

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics  
Prof. Funkhouser  
Parfit, “Personal Identity”

- Q: If true, what does the following statement tell us about personal identity?:

We can, I think, describe cases in which, though we know the answer to every other question, we have no idea how to answer a question about personal identity. (365)

- Parfit will argue that personal identity is not essential for survival, memory, and responsibility.

I.

- Here is Parfit’s way of putting our objection against Shoemaker’s “no-branching” exception:

It seems to follow that I could survive if half my brain were successfully transplanted and the other half were destroyed. But if this is so, how could I *not* survive if the other half were also successfully transplanted? How could a double success be a failure? (366)

- Parfit suggests that he would survive Wiggins’s operation as a divided mind inhabiting two bodies.

- There are cases of divided minds *within* a body — Parfit’s mathematics exam example.

... a person’s mental history need not be like a canal, with only one channel. It could be like a river, with islands, and with separate streams. (367)

Though, in the math example, the mind is eventually united and only one body is involved.

- Parfit concludes that the Wiggins operation produces two people. Parfit claims that he would survive the operation as these people, though he is not

identical to either.

## II.

- Identity is all-or-nothing and one-one; survival comes in degrees and can be many-one (or one-many).

- Survival, not identity, is “what matters”.

- Parfit makes the Shoemaker move:

... even if psychological continuity is neither logically, nor always in fact, one-one, it can provide a criterion of identity. For this can appeal to the relation of *non-branching* psychological continuity, which is logically one-one. (369)

## III.

- Parfit introduces his concept of *q*-remembering, which is just like remembering but without the identity requirement. He also introduces *q*-intending, and various other psychological concepts that eliminate identity requirements.

## IV.

- Fusion is different from fission, in that incompatible psychological traits and states must be modified. This can make survival come in degrees, unlike with most fission cases.

- Distinguish *psychological continuity* from *psychological connectedness*. The latter, unlike the former, is not transitive: “Connectedness requires direct relations.” (372) Parfit claims that, when it comes to survival, connectedness is more important than continuity.

## V.

- Things related by psychological continuity are *descendant* or *ancestral selves*.

- Parfit provides three kinds of examples. Let’s concentrate on the third one. A long-lasting, psychologically continuous thing exists. But, the range of psychological connectedness, for this being, is more limited.

When the connections are reduced, when there has been any marked change of character or style of life, or any marked loss of memory, our imagined beings would say, “It was not I who did that, but an earlier self.” They could then describe in what ways, and to what degree, they are related to this earlier self. (374)