Thought Experiments

From *The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten*

**Directions.** Try to come up with at least TWO possible “solutions” to each of the philosophical puzzles. Then, give at least one argument in FAVOR of each solution, and one argument against it. Which solution (if either) do you think works better?

# The Ship Theseus

This is not what Ray North had bargained for. As an international master criminal he prided himself on being able to get the job done. His latest client had demanded that he steal the famous yacht Theseus, the vessel from which British newspaper magnate Lucas Grub had thrown himself to his death and which more recently had been the scene of the murder of LA rapper Daddy Iced Tea. But here he was in the dry dock where the boat had just finished being repaired, confronted by two seemingly identical yachts. North turned to the security man, who was being held at gunpoint by one of his cronies. 'If you want to live, you'd better tell me which one of these is the real Theseus: demanded Ray. 'That kinda depends,' came the nervous reply. 'You see, when we started to repair the ship, we needed to replace lots of parts. Only, we kept all the old parts. But as the work progressed, we ended up replacing virtually everything. When we had finished, some of the guys thought it would be good to use all the old parts to reconstruct another version of the ship. So that's what we've got. On the left, the Theseus repaired with new parts and on the right, the Theseus restored from old parts.' 'But which one is the genuine Theseus?' demanded Ray. 'I've told you all I know!' screamed the guard, as the crony tightened his grip. Ray scratched his head and started to think about how he could get away with both…**[Which ship, if either, is the genuine ship?]**

# Beam Me Up

For Stelios, the teletransporter is the only way to travel. Previously it took months to get from the Earth to Mars, con- fined to a cramped spacecraft with a far from perfect safety record. Stelios's TeletransportExpress changed all that. Now the trip takes just minutes, and so far it has been 100 per cent safe. However, now he is facing a lawsuit from a disgruntled customer who is claiming the company actually killed him. His argument is simple: the teletransporter works by scanning your brain and body cell by cell, destroying them, beaming the infor- mation to Mars and reconstructing you there. Although the person on Mars looks, feels and thinks just like a person who has been sent to sleep and zapped across space, the claimant argues that what actually happens is that you are murdered and replaced by a clone. To Stelios, this sounds absurd. After all, he has taken the teletransporter trip dozens of times, and he doesn't feel dead. Indeed, how can the claimant seriously believe that he has been killed by the process when he is clearly able to take the case to court? Still, as Stelios entered the teletransporter booth once again and prepared to press the button that would begin to dismantle him, he did, for a second, wonder whether he was about to commit suicide. [**Did Stellos survive the trip?]**

# I am a Brain

When Ceri Braum accepted the gift of eternal life, this was not quite what she had in mind. Sure, she knew that her brain would be removed from her body and kept alive in a vat. She also knew her only connection with the outside world would be via a camera, a microphone and a speaker. But at the time, living for ever like this seemed a pretty good deal, especially compared to living for not much longer in her second, deteriorating body. In retrospect, however, perhaps she had been convinced too easily that she was just her brain. When her first body had given out, surgeons had taken out her brain and put it into the body of someone whose own brain had failed. Waking up in the new body, she had no doubt that she was still the same person, Ceri Braum. And since it was only her brain that remained from her old self, it also seemed safe to conclude that she was, therefore, essentially her brain. But life just as a brain strikes Ceri as extremely impoverished. How she longs for the fleshiness of a more complete existence. Nevertheless, since it is her, Ceri, now having these thoughts and doubts, **is she nonetheless right to conclude that she is, in essence, nothing more or less than her brain?**

# Amoebaesque

The press had given him the nickname 'worm man; but his friends knew him as Derek. Scientists had manipulated his DNA to mimic one of the most amazing features of the common or garden worm: the ability to regenerate lost tissue. And it had worked. When they chopped off his hand to test him out, a new one had regrown within a month. Then it all went wrong. His body was slowly deteriorating. To save his life they had to transplant his brain into a new body. However, a major mistake during the operation severed his brain in two. Fortunately, both halves fully regenerated and both were successfully transplanted into new bodies. The only problem was that both the men who now had one of the brains believed they were Derek. What is more, both had Derek's memories, mental skills and personality. This created problems for Derek's boyfriend, who couldn't tell them apart. It also led to the Derek’s getting entangled in a legal battle to claim Derek's assets**. But which was the real Derek? They couldn't both be him, could they?**

# The Experience Machine

Robert had been sitting in front of the consent form for two hours and still he did not know whether to sign it or shred it. His choice was between two futures. In one, his prospects were bleak and the chances of realizing his dreams slim. In the other, he would be a famous rock star guaranteed to be kept permanently happy. Not much of a choice, you might think. But whereas the first life would be in the real world, the second would be entirely within the experience machine. This device enables you to live the whole of your life in a virtual-reality environment. All your experiences are designed to make you happier and more satisfied. But crucially, once in the machine you have no idea that you are not in the real world, nor that what is happening to you has been designed to meet your needs. It seems you are living an ordinary life in the ordinary world: it is just that in this life, you are one of the winners for whom everything seems to go right. Robert knows that once he is in the machine, life will be great. But still, something about its phoniness makes him hesitate to sign the form that will take him to this paradise. **Should Robert hook up to the experience machine?**

# Total lack of recall

Arnold Conan had just made an unpleasant discovery: he wasn't Arnold Conan at all. Or rather, he used not to be. It was all rather confusing.

