

Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons Derek Parfit

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Philosophy 110W-01
9 March 2011

The Ego Theory of Self

- Existence is explained as series of experiences, felt by the *subject of experiences*, or the *Ego*
- Unity of conscience is based on the fact that all experiences in a lifetime are felt by the same person
- Also known as the *Cartesian view*, that a person is a "persisting purely mental thing-- a soul, or spiritual substance" (352a)
- There are facts about the self that are constant over time
- Parfit believes that Descartes', Locke's and Reid's theories are all Ego Theories

The Bundle Theory of Self

- It is not enough to explain unity of consciousness with just a person or Ego.
- Denies the existence of a person, period (sort of)
 - we try to understand the self through experiences, but we cannot figure out a way to connect them with something like an Ego or a soul, because every theory has gaps in it
- Similar to the Buddhist theory, which claims that "persons are merely combinations of other elements" (352b) and that only the individual elements have actual existence
- There is no constant self or Ego that pulls experiences into something complete and continuous

What do we actually think?

"We may be convinced that the Ego Theory is false, or even senseless. Most of us, however, even if we are not aware of this, also have certain beliefs about what is involved in our continued existence over time...[which] would only be justified if something like the Ego Theory were true."

353a

but..

"Most of us have false beliefs about what persons are, and about ourselves" (353a)

...So how do we figure out what we actually know, what our beliefs are, and what that means for the self?

Teletransportation

"Suppose that you enter a cubicle in which, when you press a button, a scanner records the states of all of the cells in your brain and body, destroying both while doing so. This information is then transmitted at the speed of light to some other planet, where a replicator produces a perfect organic copy of you." (353a)

Partial Replicas

"...in a single operation, a different proportion of the cells in your brain and body would be replaced; in the middle, 40 or 60 per cent; near the far end, 98 or 99 per cent." (353a)

Teletransportation and Partial Replicas

- Two questions: Will I survive?
 - Yes or no: you may die in the process, or the replica of your cells will be successfully transported and put back together
- And: Will the resulting person be me?
 - depends on how we define "me", given certain conditions:
 - The brain is an exact replica of the one you had on earth
 - There is psychological continuity. You will remember everything you did on earth up to the point you were teletransported

How this affects the Ego and Bundle Theories

- With the Ego Theory, we can still be ourselves, even with teletransportation, because changing the cells in our body does not affect the Ego that contains our self
- With the Bundle Theory, you do not exist anymore, because this replica of the past you, the future you, is not the you that had the experiences.

Split-Brain Patients

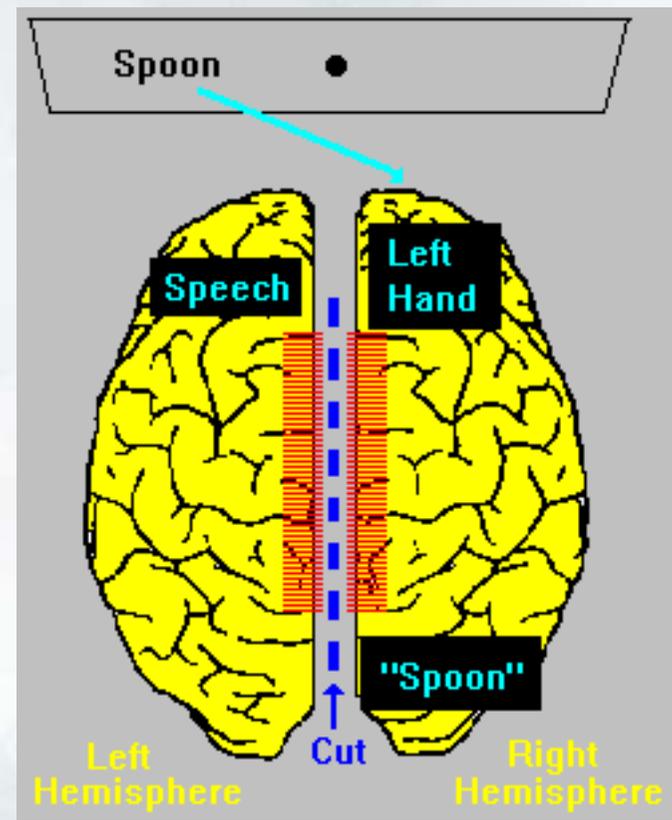
- Right hemisphere has control of left hand; right occipital lobe receives signals from left eye (and vice versa)
- Left hemisphere controls speech
- Corpus Callosum connects the two...
- ...but when it's severed, the two hemispheres can't communicate

Image source:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/gif/corp.gif>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMLzP1VCANo>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZnyQewsB_Y



Split-Brain and the Idea of an Ego

- The patients have a singular sense of self, but in the experiments, they are having separate experiences.
- "In split-brain cases, there are two streams of consciousness" (352a)
- However, there cannot be two streams of consciousness and one self, because two streams of consciousness need two Egos, which doesn't work for the singular self.
- So, how do we consolidate these ideas?
 - Parfit believes you can't: "I believe that, in a sense, the number of persons involved is none." (352a)

Split Brain and the Bundle Theory

- There is no person involved in split-brain cases because according to Bundle Theory, there is no person, period.
- "In such cases there is, at any time, not one state of awareness of several different experiences, but two such states.... In claiming that there are two...states of awareness, we are not postulating the existence of unfamiliar entities, two separately existing Egos which are not the same as the single person whom the case involves."
(356a)
- The Bundle Theory accounts for these as separate experiences that are clumped together by a body who experiences the two colors via the senses, along with a history of experiences.
- The body is a medium through which we experience what we do, and does not require a soul or Ego to do so

Questions, Comments, Concerns

- Is a replica the same as the original?
- Is psychological continuity a (the?) determining factor of self?
- Can we even apply thought experiments to real life, if there is no way for us to know what would happen under real circumstances?
- In the Partial Replica case, where is the dividing line between the original and the copy?
 - Parfit suggests when 50% of the cells have been replaced
- Does the psychology of split brains apply to the philosophical question of self?
- If so, is it enough to support the Bundle Theory enough to give it the edge over the Ego Theory?