righty. But it seems that if materialism is true, Lefty = Oldy and Righty = Oldy. After all, each of Lefty and Righty are physically connected to Oldy.



Could the materialist say that preservation of 50% of matter is just not enough physical continuity for Lefty and Righty to be the same material thing as Oldy?

The problem of fission is, in general, the problem that, for many views of persons, we can imagine situations in which those views will tell us that one person at some earlier time is identical to two persons at some later time. But the transitivity of identity tells us that this is impossible.

One strategy for responding to these cases — which can be employed by either the materialist or the psychological theorist — is to say that survival requires **both** having a certain degree of psychological/physical continuity **and** nothing else exhibiting that degree of continuity. This is sometimes called a ‘**closest continuer**’ theory. Is this plausible?

One view of personal identity which seems to be immune to the problem of fission is **dualism**. Some dualists have used this fact as a way of defending their view.

But cases of fission can also seem puzzling from the point of view of the dualist.

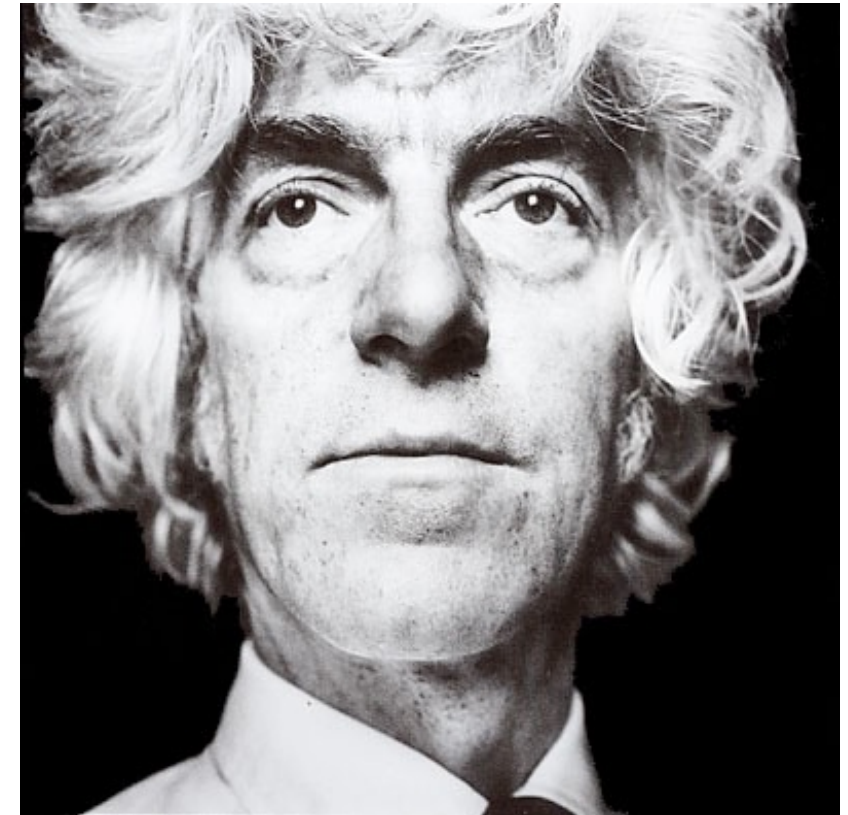
Recall our example of the teletransporter which issues in our two persons, Marsy and Venusy. These two persons will be, one might think, (at least initially) alike in all physical and psychological respects. Suppose that you were Marsy. Would you care whether you were the one who got the soul which belonged to Earthy, or got a new but indistinguishable soul?



But one might respond to cases of fission in a different and more radical way. This is what Derek Parfit recommends in the reading for today.

A good way to understand his view is by thinking about the identity of a club, or a sports team, over time.

Suppose that a professional sports franchise moves to a new city, bringing the players and management. They get new uniforms and take on a new team name. But, just after they move, a new franchise is started in the old city which takes on the team name, and uniforms, of the old team.



Which of these really is the same team as the team that existed in the city before the move? Does this question really have an answer?

