

# What Matters in Survival

Johan E. Gustafsson

# What Matters in Survival

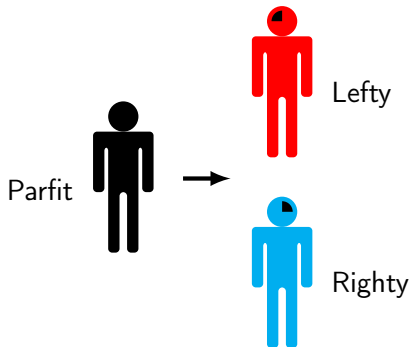
According to a common-sense platitude, identity is what matters in survival.

To say that a relation is what matters in survival is to say that it is in virtue of that relation one has reasons for prudential concern for whether one's survival will be good or bad.

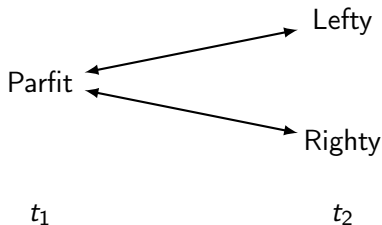
Parfit's thesis is that personal identity is not what matters in survival.

Derek Parfit (1984, pp. 254–255):

*My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two brothers. 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 that is very like mine.*



Given the various types of continuities that we have used to analyse personal identity, we have that the following connections hold (they might be physical, psychological, or phenomenal connections):



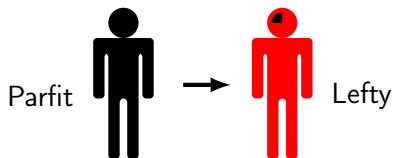
Parfit spells out the various possibilities in this case.

- (1) Parfit does not survive.
- (2) Parfit survives as just Lefty.
- (3) Parfit survives as just Righty.
- (4) Parfit survives as both Lefty and Righty.

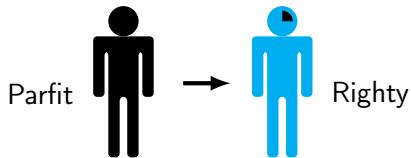
Parfit (1984, p. 256) rejects (1), that is, that he does not survive:

*The objection to (1) is this. I would survive if my brain was successfully transplanted. And people have in fact survived with half their brains destroyed. Given these facts, it seems clear that I would survive if half my brain was successfully transplanted, and the other half was destroyed. So how could I fail to survive if the other half was also successfully transplanted? How could a double success be a failure?*

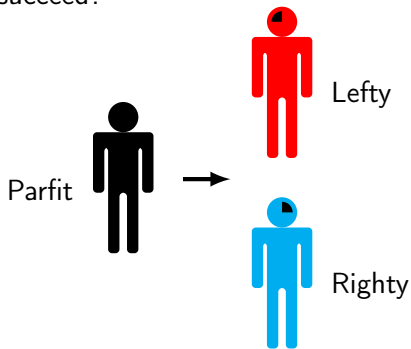
It seems that Parfit would survive if just the transplant to Lefty had succeeded:



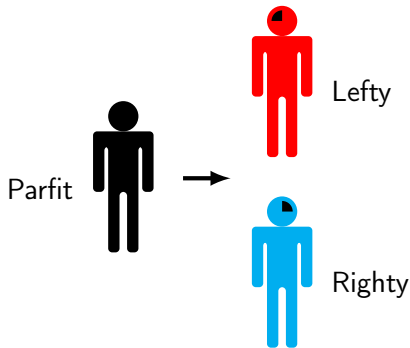
And it also seems that Parfit would survive if just the transplant to Righty had succeeded:

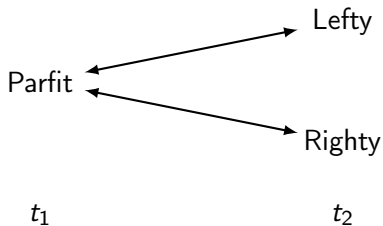


But, if so, how can Parfit fail to survive when both transplants succeed?



Because of the symmetry in his relation to Righty and Lefty, Parfit does not find plausible either of (2) he survives as just Lefty or (3) he survives as just Righty.