This is the best sense he could make of his unusual auto- biography. He was born Alan E. Wood. Wood was, by all accounts, a deeply unpleasant man: egotistical, selfish, cruel and ruthless. Two years ago, Wood had got into deep trouble with the State Bureau of Investigation. He was given a choice: spend the rest of his life in maximum security prison, where they would make sure he was victimised by the other inmates; or have his memory erased and replaced with that of an entirely fictitious creation of the spooks at the SBI. He chose the latter. And so it was that Alan E. Wood was put under a general anaesthetic, and when he woke up, he had forgotten all about his life to date. Instead, he remembered an entirely fictitious past, that of Arnold Conan, the man he now believed he was. Conan had established that these were the facts. **But he still did not know who he was:Wood or Conan?**

## Mary the Neuroscientist (Frank Jackson)

Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like ‘red’, ‘blue’, and so on. She discovers, for example, just which wavelength combinations from the sky stimulate the retina, and exactly how this produces via the central nervous system the contraction of the vocal cords and expulsion of air from the lungs that results in the uttering of the sentence ‘The sky is blue’...What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? **Will she learn anything or not?**

# Living in a vat

Ever since the accident, Brian had lived in a vat. His body was crushed, but quick work by the surgeons had managed to salvage his brain. This procedure was now carried out whenever possible, so that the brain could be put back into a body once a suitable donor had been found. But because fewer brains than bodies terminally fail, the waiting list for new bodies had got intolerably long. To destroy the brains, however, was deemed ethically unacceptable. The solution came in the form of a remarkable supercomputer from China, Mai Trikks. Through electrodes attached to the brain, the computer could feed the brain stimuli which gave it the illusion that it was in a living body, inhabiting the real world. In Brian's case, that meant he woke up one day in a hospital bed to be told about the accident and the successful body transplant. He then went on to live a normal life. All the time, however, he was really no more than his old brain, kept alive in a vat, wired up to a computer. Brian had no more or less reason to think he was living in the real world than you or I. **How could he - or we - ever know differently?**

# Soul power

Faith had believed in reincarnation for as long as she could remember. But recently her interest in her past lives had reached a new level. Now that she was visiting the medium mystic Marjorie, for the first time she had information about what her past lives were really like. Most of what Marjorie told her was about her previous incarnation as Zosime, a noblewoman who lived at the time of the siege of Troy. She heard about her daring escape first to Smyrna and then on to Knossos. She was apparently both brave and beautiful, and she fell in love with a Spartan commander, whom she lived with at Knossos for the rest of her life.

Faith didn't check the real history of Troy to try to verify Marjorie's story. She did not doubt that hers was the same soul that had lived in Zosime. She did, however, have a nagging concern about what this all meant. Much as she enjoyed the idea of being a Greek beauty, since she didn't remember anything of her life in Knossos or have any sense of being the person Marjorie told her about, she couldn't see how she and Zosime could be the same person. She had found out about her past life, but it didn't seem like her life at all. **Is it possible for Zosime and Majorie to have the same “soul”, or to be the same “person”? Why or why not?**

# Zombies

Lucia lived in a town where the lights were on, but nobody was ever home. She lived among zombies. This was not as scary as it might sound. These zombies were not the flesh-eating ghouls of horror films. They looked and behaved just like you and I. They even had exactly the same physiology as you and I. But there was one key difference: they had no minds. If you pricked them they would say 'ouch' and wince, but they felt no pain. If you 'upset' them they would cry or get angry, but there would be no inner turmoil. If you played them soothing music they would appear to enjoy it, but in their minds they would hear nothing. On the outside, they were ordinary humans, but on the inside, nothing was going on. This made them easy to get along with. It was easy to forget that they didn't have inner lives as she did, since they spoke and behaved just like ordinary people and that included references to how they felt or what they thought. Visitors to the town would also fail to notice anything strange. Even when Lucia let them in on the secret, they refused to believe her. 'How do you know that they have no minds?' they would ask. 'How do you know that other people do?' would be Lucia's reply. That usually shut them up. **Are zombies—creatures that behave exactly like humans in every possible imaginable way, but which don’t have “experiences”—even possible? Why or why not?**

# Memories are made of this

Alicia clearly remembers visiting the Parthenon in Athens, and how the sight of the crumbling ruin up close was less impressive than the view of it from a distance, perched majestically on the Acropolis. But Alicia had never been to Athens, so what she remembers is visiting the Parthenon, not her visiting the Parthenon.It is not that Alicia is deluded. What she remembers is actually how it was. She has had a memory implant. Her friend Mayte had been to Greece for a holiday, and when she came back she went to the Kadok memory processing shop to have her holiday recollections downloaded onto a disc. Alicia had later taken this disc back to the same shop and had the memories uploaded to her brain. She now has a whole set of Mayte's holiday memories, which to her have the character of all her other memories: they are all recollections from the first person point of view. The slightly disturbing thing, however, is that Mayte and Alicia have exchanged such memories so many times that it seems they have quite literally inhabited the same past. Although Alicia knows she should really say that she remembers Mayte's holiday to Greece, it feels more natural simply to say she remembers the holiday. But how can you remember what you never did? **Many philosophers have argued that people “are” their memories. However, how could this theory deal with a story like this—where someone “remembers” something that they never did?**