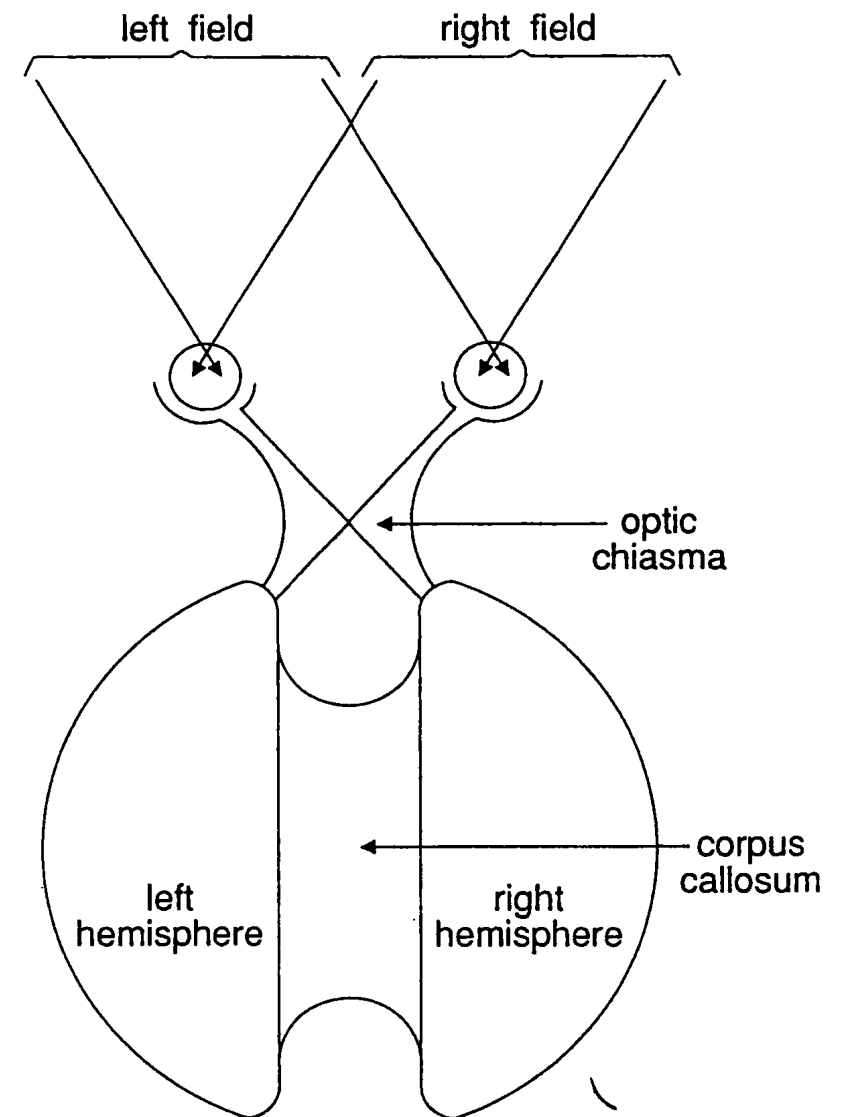
Some of you may have been inclined to say similar things about the Ship of Theseus.

Parfit's radical suggestion is that people are, in this way, like clubs. When we ask, "Is Earthy really the same person as Marsy, or Venusy?" we are not asking a very deep question. Each is similar in certain important ways to Earthy, and that is pretty much the end of the story. There is simply no further, fundamental fact about which one is identical to Earthy.

