

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood” –Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

Parfit's Teletransporter Thought Experiment

Version 1: You step into a machine and you seem to disappear. A radio sends information about how you were assembled to a new machine on Mars and the machine puts molecules together to reconstitute a person very much like you on Mars.

This teletransporter seems like an excellent way to *travel*. But what about:

Version 2: As before, except now the teletransporter is functioning so well that there is no need to “dissolve” the person who steps in. The person “left over” after transportation may die shortly after teletransportation occurs.

Are all these cases on a par? That is, should we answer the question: “Is the person who steps out on Mars the person who stepped into the machine?” in the *same* way in both cases?

Fission Cases

It is tempting to treat the person left behind in version 2 as the genuine you: they have your actual body and brain and are continuous with you in most normal ways we use to assess personal identity. But some thought experiments are even more problematic: duplication occurs in “symmetric” ways. For example:

Version 3: As with version 1 except there is a slight malfunction and the data from your scan gets sent to *two* planets: Mars and Venus. So there are two people in the future who both claim to be “you.”

Or suppose you otherwise split in two, kind of like an amoeba. Or your memories get implanted in two new “blank slate” brains. In these cases there are two people who might be you. Let's call them “Lefty” and “Righty.” Which one is you? Let's consider some cases by process of elimination.

Option 1: Lefty is you. Righty isn't.
Problem: Seems arbitrary.

Option 2: Righty is you. Lefty isn't.
Problem: Same.

Option 3: Lefty and Righty are (collectively) *one person*, who is you.
Problem: They don't seem to be one person at all, especially as time goes on.

- Option 4: Lefty is you, and so is Righty, though Lefty isn't Righty.
Problem: Violates constraint on numerical identity. It's simply incoherent to say two things are numerically one.
- Option 5: You were never just one person, but two (Lefty and Righty) who have now been separated out.
Problem: Seems unprincipled. And the solution doesn't generalize easily.
- Option 6: Neither is you. You have ceased to exist.
Problem: ???

It seems like our previous psychological theory

Psychological Theory A: Person stage A is part of the same person as a later person stage B if they are part of a “chain” of person stages such that each later stage causally-remembers being its immediately preceding stages.

predicts option 3 (or maybe 4) should be right. If that bothers us maybe we should endorse:

Psychological Theory B (No Competitors): Person stage A is part of the same person as a later person stage B if they meet the conditions of psychological theory A *and* there are not multiple chains meeting those conditions of which person stage A is a part.

Is this believable? Consider an analogy from chalk.

Suppose I gradually wear away at a piece of chalk by writing with it until it is half used. Is the result the numerically same piece of chalk I started with? You might think so. But what if I broke the original, unused piece of chalk in two equal parts. Which of these two pieces would be the original? It seems like neither.

Is Identity an “Intrinsic” Matter?

Suppose you are the same person you were yesterday. You might think this just depends on *you* and *the person you were yesterday* and perhaps how you are related. This would mean identity between persons is **intrinsic** to the persons related (it depends only on facts about them). If Psychological Theory B is correct, that's wrong. The identity between you and your manifestation yesterday depends on what is happening *throughout the entire universe* (anywhere a duplicate of you might be created). Identity depends on facts “extrinsic” to the things identified.

Gretchen thinks this leads to “a pile of absurdities”. What if, right now, God created a duplicate of you somewhere. Then he would have *killed* you according to Psychological Theory B. Does that seem right?