

ASSIGNMENT #1

TA: Charles

The department of defense in collaboration with NASA have developed a Supersonic Tunnelling Underground Device designed to deliver atomic warheads through the earth's core to attack the missile silos in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately during an experimental launch, an early prototype of the missile was lodged one mile underground under Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Later when the researchers attempted to directly retrieve the lodged missile, they discovered that the missile's reaction with material deep within the earth have produced radiation that would cause severe abnormalities to brain tissue but was nevertheless harmless to all other tissues inside the body.

Therefore, the researchers have devised an alternative retrieval plan for the lodged missile; The retriever, Daniel Dennet, would leave his brain behind while the rest of his body would retrieve the lodged missile. The brain, whom Dennet names Yorick, would be placed inside a life-support system in Houston, Texas. However, Yorick would still be able to communicate with the body, whom Dennet names Hamlet, through pairs of microminiaturized radio transceivers attached between Yorick's input and output channel's to the nerve stump inside Hamlet's empty cranium.

After a successful surgery and recovery, Hamlet was airlifted to Tulsa, Oklahoma to retrieve the lodged missile while Yorick remained in Houston, Texas. Initially the mission was successful and Hamlet was able to local the logged missile. However after Hamlet started to dismantle the missile, the underground tunnel collapsed, presumptively killing Hamlet.

Concurrently in Houston, Texas, Yorick lost all radio contact with Hamlet and was thrown into limbo. Hours later, Dennet regained his consciousness in a slightly different body, whom Dennet names Fortinbras. With Fortinbras, Daniel decides to visit Yorick inside the life-support system.

However, Dennet discovers that prior to the mission, the researchers have constructed a computer duplicate of Yorick with the same processing structure and computational speed inside a giant computer program, whom Daniel names Hubert. The computer program, Hubert, is a real simulation of reality and its input and its activities were kept in parallel with Yorick after the surgery.

Later, the researchers show Dennet a master switch connecting to Yorick whom remains inside the life-support system. The switch has two positions; B for Yorick and H for Hubert. When Dennet switches to Yorick, the life-support system reconnects Yorick's mental outputs to Fortinbras in the real world. Similarly, when Dennet switches to Hubert, the life-support system would instead direct Yorick's mental outputs to Hubert in the virtual reality.

After switching between Yorick and Hubert, Dennet could not discover any differences switching between the realities; Dennet could start one sentence on one side of the switch, and finish his sentence on the other side without any pauses or delays.

Dennet contemplates about the possibilities and difficulties of living two lives; one life in the virtual reality and the other in the real world. However, Dennet whom understands the dangers of a technical failure, decides to place both Hubert and Yorick under secure doors at the lab in Houston to prevent any technical failures endangering his existence.

Although the technological feats within the excerpt may remain outside our ability for many generation, the thought experiment raises a very important question; After Dennet separates into Yorick and Hamlet, where is Dennet?

If we answer this question by following the theory of bodily continuity, Dennet's identity of self would follow Hamlet. Following the operation, Hamlet would retain all of Dennet's extrinsic

properties such as his weight and his citizenship. The external world would continue to recognize Hamlet in the same way after the operation.

For example, if Dennet would commit a crime while separated as Hamlet and Yorick, the criminal prosecutors would arrest and incarcerate Hamlet as the Hamlet body shares the same DNA and extrinsic properties as the perpetrator of the crime.

Similarly, criminal prosecutors would never investigate if the individual is psychologically continuous with the individual at the scene of the crime. For example, if Dennet and a researcher swapped minds prior and Dennet commits a crime prior to the operation, the prosecutors would arrest the Dennet body individual since the Dennet body individual would share the same extrinsic properties as the perpetrator of the crime.

However, the use of bodily continuity would contradict the best candidate theory. After Hamlet becomes trapped underground and loses all psychological connects to Yorick, the researchers attached a new body, Fortinbras, to Yorick's output receptors.

As a result, both Fortinbras and Hamlet are both possible candidates for Dennet. However, the trapped Hamlet body is mostly decomposed and loses almost all of Dennet's extrinsic properties. On the other hand, Fortinbras retains more of Dennet's physical properties such as his weight and appearance. However, in this case, the bodily continuity theory would require the body to be physically continuous and therefore would recognize the Hamlet body as Dennet.