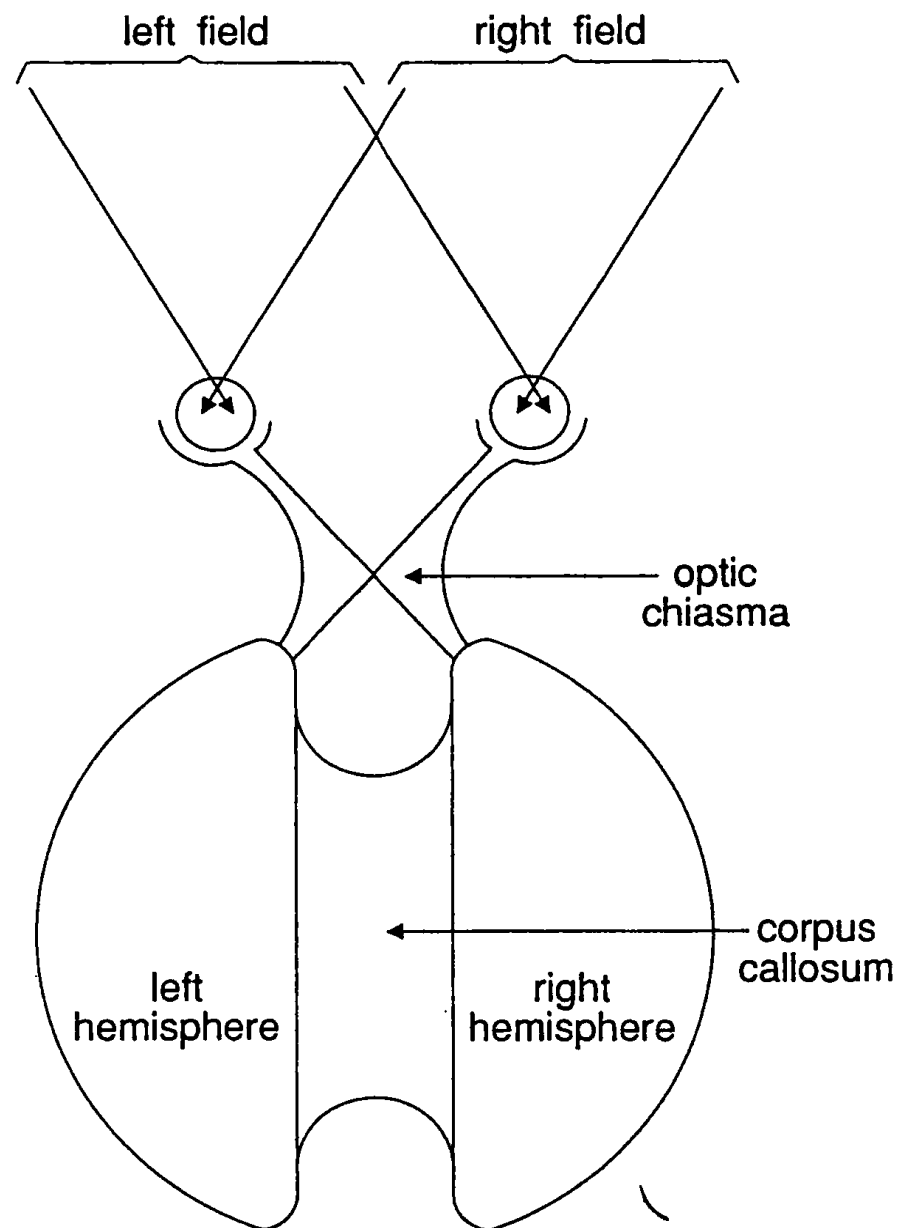
This view has some surprising consequences. One is that questions about death and survival also do not have all-or-nothing answers. Imagine that Venus is told that he is going to die soon very soon. But, if Parfit is right, he should be much consoled by the fact that Marsy, who is psychologically extremely similar to him, will continue to live — after all, there is nothing important about survival other than there being someone psychologically quite similar to me who continues to exist.

Parfit thinks that his radical view of persons is also encouraged by certain empirical results obtained in studies of patients whose **corpus callosum** has been severed. The corpus callosum is a pathway which connects the left and right hemispheres of the human brain and, in normal subjects, allows the two hemispheres of the brain to exchange information.

If the corpus callosum is severed, the two hemispheres of the brain cannot exchange information. So any sensory data about the environment available to, for example, the left hemisphere, will not be available to guide the movements of the left hand, which is controlled by the right hemisphere. Information available only to the right hemisphere will not be reportable in speech, since speech is controlled by the left hemisphere.



