

Questions on Parfit, chapters 10 and 11

PHIL 1480 Metaphysics

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Note: don't worry if you don't follow everything in section 79 on a first reading: this section is a sort of preview of the remaining three chapters. Also, I won't mind if you skip from the middle of p. 224 to the top of p. 229.

1. Would you have chosen to use the Teletransporter [199] (instead of taking a long and onerous journey) if you had been given the option of doing so before being exposed at all to the philosophical literature on personal identity? Would you choose to use it now that you have thought a bit more about the issues? Explain.
2. If you were in the situation of Parfit's 'branch line' case [200-201], knowing that you were going to suffer cardiac failure in a few days while having a Replica on Mars, how would you feel? Much the same as if you were about to die without having a Replica? Much the same as if you were about to have a few days' worth of your memories erased? Or some other way? Explain.
3. Is the view that people do not survive Teletransportation really supported, as Parfit claims [201, top] by consideration of the branch line case? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Does it really follow from the Physical View (as Parfit states it) that people do not survive Teletransportation? (Mightn't someone think that Teletransportation moves our brains and bodies, as well as ourselves, from one place to another?)
5. The Psychological Criterion entails that it is impossible for a person to survive a sufficiently drastic and sudden psychological change, involving total irrecoverable amnesia, a change of personality, etc: such a process would result in a literally new person in the same body. How plausible is this? Supposing we agree that this is impossible, where should we draw the line between changes that can and can't be survived?
6. How convincing is Parfit's defence of the Psychological Criterion against Butler's objection (that the notion of memory involves personal identity and hence cannot be used to explain it), in section 80?
7. Locke argued, influentially, against a view on which personal identity depends on the identity of separately existing entities (e.g. souls), on the grounds that this view would make it impossible for us to know or be justified in believing anything about personal identity. For example, we have no evidence that could justify us in ruling out the hypothesis that souls, and hence people, only exist for a day, after which then replaced by a new but psychologically similar soul. Parfit discusses this argu-

ment on pp. 223-224. How convincing is it? Does it presuppose some implausibly high standard for knowledge or justified belief?

8. How compelling is Williams' argument (described on pp. 229-230) against the Psychological Criterion, and/or Parfit's revised version of it (231)? Are these arguments more or less compelling than the analogous argument against the Physical Criterion developed on 234-235? What should we think about all these arguments?
9. Can there be cases where there is no fact of the matter about whether a person in the future will be oneself or someone else? Does "common sense" have a view on this question?