

Questions on Parfit, chapters 12 and 13

PHIL 1480 Metaphysics

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This is a pretty long excerpt. You won't miss anything essential if you skip from the start of section 91, on p. 266, to the end of the last full paragraph on p. 279, and stop reading altogether at the end of section 97.

1. Do you agree with Parfit's claim that even those who are not Reductionists should think that the story of *My Physics Exam* is a story of just one person (p. 248)?
2. How compelling is the argument for Reductionism based on cases like *My Physics Exam*? What, if anything, stops a Non-Reductionist from accepting the explanation of the "unity of consciousness" as consisting in the existence of states of simultaneous awareness of many experiences, which Parfit attributes to Reductionists?
3. On pp. 256–58, Parfit discusses several different views on which one can say that, in the case of *My Division*, I "survive as" both of the two people. (For example, there is the astounding view that what we have afterwards is not really two people but one unusually large and spatially scattered person with two streams of consciousness.) Which is the most plausible of these views? What are its problems, and how serious are they?
4. How compelling is the argument for Reductionism based on this case?
5. Is Parfit right that 'on the Reductionist view, the problem disappears' (260)? (Consider: *everyone* is a Reductionist about ships, but the Ship of Theseus case is still much-discussed.) How can a question both be empty and have a right answer, as Parfit seems to suggest in the middle of p. 260? Given Parfit's notion of an empty question, do most philosophical questions turn out to be empty?
6. Is Parfit right that the original person does not survive in cases like *My Division*?
7. What would be your attitude to the prospect of undergoing this kind of fission yourself? Would it seem as bad as death, or potentially quite inviting...? (Suppose both fission products would be psychologically just like you as you are right now.)
8. What does Parfit mean by the question whether identity or some other relation 'matters'?
9. Suppose that you became convinced of Reductionism. How would your emotional reactions compare to those Parfit describes in section 95?
10. Parfit claims (in sections 96 and 97) that, if Reductionism is true, it would be unreasonable to care much about the difference between teletransportation and ordinary survival, or about the difference between the Branch-Line case and ordinary survival, or about the difference between fission and ordinary survival (practical issues about, e.g., conflict between my two fission products aside). Do you agree? Explain.

11. Would it be rational for someone—a sea-captain, say—to care a lot about continuing to have the *same ship* over time, in such a way that the philosophical task of resolving puzzles like that of the Ship of Theseus would have, for this person, great practical significance? If so, is this fact consistent with Reductionism about ships? How does this bear on Parfit's argument from Reductionism about persons to conclusions about what it makes sense to care about?