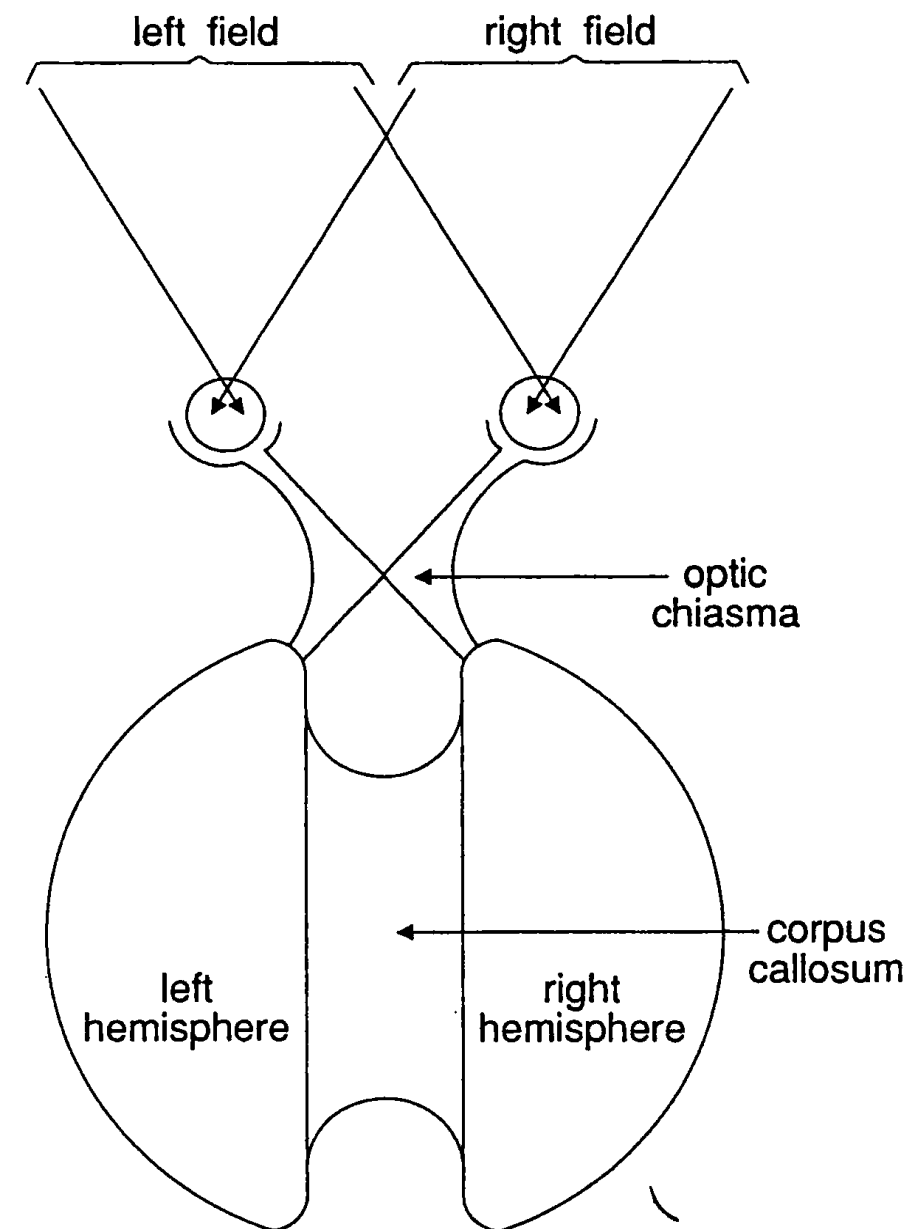
The results of giving sensory data to just one of the hemispheres of the brain of such a patient are striking.



The results are as follows. What is flashed to the right half of the visual field, or felt unseen by the right hand, can be reported verbally. What is flashed to the left half field or felt by the left hand cannot be reported, though if the word 'hat' is flashed on the left, the left hand will retrieve a hat from a group of concealed objects if the person is told to pick out what he has seen. At the same time he will insist verbally that he saw nothing. Or, if two different words are flashed to the two half fields (e.g. 'pencil' and 'toothbrush') and the individual is told to retrieve the corresponding object from beneath a screen, with both hands, then the hands will search the collection of objects independently, the right hand picking up the pencil and discarding it while the left hand searches for it, and the left hand similarly rejecting the toothbrush which the right had lights upon with satisfaction.

The results of giving sensory data to just one of the hemispheres of the brain of such a patient are striking.

One particularly poignant example of conflict between the hemispheres is as follows. A pipe is placed out of sight in the patient's left hand, and he is then asked to write with his left hand what he was holding. Very laboriously and heavily, the left hand writes the letters P and I. Then suddenly the writing speeds up and becomes lighter, the I is converted to an E, and the word is completed as PENCIL. Evidently the left hemisphere has made a guess based on the appearance of the first two letters, and has interfered, with ipsilateral control. But then the right hemisphere takes over control of the hand again, heavily crosses out the letters ENCIL, and draws a crude picture of a pipe.⁶



Why do these split brain cases seem paradoxical?