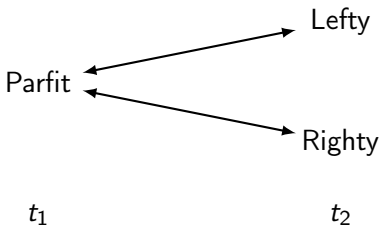




Parfit favours the only remaining view (4) that he survives as both.

The problem is then how to best account for that.





(a) Parfit = Lefty and Parfit = Righty

Problem: Parfit would be in two different places at  $t_2$ , also since identity is transitive, we have Lefty = Righty.

(b) Parfit = Lefty and Parfit  $\neq$  Righty

(c) Parfit  $\neq$  Lefty and Parfit = Righty

Problem: There is no way of determining which of (b) and (c) is the case.

Parfit defends therefore:

(d) Parfit  $\neq$  Lefty and Parfit  $\neq$  Righty

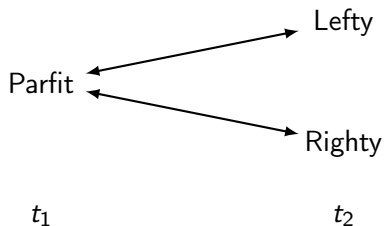
# The Only-x-and-y Principle

Harold W. Noonan (1989, p. 152; 2003, p. 129):

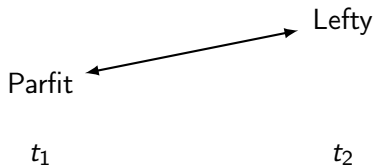
## *The Only-x-and-y Principle*

Whether a later individual  $y$  is identical with an earlier individual  $x$  can depend only on facts about  $x$  and  $y$ .

This might be a problem for Parfit's analysis. If in



we claim that Parfit  $\neq$  Lefty and Parfit  $\neq$  Righty, then in



we should similarly claim that Parfit  $\neq$  Lefty.

How can whether Righty exists matter for whether Parfit = Lefty?

If only Lefty had survived, the relation that matters in survival seems to hold between Parfit at  $t_1$  and Lefty at  $t_2$ .

Also, if only Righty had survived, the relation that matters in survival seems to hold between Parfit at  $t_1$  and Righty at  $t_2$ .

Parfit (1984, p. 262):

*each of the resulting people thus contains everything that would be needed for me to survive as that person. It cannot be the nature of my relation to each of the resulting people that, in this case, causes it to fail to be survival. Nothing is missing. What is wrong can only be the duplication.*

Parfit (1984, p. 261):

*We might say: 'You will lose your identity. But there are different ways of doing this. Dying is one, dividing is another. To regard these as the same is to confuse two with zero. Double survival is not the same as ordinary survival. But this does not make it death. It is even less like death.'*

Since double survival does not fit the logic of identity, Parfit claims instead that

*Relation R is what matters. R is psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, with the right kind of cause.*

The right kind of cause for Parfit is any kind of cause.

Parfit argues that if you are sick and then get cured, it does not matter in what way you were cured. So, analogously, if you find yourself *R*-related to a person in the past it should not matter how this was caused.

Parfit holds that when  $R$  holds uniquely from a present person to a future person then there is personal identity.

personal identity =  $R$ -relation holding uniquely

Two requirements:

*Requirement (1):* 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.

*Requirement (2):* Since personal identity has great significance, whether identity holds cannot depend on a trivial fact.

Parfit (1984, pp. 266–273) argues that no criterion of personal identity can meet both of these requirements.

First, all theories with a non-branching clause violates (1).

So the following is ruled out:

*The Physical Criterion: If there will be a future person with enough of my brain to be the brain of a living person, this person will be me, unless there will also be someone else with enough of my brain.*



We could suggest the following instead:

*The New Physical Criterion: A future person will be me if and only if this person is both living and has more than half my brain.*

This proposal fails to meet requirement (2), since trivial change in the amount of my brain a future person has will be crucial for whether I am identical to that person.

William's requirements restated for what matters:

*Requirement (1):* Whether a future person will be related by what matters to me depend only on the intrinsic features of the relation between us. It cannot depend on what happens to other people.

*Requirement (2):* Since what matters in survival has great significance, whether this relation holds cannot depend on a trivial fact.

Parfit thinks the *R*-relation meets these requirements.

## References

- Noonan, Harold W. (1989) *Personal Identity*, London: Routledge.  
— (2003) *Personal Identity*, London: Routledge, 2nd edn.  
Parfit, Derek (1984) *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.