

PHIL447: Ethical Theory
Tropman
Personal Identity

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Case I: Teletransportation

At some point in the future, scientists develop a new, cheap, and extremely fast way of traveling to Mars. The traveler steps into a booth, and the machine operator presses a button. The machine then records the exact state of every molecule in the traveler's body, and in doing so destroys the traveler's body. The machine then sends the information about the exact state of every molecule in the traveler's body to Mars over radio waves. On Mars, the receiving machine makes an exact molecule for molecule duplicate of the traveler's body on earth.

- (1) Would teletransportation be a way of traveling, or a way of dying? Why or why not?

Case II: Fission

- (2) Suppose that your brain is transplanted into someone else's brainless body. Is the resulting person you?
- (3) Suppose that you are in a terrible car accident and suffer a severe head injury. Doctors have to remove the right hemisphere of your brain. You wake up in the hospital. Is the resulting person you?
- (4) Suppose you undergo an operation in which your brain is divided, and each half is housed in a new body. Both resulting people have your character and apparent memories of your life. What happens to you? There seem to be three possibilities: (i) you do not survive, (ii) you survive as one of the two people, or (iii) you survive as both. Which possibility seems most plausible and why?

Case III: Dr. Nefarious

Consider the following cases. In each case suppose that you have been captured by Dr. Nefarious, and that he informs you that your body will be tortured. Then, Dr. Nefarious attempts to reassure you with the following description of what will happen to you right *before* the torture:

In which cases do you fear the pain of the torture?

In which cases are *you* the person subject to the torture?

- (a) You will be subjected to an operation which produces total amnesia.
- (b) You will be subjected to an operation which produces total amnesia, and other procedures will lead to certain changes in your character.

(over)

- (c) You will be subjected to an operation which produces total amnesia, and other procedures will lead to certain changes in your character while at the same time certain “memory” beliefs will be induced in you. Only this time, both the character traits and “memory” impressions are designed to be appropriate of Bill Clinton.
- (d) The same as (c), only this time the result of (c) is produced by transferring information (beliefs, character, dispositions, “memories,” etc.) into you directly *from* Bill Clinton’s brain by a procedure that leaves Clinton’s brain the same as it was before.
- (e) The same thing happens to you as in (d), only this time Bill Clinton’s brain does *not* remain the same. All the information from your brain will be transferred into Bill Clinton’s brain.

Reading Questions

Derek Parfit, “Later Selves and Moral Principles:

1. What is the difference between the Simple View and the Complex View?
2. Parfit thinks that the Complex view both weakens some moral principles and also might change some principles’ scope? Using each of the three subjects (or kinds of principles) that he considers, can you explain why this is so? Consider both the case where the psychological connections are strong and where they are weak. On each case, for each of the three principles, what is the result: weakening and/or change in scope, and why?
3. How does the Complex View relate to utilitarianism, for Parfit?