

Principles and Persons: The Legacy of Derek Parfit

Derek Parfit's 1984 book, *Principles and Persons*, is a seminal work in contemporary philosophy. It has had a profound impact on our understanding of ethics and personal identity, and continues to be widely debated and discussed today.



Principles and Persons: The Legacy of Derek Parfit

by Jeff McMahan

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

Language : English
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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
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Lending : Enabled



In *Principles and Persons*, Parfit argues that the traditional concept of personal identity is flawed. He claims that there is no such thing as a single, unchanging self that persists over time. Instead, he suggests that our identity is more like a series of overlapping "stages" or "selves." These selves are connected by a chain of psychological continuity, but they are not identical to each other.

Parfit's theory of personal identity has implications for a wide range of ethical issues. For example, he argues that it is not always possible to identify the same person over time. This has implications for our understanding of responsibility, punishment, and reward.

Parfit also argues that the traditional distinction between persons and things is not as clear-cut as we might think. He suggests that there may be cases where it is difficult to say whether a particular entity is a person or not. This has implications for our understanding of the moral status of animals and fetuses.

Principles and Persons is a challenging and thought-provoking work that has had a profound impact on contemporary philosophy. It is a must-read for anyone interested in ethics, personal identity, or the nature of the self.

Key Themes in Principles and Persons

Some of the key themes in *Principles and Persons* include:

- **The non-identity problem:** Parfit argues that there is no such thing as a single, unchanging self that persists over time. Instead, he suggests that our identity is more like a series of overlapping "stages" or "selves." These selves are connected by a chain of psychological continuity, but they are not identical to each other.
- **The relational theory of personal identity:** Parfit argues that our identity is not determined by our internal states, but rather by our relationships with others. He claims that we are the same person over time because we have a continuing relationship with ourselves.

- **The moral significance of personal identity:** Parfit argues that the traditional distinction between persons and things is not as clear-cut as we might think. He suggests that there may be cases where it is difficult to say whether a particular entity is a person or not. This has implications for our understanding of the moral status of animals and fetuses.

The Legacy of Principles and Persons

Principles and Persons has had a profound impact on contemporary philosophy. It has been widely debated and discussed, and has helped to shape our understanding of ethics, personal identity, and the nature of the self.

Some of the ways in which Principles and Persons has influenced contemporary philosophy include:

- **It has challenged the traditional concept of personal identity:** Parfit's theory of personal identity has forced philosophers to rethink the traditional view of the self as a single, unchanging entity. This has led to a number of new theories of personal identity, and has helped to deepen our understanding of the nature of the self.
- **It has raised new questions about the moral status of animals and fetuses:** Parfit's work has led to a renewed debate about the moral status of animals and fetuses. This debate has focused on the question of whether these entities are persons, and has helped to shape our understanding of the moral obligations that we have to them.

- **It has helped to shape our understanding of ethics:** Parfit's work has helped to shape our understanding of ethics by providing a new framework for thinking about moral problems. His theory of personal identity has implications for a wide range of ethical issues, and has helped to deepen our understanding of the nature of morality.

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