Ownership

Every conscious experience must be an experience of someone.

Awareness

If someone has a conscious experience, it must be at least in principle possible for them to be aware of that experience.

Now think about a case in which a split-brain patient has a red stimulus presented to the right half of their visual field, and a blue stimulus presented to the left half of their visual field. If you ask the subject what color they see, they will say “Red”, since this was the color presented to the part of the eye which feeds input to the left hemisphere of the brain, which controls speech.

Ownership

Every conscious experience must be an experience of someone.

Awareness

If someone has a conscious experience, it must be at least in principle possible for them to be aware of that experience.

So it is clear that there is a conscious experience of red; so, by **Ownership**, there must be someone who is having this experience. Let's call this person "Mr. Red."

If you put a pen in the left hand of the left hand of the subject, and ask what color was just seen, that hand will write "Blue." So it seems that there must have been a conscious experience of blue — otherwise, how would the hand know what color to write?

But if there is a conscious experience of blue, by **Ownership** someone must have had this experience. Let us call the person who has this experience "Mr. Blue."

Ownership

Every conscious experience must be an experience of someone.

Awareness

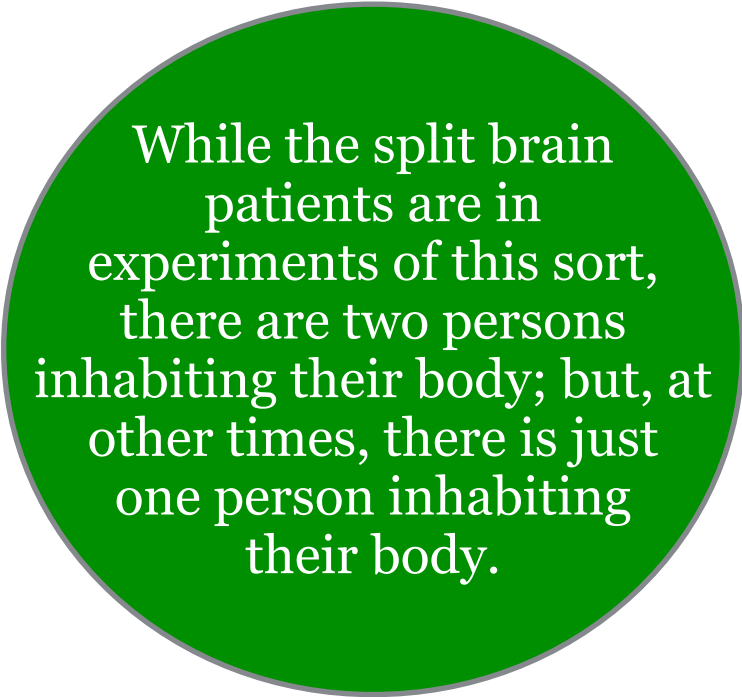
If someone has a conscious experience, it must be at least in principle possible for them to be aware of that experience.

Now the crucial question is: Is Mr. Red the same person as Mr. Blue? It seems to follow from **Awareness** that they are not the same person. After all, if you ask Mr. Red whether he has had any experience of blue, he will say “No.” And no amount of introspection on his part will allow him to remember having a conscious experience of this sort; and of course this is not because he forgot having the experience, but because he was never aware of having it. But then, by **Awareness**, he *didn't* have it.

