

# Conceptual Quarantine

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Many have found it useful to model certain agents as having mental states which are divided or *fragmented*, in order to account for

- conflicting desires (Plato (*Republic*, 439a–c), Davidson (1982)),
- inconsistent beliefs (Lewis 1982)
- limited recall (Cherniak 1983)
- logical non-omniscience (Stalnaker 1984),
- self-deception (Davidson 1986),
- delusions (Davies and Egan 2013), and
- implicit/explicit attitude differences. (Gendler 2008; Mandelbaum 2016).

It's generally assumed that fragmentation either constitutes or indicates some defect.

*Anti-Fragmentation*: For any fragmented state, there's a non-fragmented state that is more epistemically ideal.

**My thesis**: a kind of fragmented concept possession is epistemically ideal, so Anti-Fragmentation is false.

## Part I Fragmented Concept Possession

A case motivating fragmented information access from Elga and Rayo (forthcoming, p. 3):

### *Jack's memory*

Jack has a neighbor he sees only infrequently. The neighbor's name is "Beatrice Ogden", and she lives in apartment 23-H. If asked "What is the name of the person in 23-H?" Jack is disposed to groan, scratch his head, mutter "I know this, don't tell me. . ." but be unable to answer. But if instead asked "How do you know Beatrice Ogden?", Jack is disposed to immediately reply, "She's the person in 23-H."

Elga and Rayo model fragmentation of information access by representing various pieces of information as *indexed* to certain conditions.

<i>Elicitation Condition</i>	<i>Information accessible</i>
Recently asked "Where does Ogden live?"	Ogden lives in 23-H [irrelevant information]
Recently asked "Who lives in 23-H?"	[irrelevant information]
...	...

I claim we need two-part indices: we need to specify both the conditions under which the information is available *and* what the information can be used for.

Combining *Jack's Memory* with a split-brain case:

<i>Elicitation Condition</i>	<i>Information</i>	<i>Use</i>
Right visual field: who is in apartment 23-H?		Verbal reporting
Right visual field: which apartment is Ogden in?	Ogden is in 23-H	Verbal reporting
Left visual field: who is in apartment 23-H?		Left hand pointing
Left visual field: which apartment is Ogden in?		Left hand pointing

Extending this to concept possession: just replace '*Information*' with '*Concept*'

**concept**: an ability to grasp a particular content or set of contents.

Some motivation to think our concept possession is fragmented:

- Limited Recall (not just of answer, but of possible answer)
- Implicit vs. Explicit (GLASS FLOOR, sentence parsing)
- Category Mistakes (see also Pérez Carballo (2016) on logical non-omniscience)

## Part II The Ideal of Concept Fragmentation

A case from Carey (2009):

Adults have DENSITY and WEIGHT

Children have WEIGHNSITY

Understanding, and not merely truth/knowledge, is epistemically valuable. (Elgin (1996), Zagzebski (1996), Kvanvig (2003), et al.)

In particular, understanding someone in a first-personal/‘from the inside’ way is epistemically valuable (Grimm 2016).

Being able to grasp contents as someone else does contributes to this kind of understanding.

A benefit to concept possession: allows for this kind of epistemic empathy.

Having DENSITY allows me, to better understand DENSITY-users’ thoughts, at least in some respect.

But similarly, it is a cost to concept possession. It is essential to the child’s puzzlement about the sinking block that they lack access to the concept DENSITY. Having access to it prevents me from fully understanding the child’s puzzlement.

With the right kind of fragmentation, one can have the benefits of concept possession without the costs.

<i>Elicitation</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Use</i>
[all conditions]	DENSITY	thinking about physical objects; interpreting DENSITY-USERS
[all conditions]	WEIGHNSITY	interpreting WEIGHNSITY-USERS

‘interpreting’ might be spelled out in different ways, but Goldman (2006)-style simulation is a natural fit.

## Part III Consequences & Extensions

- Defective concepts

Defective concepts should be quarantined, rather than fully possessed (contra a suggestion by Carr (2015)) or eliminated.

- Coherence Ideals

We should either allow fragmented states to count as coherent (contra Worsnip (2018)) or else reject coherence as a normative ideal.

- Non-idealized agents?

Pros	Cons
narrowing options	clutter
uncertainty	risk of ‘overflow’
...?	...?

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