87. **Divided Minds** [245]

The strange effects of a severed corpus callosum (the nerves that connect the two hemispheres): we appear to have two consciousnesses. That is, when blue is shown to the eye (or parts of eyes) that feeds to the left hemisphere, while red is shown to the right hemisphere, both hands write that the writer sees only one color, the left writing that it sees only red, the right that it sees only blue.

Creepiest example:

One of the patients (who have had their corpus callosum severed to treat severe epilepsy) complained that sometimes, when he embraced his wife, his left hand pushed her away.

Parfit imagines being able to control whether or not the hemispheres are connected in his case *My Physics Exam*, where he is able to do two calculations in half the time by a division of labor amongst the separated hemispheres. When they are reunited, he says he will remember doing both sets of calculations. While separated, each will be surprised to see the other hand scratching away apparently by itself.

What happens in this case? Parfit suggests it is a case of divided mind. Alternative suggestions:

- It’s a case of **one person with two minds**
  - Parfit: same thing
- It’s a case of **two different people**, neither being me
  - Parfit: this might be plausible in a case of permanent separation, but this is temporary, for only ten minutes. “On this interpretation, the whole episode involves three people, two of whom have lives that last for only ten minutes. Moreover, each of these two people mistakenly believes that he is me, and has apparent memories that accurately fit my past.”
- It’s a case of **me and someone else**
  - Parfit: when reunited, I would remember both. Which would be false?

88. **What Explains the Unity of Consciousness?** [248]

Suppose we believe:

1. There is a true answer to the question “who has each stream (in the physics exam case) of consciousness?”

2. This case involves only a single person, who for ten minutes has a divided mind

What can we say? “We must now abandon the claim that ‘the subject of experiences’ is the person” [249] because when the mind is divided there are two different subjects of experiences, but only one person (2). (This means that we must abandon the related claim that psychological unity is explained by ownership by a person – there is unity in each of the two streams without a separate person to “own” each experience in the stream).

What does a reductionist say? He rejects claim (1) above, for one, and claims:

what unites my experiences in my right-handed stream is that there is, at any time, a single state of awareness of these various experiences... At the same time, there is another state of awareness of the various experiences in my left-handed stream. My mind is divided because there is no single state of awareness of both of these sets of experiences. [250]
What is a “state of awareness”? It is a combination of co-conscious experiences.

Analogy: the specious present:

Just as there can be a single memory of just having had several experiences, such as hearing a bell strike three times, there can be a single state of awareness both of hearing the fourth striking of this bell, and of seeing ravens fly past the bell-tower. Reductionists claim that nothing more is involved in the unity of consciousness at a single time. [251]

The reductionist thus avoids the problem of having to say either that there are several people having these experiences, or one of the subjects is not a person. The divided minds cases are evidence against Cartesian Egos because they are evidence against the claim that psychological unity is explained by ownership by a single person. Analogy: Cartesian Ego like Newtonian space and time. Newton believed that space and time had independent existence of all the things in them, and that this was necessitated to explain the position of those things. But Einsteinian physics rejects that. (However, Einstein can still talk about space and time distinct from the things “in” them, without implying that they have separate existence, and reductionists claim they can do the same for persons.)

[Discussion of apparently subjective thoughts, that Parfit claims can be accounted for using “this” [252].]

89. What Happens When I Divide? [253]

My Division:

My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two brothers [the three are identical triplets]. My brain is divided, and each half is successfully transplanted into the body of one of my brothers. Each of the resulting people believes that he is me, seems to remember living my life, has my character, and is in every other way psychologically continuous with me. And he has a body very like mine. [254-5]

The point this example should show: that personal identity is not what matters. Suppose we ask of this case “what happens to me?” There are four possibilities:

1. I do not survive.
   Parfit: I would have survived if only one had happened – how can I fail if two happen. “How could a double success be a failure?” [What would Nozick say?]

2. I survive as one of the two.

3. I survive as the other.
   Parfit: But they’re both the same – how could I be either without being the other? There’s no reason that could choose

4. I survive as both.
   a. …one divided mind in two bodies
      Parfit: what if the two separated, changed appearances and ended up playing tennis against each other. Am I playing tennis with myself without knowing? “It cannot be true that what I believe to be a stranger, standing there behind the net, is in fact another part of myself” [257].
   b. two different people
      Parfit: Suppose the two fight a duel: “Are there three people fighting, one on each side, and one on both? And suppose one of the bullets kills. Are there two acts, one murder and one suicide? How many people are left alive?”