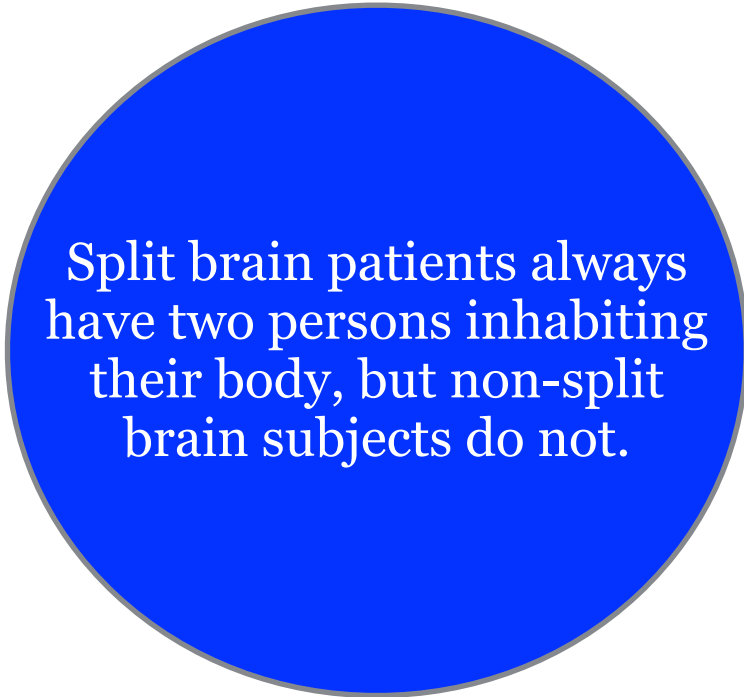
Hence it seems that Mr. Red \neq Mr. Blue. So there are two persons in the body of the split brain patient.

This is a bit weird on its own. But further oddities result from consideration of what this conclusion says about non-split-brain patients, like us.

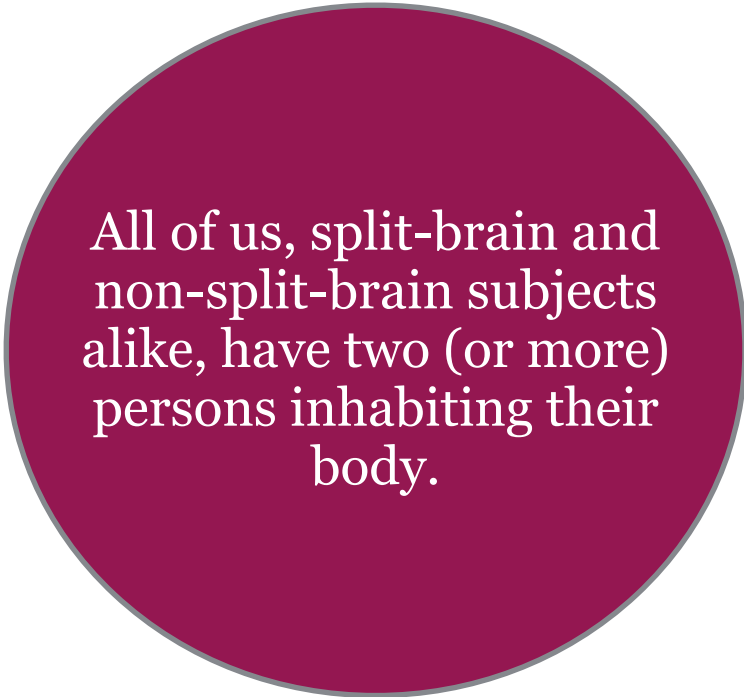
There seem to be three things
we can say:

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While the split brain
patients are in
experiments of this sort,
there are two persons
inhabiting their body; but, at
other times, there is just
one person inhabiting
their body.

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Split brain patients always
have two persons inhabiting
their body, but non-split
brain subjects do not.

A large maroon circle with a thin grey border, containing white text.

All of us, split-brain and
non-split-brain subjects
alike, have two (or more)
persons inhabiting their
body.

But each of these seems absurd.

While the split brain patients are in experiments of this sort, there are two persons inhabiting their body; but, at other times, there is just one person inhabiting their body.

If this were true, then simply flashing some red and blue lights at someone would bring a new person into existence; and turning off the lights would kill that person.

Split brain patients always have two persons inhabiting their body, but non-split brain subjects do not.

If this were true, then severing the corpus callosum of an epileptic patient would bring a new person into existence; and reversing the surgery would kill that person.

All of us, split-brain and non-split-brain subjects alike, have two (or more) persons inhabiting their body.

Non-split brain patients never have conscious experiences of which they are not aware; but then it would follow that there is a person inhabiting my body which never has any conscious experiences at all. But then in what sense does that person even exist?

One can, of course, follow Parfit and say that our talk about persons, or subjects of experience, is just a sort of convenient fiction for talking about conscious experiences. The split-brain cases illustrate that there are cases in which this convenient fiction breaks down; in cases like the one described above, there is a red experience and a blue experience, and that is all that we can say; there is no further fact about whether these experiences are experiences of the same person, or not.