What am I?



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 ≠ 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. ner connections between the two eres have been severed in men, r iousness in a single body. The fai also encouraged by

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monkeys.³ In the brain-splitting operation for epilepsy, the optic chiasma is left intact, so one cannot get at the two hemispheres separately just through the two eyes. The solution to the problem



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Both hemispheres are linked to the spinal column and peripheral nerves through a common brain stem, but they also communicate directly with one another, by a large transverse band of nerve fibres called the corpus callosum, plus some smaller pathways. These direct cerebral commissures play an essential role in the ordinary integration of function between the hemisphere of normal persons. It is one of the striking features of the subject that this fact remained unknown, at least in the English-speaking world, until the late 1950's, even though a number of patients had had their cerebral commissures surgically severed in operations for the treatment of epilepsy a decade earlier. No significant behavioral or mental effects on these patients could be observed, and it was conjectured that the corpus callosum had no function whatever, except perhaps to keep the hemispheres from sagging.

Then R. E. Myers and R. W. Sperry introduced a technique for dealing with the two hemispheres separately.² They sectioned the optic chiasma of



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Why do these split brain cases seem paradoxical?



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."



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:

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.

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

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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. 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?

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.

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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.