

“Imagine you are Michael Harding. As you lie injured on the road, you are told that a brain scanner is going to be used to map your memories and personality, and the information used to programme the brain of a new body cloned from of your own cells. The moment the new “you” gains consciousness, the old “you” will be painlessly destroyed. How do you feel about that prospect? Justify your answer by reference to one of the competing philosophical accounts of the relation between mind and body.”

As I lie on the road, in pain and terrified, the machine mapping my memories maps my pain but also my fear. I fear that “I” will not step out of the machine, but that it will only be a clone and that I, as I exist in those awful last moments, will cease to exist. Being a human animal there is no way I could view my coming extinction with anything other than dread, except, perhaps if I was a religious person who believed in reincarnation or resurrection.

Who or what steps out of the machine?

Is it the “new improved” version of me,” improved” as I no longer have mortal physical injuries? Is my clone the triumphant survivor or replica, or might it be traumatised by my last memories which become its first new memories. If the latter then that alone would mean that the new improved “me” could not be the person who existed prior to my accident. I would also never know whether the information passed on might be corrupted or even worse, incoherent, leaving me with the fear that the resulting “I” might “die” a second time as a consequence.

Be that as it may, I do not believe that any cloned version of myself could possibly be “me”. I do not subscribe to the materialist view of mind. I do not think that human brains are like machines that can be duplicated. However closely one could examine my brain, the experiences that I have had could never be replicated. Even if it were to become possible to use a “cerebrescope” to examine my brain function closely, that would still fail to convey the meaning of what it observed.

However, if my actual brain were removed and placed into another body, then I accept that the new individual would remain “me”. This new person, although looking very different, would be psychologically continuous with me, would have experienced my life as I knew and recalled it, and although I would not have been physically continuous, nevertheless “I” would continue to exist even though I might not recognise myself in the mirror! Hopefully, I would retain the privileged knowledge about my interior self and survive psychologically intact.

As Locke remarked, “...self is not determined by identity or diversity of substance...but only by identity of consciousness.” I have, anyway, changed physically many times throughout my life, from baby to adult, from being middle aged, to now (sadly) approaching older age. Nevertheless, I still recognise “myself” in all of these people because I remember being me; I remember how it felt to be me and how I experienced my life and even though I may not have intact memories, the person doing the remembering would surely have to be me? As Parfitt has pointed out, the gaps in memory can be explained as memory “chains” or “connectedness”; this allows that some memories can remain whilst others fade, but that the person nevertheless remains the same. A fictional example occurs in Kafka’s short story “Metamorphosis” where the narrator finds himself transformed into a huge insect but nevertheless recognises himself in that new body.

Locke also made a distinction between persons and humans in the example of the body swap

between the prince and the cobbler. The prince remained the same person although, because of the change of body, he was no longer the same man. What he retained was the memory of his psychological self which was sufficient to give him his identity. This also holds true when I go to bed at night, am not conscious of anything whilst I am asleep, yet retain my identity in the morning even though I have had dreams that have taken me elsewhere during the night.

There is, as Nagel said, something “that it is like” to be me. Even were my brain neurons replicated, and my memories fully restored, there could be no way that my clone could **interpret** those memories and experiences (qualia). It might remember facts, for instance where I lived or that I liked a certain piece of music, even why I liked it, but how it actually felt to be me whilst experiencing that home or piece of music would remain elusive and the clone would have to build up new meanings. What would a clone make of my secrets, or of my quasi-Freudian repressions? Even genetically identical twins, brought up in identical circumstances, could not be said to have the same interior view of the world as each other, even though they had had identical experiences.

I am here subscribing to a dualist view of the mind-body question rather than the materialist view which states that we **are** our brains, and that its millions of neurons will eventually be deciphered reducing our conscious experiences to observable and explicable physical phenomena. As a dualist I believe that even were my brain examined in minute detail, my individual conscious experience could never be discovered, let alone replicated. The creation of a clone might provide material continuity but no continuity of my unique consciousness and of my own subjective world.

I think that it is not ultimately provable that anyone else has consciousness as I experience it. To quote Nagel (What it is like to be a bat), “...physicalism is a position we cannot understand because we do not at present have any conception of how it might be true...”