

Emotion, Memory and Personality
The Essence of "Self" and
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

We have had several discussions on what determines "self" or who we are.

We read philosophers who argued that our collected memories are part of that discussion.

- "Reflected" memory being memories we can call back.

- "Unreflected" memory being memories we cannot recall.

Questions:

How much of who you are..."your sense of self" ...

How much of that defines who you are?

But am I ONLY the collective memories in my brain?

Am I not MORE than my collective memories?

We read a philosopher who seemed to say that our essence [self] is what we are in the present. That our past is NOT our essence...

and that NOTHING can count as our future because as soon as the future happens, it is our past.

If you fear that I am trying to drag you back into these particular philosophical discussions...

Let me assure you that I am moving into a somewhat "new" area today.

But isn't it interesting that your thoughts about "reflected" and "unreflected" memory... YOUR MEMORY of those previous discussions have triggered [for some of you]...perhaps a dread response?

So, let me get into a new dimension of this subject.

Have any of you personally known someone who had a TBI, a traumatic brain injury?
OR a military combat veteran who has PTSD?

I know 2-3 people, distant friends...I mostly know their adult children...or their spouse. All of these victims of TBI are/were men.

One was in a car accident.

One was in a tragic work accident and was run over by 18 wheeler at a loading dock.

And one was a personal friend who had a brain tumor.

All lost some of their memories of their lives.

Two lost MOST of their past memories.

All three of these men had a personality change.

One man had no memory of being married... no memory of his four children...

His family was devastated, trying to reorient him into their family.

This was a wonderful Christian man who, after his

brain injury, became a quiet, sullen man.

Outbursts of anger, swearing at his wife or at anyone who tried to help him.

Never showed a sense of moving back and forth between his past...and what was now his "new" personality.

I heard another story in a documentary, so this is not somebody I know.

A woman who had been an ardent atheist...was kind of bitter towards her friends and family, had a serious car accident with a TBI...

When she came out of unconsciousness...she was 100% flipped different. She immediately spoke of God in her life, was happy and cheerful...and by all accounts as if she had experienced a complete internal life change.

QUESTION:

Were these completely different people...living in the same body?

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What about 3-4 of my personal friends who have suffered from PTSD from being in combat?

Their memories are intact...the constant memories of tragic things they witnessed...or of things they did, haunt them.

They have personality changes...interruptions in their daily lives where something triggers them... and they quickly slip back into combat mode

they think somebody is trying to kill them... or that an attacker is outside, so they jump into protection/combat mode.

Many former soldiers have been able to find significant healing from PTSD.

QUESTIONS:

Are these people forever changed?

Do they remain the same person?
with the same consciousness?

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Is my "self" ONLY defined by my memories of
the past?

Is our consciousness ONLY the collective
memories?

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Some of my high school friends were amazed
when they saw me at our 40 yr reunion.

I had a spiritual awakening when I was 17.
It indeed changed how I viewed the world.
My family told me it was just a "religious" phase
and it would pass.

40 years later...

My old high school friends were astonished.

I am a "different" person.

But I would tell you that MOST of the changes in me happened fairly slowly over 40 years.

BUT: AM I a different person now...or the same person with new/different memories?