

Personal Identity Case Studies

- a) **Miranda** is 19. She has a severe form of cancer that is spreading rapidly through her body. Doctors warn that it will spread to her brain soon, and that there is nothing they can do. However, one doctor suggests a radical new treatment. A 19-year old man, Tony, was just admitted to hospital after a motorbike accident. His body is fit and healthy, but his brain is completely dead. Miranda's brain could perhaps be transplanted into Tony's skull. Miranda's parents decide to take the risk, and transplant their daughter's brain into Tony's body. The resulting person still calls herself Miranda, and has all of Miranda's memories and personality, though in Tony's body. Her parents are overjoyed, and think she survived the operation. Meanwhile, Tony's parents are also glad: it seems like he's still around, even though his memories and personality have changed. Miranda picks up a few of Tony's quirks. She finds her sexuality and gender identity begin to shift, though she still broadly identifies as female. She also finds herself enjoying sports and athletic activity more (Tony was 6'4 and very fit). **Did Miranda survive the accident? Did Tony?**
- b) **Jonathan** is 75 years old and suffers a severe stroke. He suffers severe and permanent amnesia and loses all memory of his life before the incident. He cannot recognize or remember his family or friends: his wife looks like a complete stranger to him. Likewise, the house where he lived for forty years is entirely unfamiliar to him, and he has to ask for directions to the bathroom. Nonetheless, he remains alert, intelligent, and fully mobile. He understands his predicament, that he is a man without a past. He tries to rekindle past memories by looking through old photo albums and talking things through with his wife, but without success. Doctors say his memory loss is permanent. Notice, however, that Jonathan kept most of the same abilities he had before the stroke: he still speaks fluent French, can cook well, and has a mean backhand in tennis. But he has no idea how he knows how to do these things. His preferences, too, have not changed: he still loves beer, hates asparagus, and enjoys taking country walks. **Is Jonathan the same person?**
- c) **Finn** is working at a factory one day when a large iron rod is propelled through his brain, destroying much of his left frontal lobe. Amazingly, he recovers from the accident with his memories intact he can still recognize his family, friends, and familiar places, and even has a clear recollection of the day of the accident. However, his personality changes radically. Whereas before the accident he was a church-going tea-total family man, after the accident he becomes a profane sex-obsessed alcoholic. He laughs and jokes about his personality before the accident, saying that he used to be a sap, and that the accident was the best thing that ever happened to him. Close friends say that he has changed beyond all recognition, and that he's not the same Finn. **Is Finn the same person?**

- d) In the future, it becomes common for people to have life extension treatments. **Janice** is an American woman who is seventy years old when she decides to book in for the treatment. Through changing the genetic mechanisms of aging, scientists are able to reverse the process in Janice. After a few weeks of therapy, she looks like a woman in her early twenties, and she is told that she will never age and can now live potentially indefinitely. Her husband and family decide not to get the therapy, and within a few decades, they are all dead. Janice maintains some contact with her grandchildren, but by age 200 she is remarried with new children and living in Paris, France. A few hundred years later, she is living in Tokyo, speaking fluent Japanese. She is interviewed aged 740 as one of the first people to undergo life extension treatment. She claims to remember nothing about her early life or her parents, and has forgotten how to speak English, now conversing solely in French and Japanese. She has dim recollections of her first husband, but says they are like a dream. **Is Janice still the same person?**
- e) Two identical twins, **Fred** and **George**, are involved in a severe car accident. Both of them suffer severe brain damage, losing around 50% of their brain mass each. However, whereas Fred suffers catastrophic damage to his left hemisphere, George suffers catastrophic damage to his right. Medical staff realize that neither is going to survive: too much brain tissue has been lost. In a desperate move, doctors transplant the remainder of Fred's brain into George's skull and reconnect the two hemispheres. The resulting individual, whom doctors nickname 'Frorge', displays the same personality as Fred and George did before the accident (they were very similar). However, he has a couple of novel traits: Fred used to like pasta but hated cheese, while George loved cheese but hated pasta. Frorge's favorite dish is mac and cheese! Frorge also has rich memories of life before the accident, but some of these are from Fred's perspective, and some are from George's perspective. **Did either Fred or George survive the accident? If yes, was it just one of them, or both?**
- f) **Belinda**, an extreme snowboarder, was always planning ahead. She knew her career choice was dangerous. So, she took advantage of the latest medical science, and arranged for a clone of herself to be grown and stored in a tank ready for use if she died. On top of this, every two weeks she checked in to have her brain scanned in fine detail. The resultant data was stored on a computer, ready to be uploaded to the clone's brain. As Belinda feared, she eventually suffered an accident, though not snowboarding: she was killed in a hit and run as she left the brain scanning clinic. Within a few hours, scientists had uploaded her memories to her clone body. Once awakened, 'Belinda 2.0' was surprised to hear of her death, but very relieved that she had been sensible and arranged to have her body backed up. She went home that same day, and at the request of medical staff, her husband and children were never informed about the accident, nor did they ever notice the difference. **Is Belinda still the same person?**