

Comments on Problem Set 8
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1. Parfit claims (p. 205) that it is 'wildly inconsistent' to regard fission as death. Explain Parfit's reasons for this claim. Is he right (1 sentence)?

The context of the passage in Parfit makes it clear that to 'regard fission as death' is to *feel* a certain way about fission, e.g., be motivated to avoid fission in the same way that we are normally motivated to avoid death. 'Regarding fission as death' is not the same thing as holding any particular *view* about what happens in fission, e.g. the view that it involves the original person's ceasing to exist. Nobody pointed this out, but Parfit's claim that it is 'wildly inconsistent' to feel this way about fission is of course exaggerated. Someone *could* consistently feel that way, just as someone could desire very strongly that there should be *exactly one* apple-tree in their garden—not two, and not none. What Parfit really means, I think, is that it would be *arbitrary and unnatural* to have such a very strong preference for a future in which only one "descendant self" of mine is around over one in which two of them are.

2. 'Identity must be part of what matters in survival. When we want survival, we want there to be someone in the future who has memories of the things that happen to us. But even if a person in the future who is not me has apparent memories that match my experiences, these will not be memories: rather, they will be misleading memory-hallucinations. So only my own continued existence can provide what matters.' Explain, on the basis of section 3 of 'Personal Identity', how Parfit would respond to this objection.

Many people answered this question by giving summaries (in some cases, much too long) of Parfit's remarks about q-memory, without adequately explaining the role these remarks might play in a response to the quoted objection. There are many ways one might respond to the argument; here is one.

'Indeed, a given person can only have *memories* of that very person's experiences. But not all events that are psychologically similar to memories without in fact being memories are mere memory-hallucinations: some of them are *q-memories*, which represent experiences that were actually had by someone, and are causally connected with those experiences in the right way. 'x has a memory of experience e' can be analysed as 'x has a q-memory of e, and the subject of e was x'. Once this concept has been introduced, there is a natural way to capture the basic idea that lay behind the original claim: what we want when we want survival is (in part) that someone in the future have *q-memories* of our own experiences. Only if one had some independent reason to think that *identity* was important in survival could it be reasonable to insist on the importance of memory, rather than q-memory.'

3. Lewis writes (p. 60): 'I claim that something is a continuant person if and only if it is a maximal R-interrelated aggregate of person-stages'. Explain.

All that was required here was a clear explanation in your own words of Lewis's definition of 'person'. Some account of the meaning of 'person-stage', 'R-

related', 'R-interrelated', 'maximally R-interrelated' and 'aggregate' would have been good.

4. According to Lewis, whenever there is a person who will later undergo fission, there are really two people who share a stage. One objection to this view is that it contradicts obvious facts about the number of people in various situations. For example, it seems to be a consequence of Lewis's account that it never happens that there is exactly one person in the waiting room of the duplication centre. (Suppose that once you have entered the waiting room there is no choice but to undergo fission.) Explain Lewis's response to this objection (p. 63ff.). Is the response convincing?

Most people handled this question pretty well.

5. Would it make sense to choose to undergo fission, if you knew that one of the two resulting people would die a painful death soon after the fission, while the other one would live to achieve your heart's desire? How does the answer to this question bear on Lewis's account of what matters in survival? (You might want to refer in your answer to Postscript A of 'Survival and Identity')

The answers to this one were a mixed bag. The most common problem was for people to describe fission in inconsistent ways---e.g. as involving the failure of the transitivity of identity.

General point: some of you make a lot of use of the phrase 'x's identity'. ('My identity will still exist after the fission'; 'I will come to have a new identity', 'Before the fission, they shared the same identity', etc.) Don't! I have *no idea* what this phrase is supposed to mean—the only remotely plausible hypothesis I can come up with is that 'x's identity' is another way to say 'x'; but if this is right, then it obviously would be a much better idea to just say 'x'. I'm serious about this.