On the other hand, if we answered the question to "Where is Dennet" using the theory of psychological continuity, Dennet's identity of self would follow Yorick. After the operation, Dennet's brain, Yorick, would retain all of Dennet's memories and cognitive capabilities. Therefore, Yorick remains Dennet's cognitive structure and memories and therefore is

psychologically continuous with Dennet. As a result, Dennet's identity would follow Yorick and Dennet is always inside the life-support machine, despite changing several bodies in the excerpt.

Similarly, if Dennet and a research were to swap minds, or in other words, Dennet and the researcher's minds were both placed inside life-support machines, but instead Yorick's output signal was connected to the researcher's body, the Dennet-mind, research-body individual would identify themselves as Dennet. On the other hand, the research-mind, Dennet-body individual would identify them self as the research. Therefore, using the best candidate theory, since only of the two individuals extrinsically identifies themselves as Dennet, the Dennet-mind, researcher-body individual is a better candidate for Dennet, as the individual is psychologically continuous with Dennet.

However, we could also answer the question to "Where is Dennet" by saying both Dennet's brain and Dennet's body are both Dennet at the same time. Prior to the operation, a researcher quoted: "Think of it as a mere stretching of the nerves. If your brain were just moved over an inch in your skull, that would not alter or impair your mind. We're simply going to make the nerves indefinitely elastic by splicing radio links into them." (Where am I?, Daniel C. Dennet pg 1)

Similarly, could consider Dennet's mind and Dennet's body as one continuous individual, despite Dennet's mind and Dennet's body in different locations. Using the researcher's argument, we cannot determine a measurable threshold in distance when Dennet would split into Yorick and Hamlet.

For example, if an individual is trapped halfway above stage and halfway below stage, it becomes trivial to determine if the individual is above the stage or below the stage; It better to describe the individual as trapped between the stage.

Therefore, it makes sense to view both Yorick and Denet as one continuous individual instead of determining if Yorick is Denet or Hamlet is Denet. In addition, neither Hamlet nor Yorick retains all of Denet's extrinsic properties; Yorick would retain only Denet's cognitive capabilities and Hamlet would retain only Denet's extrinsic appearance. As a result, it is better to consider both Yorick and Hamlet as Denet at the same time instead of determining which if Yorick or Hamlet is the better candidate.

However, we could also answer the question to "Where is Denet" by saying Denet is where his individual point of view is. For example, if a researcher is using a live-feed camera and an artificial arm extension to operate a robotic arm attached to an orbital space shuttle, the research's perspective and therefore his point of view is directed at the robotic arm in outer space.

Similarly, there is no difference between when Yorick's output receptors are attached to Hamlet's body and when Hamlet's commands are directed at the outer space robotic arm; The two scenarios both involve connecting Denet's cognitive capabilities with an external output to communicate with an external world.

On the other hand, by answer the question, "Where is Denet" using his individual point of view, we could provide a more accurate description of his current cognitive state. For example, if Denet was lost in the woods and could not find his current location, it is more accurate to

describe Dennet's location using his point of view as lost in the woods, instead of his physical geographical location.

Finally, I personally believe all four options all share equal merit in determining Dennet's location of himself. Each of these four individual methods can be more accurately used in one given scenario compared to another.

For example, although Dennet may be psychologically continuous during the entire excerpt, it isn't an accurate description of Dennet's state when his mind switches between several bodies; When Yorick changes bodies from Hubert to Fortinbras after the mission, it is better to describe Dennet's location using his individual point of view, instead of simply saying his mind is psychologically continuous.

Similarly, after Dennet separates into both Yorick and Hamlet, it is better to describe Dennet using both his brain and his body, since Yorick and Hamlet together would retain almost all of Dennet's extrinsic properties. However, when Hamlet is trapped within the mine and Yorick is reconnected to Fortinbras, it is more accurate to describe Dennet's continuity in terms of psychological continuity as Dennet is no longer bodily continuous but is psychologically continuous.

However, bodily continuity and his current physical location is most accurate method in describing Dennet's location prior to the body swap; For example, national identification methods use DNA and facial identification to determine an individual.

Therefore, the best candidate method for determining Dennet's self should not be limited to one of the four best methods. Instead, we should choose evaluate the best method for determining Dennet's location for each individual case.

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References

Dennet, Daniel C. "Where am I?, Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology, 1978 by Bradford Books. Publisher, Inc.