All these possibilities are implausible, particularly since “whatever happened to me, we could not discover what happened” because no facts that we have access to would
decide the issue. This leaves the reductionist position: the question “which of them is me?” is an empty question. Analogy:

In 1881 the French Socialist Party split. What happened? Did the French Socialist Party cease to exist, or did it continue to exist as one or other of the two new parties? … Even if we have no answer to this question, we could know just what happened. [260]

Two kinds of empty questions:
1. Empty, with no answers (e.g., the question “Shall I survive?” in the central cases of the Combined Spectrum)
2. Empty, in that the answers are different descriptions of the same outcome, BUT one of the descriptions is better than the others. In the case of My Division, there is a best description: neither is me.

BUT because all the answers are just different descriptions of the same thing, the important answer is not really which is the best, but instead “what ought to matter to me?”

Sidenote: when discussing quasi-memories (impersonal analogs of memories that do not fall to Butler’s circularity criticism of Locke) Parfit mentioned (a) that memories are not the only psychological relations that underlie relation R, and (b) that he could give impersonal variants on those, too. One such relation is “that which holds between an intention and the later action in which this intention is carried out” [261]. Quasi-intentions can affect one or other (or both) of the two resulting person of My Division. (So just as I can have quasi-memories of two people in the past, I can quasi-intend the actions of two people in the future.) This is another example of a non-personal psychological relation (because I can quasi-intend both, but according to our notions of identity, both can’t be me).

90. What Matters When I Divide? [261]

We care about personal identity, which is relation-R plus uniqueness (which is why both of the resulting people in My Division can’t be me). BUT, says Parfit, we should only care about relation-R – we shouldn’t regard My Division as like death (because it’s just like cases where nobody would say that I die, except it’s like TWO such cases!) To put it “mathematically”, if personal identity is relation-R plus uniqueness (PI=R+U), personal identity only matters at all because of R, and U adds nothing:

If I will be R-related to some future person, the presence or absence of U makes no difference to the intrinsic nature of my relation to this person. And what matters most must be the intrinsic nature of this relation. [263]

(Here Parfit appears to agree with Williams, and disagree with Nozick.)

What we should believe about division:
• Neither resulting person is me (so, if we’re non-reductionists, I have died)
• This doesn’t matter(because personal identity is not what matters)

Division is not as bad as death – it could be better or worse than normal survival [264]:
• worse because it would be “unpleasantly uncanny” to have a duplicate; we might compete for the love of a partner
• better because I have a “doubling of the years to be lived”, I can get two different lives lived, each as proud of the other as a parent of a child.

91. Why There Is No Criterion of Identity that Can Meet Two Plausible Requirements [266]

Bernard Williams’s two requirements for personal identity:
Whether a future person will be me must depend only on the intrinsic features of the relation between us. It cannot depend on what happens to other people (this is what Nozick’s closest continuer position denies).

Since personal identity has great significance, whether identity holds cannot depend on a trivial fact.

Parfit’s version of the Psychological criterion (relation R PLUS non-branching) fails to meet these standards, and thus cannot, according to Williams, explain personal identity. This is because the “non-branching” relies on facts about other people. If I have a duplicate, what would have been me otherwise is not me (the branch-line case vs. teleporting). Williams believes that these requirements support a (1) non-reductionist version of the (2) physical criterion.

Parfit’s response: the My Division case is an example of physical branching, so either his view has to say that both are me (which it can’t) or neither are (which it can’t, because if only one or the other existed Williams would say that person is me, and the existence of the other one can’t be allowed to change this without violating his first requirement).

[Discussion of a possible new physical criterion, requiring that more than half of my brain survive, but this is quickly dismissed [270].]

Conclusion: “no plausible criterion of identity can meet both requirements” [270]

[Cartesian egos can, but are implausible.]

HOWEVER: relation-R meets both intrinsic and non-trivial requirements:

In the case where I divide, though my relation to each of the resulting people cannot be called identity, it contains what fundamentally matters. [271]

92. Wittgenstein and Buddha [273]
While Wittgenstein would not have liked the reductionist view, he would have agreed with the reductionist that we should reject the beliefs that most people have about Parfit’s cases, that we are separately existing entities (distinct from brain and body), and entities whose existence is all-or-nothing.
The Buddha would have accepted the reductionist view (see Appendix J).

93. Am I Essentially My Brain? [273]
Nagel argues that what I am essentially is just my brain. Parfit argues against this in Appendix D. Parfit discusses Nozick’s closest continuer view in Appendix E.

94. Is The True View Believable? [274]
Ordinary survival is about as bad as being destroyed and replicated. [280]