

Personal Identity:
Parfit, "Personal Identity"

1.
Parfit's Target

Two beliefs:

- a. The belief that questions about identity must have a true answer.
- b. The belief that, unless questions about identity have an answer, we cannot answer "certain important questions about matters such as survival, memory and responsibility".

2.
Fission, Identity and Survival

Parfit distinguishes between survival and identity. He asks us to consider a set of cases.

Case 1: Your brain is transplanted into someone else's body, B. The resulting person, PB, has your character and apparent memories of your life.

What we want to say about case 1: PB is **you**. You survive the transplant.

Case 2: Your brain is divided and one half of it is transplanted into someone else's (brainless) body, B. The other half is destroyed. The resulting person, PB, has your character and apparent memories of your life.

What we want to say about case 2: PB is **you**. You survive the transplant.

Case 3: Your brain is divided and each half is transplanted into someone else's (brainless) body. The result: one brain half in body B and the other brain half in body C. We can call the resulting persons PB and PC. Both PB and PC have your character and apparent memories of your life.

What we want to say about case 3: it's unclear

There are 3 possibilities:

- i. You do **not** survive.
- ii. You survive as **one** of PB or PC.
- iii. You survive as **both** PB and PC.

According to Parfit, (i) and (ii) are not options. Why not?

Next question: what about (iii)?

- Parfit's conclusion:**
- a. You bear all the relations that matter to PB and PC. But neither PB nor PC are identical to you. Identity is, after all, a one-one relation. You "survive as" each of PB and PC, if we use "survives as" in a way that does not imply identity but does imply the presence of **what matters** in survival.
 - b. There is no fact of the matter as regards which description of the case in terms of identity is the correct one.

3.
What Matters in Survival

Psychological continuity

The fission case shows that what matters in survival (what relation that matters) need not be one-one. It typically is, for us. But it need not be.

In the typical case (i.e. non-branching case), psychological continuity is the *ground* of identity claims.

But, in the branching case, Parfit argues that we must take the importance that we attach to identity and attach it to each of the branch lines. In such a case, we must give up speaking of 'identity' but we mustn't give up speaking of survival. "[E]ach limb of the branching tree is as good as survival" (21).

A criterion of identity: A and B are the same person if they are psychologically continuous and there is no person who is contemporary with either and psychologically continuous with the other.

4.

No Circularity

Parfit introduces the concept of **q-memory**.

A subject S q-remembers an experience if

- (1) S has a belief about a past experience which seems in itself like a memory belief,
- (2) someone did have such an experience
- (3) S's belief is dependent upon this experience in the same way (whatever that is)

And there are other relations included within psychological continuity (e.g. *q*-intention, *q*-recognize, etc.)

According to Parfit, his notion of *q*-memory does not presuppose the continued existence of a person. (As we will see, Schechtman will question this claim.)

5.

Psychological Continuity and Psychological Connectedness

Distinction: psychological continuity and psychological connectedness

psychological connectedness: B at a later time has *q*-memories ("memory traces") of things that happened to A at an earlier time; B at a later time does actions *q*-intended by A at an earlier time, etc.

Psychological connectedness requires the holding of direct psychological relations. It is an **intransitive** relation.

Psychological connectedness comes in degrees. How so?

psychological continuity: the relation that obtains between A and B if there is a series $C_1 \dots C_n$, and times, $t_1 \dots t_n$, such that A at t is connected to C_1 at t_1 , and C_1 at t_1 is connected to C_2 at t_2 , and... and C_n at t_n is connected to B at the later time.

Psychological continuity requires overlapping chains of direct psychological relations. It is a transitive relation.

Parfit's weaker claim: what matters in survival can come in degrees.

Parfit's stronger claim: continuity may matter somewhat; but, connectedness is perhaps a more important element in survival.