for our mutual vulnerability as flesh-and-blood creatures. I appreciate my own pain, joy, longing, hope, and distress by acquiring the terms and associations in which to understand these common human experiences. I appreciate myself and the unfolding story of my own life in and through my interaction with others. I appreciate it as a life in process of creation, over which I have certain powers and for which I have certain responsibilities. Having said all this, I seem to have said that I am an inescapably ethical being, so there I will rest my case.

A Response – DEREK PARFIT

Dr Gillett's paper is so full of ideas that I can't hope to respond to more than just a few of them. First, as Dr Peacocke suggested, I shall sketch parts of my view about the nature and significance of personal identity. I argued three things: that most of us, even if we are not aware of this, have certain strong beliefs about what is involved in our own identity – or continued existence – over time, that these beliefs are false, and that, if we gave up these beliefs, this might affect some of our emotions and moral principles.

Part of my argument for these claims appealed to various imaginary cases of the kind found in science fiction. I agree with some of Dr Gillett's objections to the use, in philosophy, of bizarre examples. If we imagine away the scaffolding of natural facts which are presupposed by many of our concepts, it may be pointless to ask what we would then say, since our concepts may simply fail to apply. But I used such cases to throw light, not on our concepts, but on our beliefs. When we imagine ourselves in these cases, most of us are not merely baffled. We have certain definite convictions about what either might or must be true.

Dr Gillett argued that some of these examples are hard even to imagine, especially my case of fusion, in which two different persons join together, and become one. I agree that this case raises many doubts. For this reason, I gave it little more than a glance. A simpler kind of example, which I dicusssed at length, involves what I called Teletransportation. If this process happened to me, a Scanner would destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact states of all my cells. My blueprint would then be beamed, at the speed of light, to some place like Mars, where a Replicator would create, out of new matter, a brain and body just like mine. To some readers of science fiction, Teletransportation seems to be a way of travelling; others think it a way of dying.

In describing such a case, I assume that such a Replica of me would be, not just physically, but also psychologically just like me. He would have my character and intentions, seem to remember living my life, and so on. It is not hard to imagine that this might be true. Nor is the process of Replication hard to imagine. It will obviously remain impossible to make an exact copy of someone's brain: but this seems to be merely technically impossible. This imagined case is not deeply impossible, like the floating iron which Dr Gillett discussed. Professor Swinburne mentioned a similar case, when he mentioned the difference between its being he, or merely someone else who is like him, who might be resurrected after his death.

I then turned to the version which I called the Branch-Line Case. Since the New Scanner does not destroy my brain and body, I am able to meet my Replica. While we are talking, I learn that I am about to die. My Replica tells me not to be concerned. Since he is exactly like me, he will take up my life where I leave off. He will look after my children, and write the book that I have planned. Perhaps my friends and relatives will not even know that he is not me.

In such a case, would I have a reason to be concerned? On the 'Reductionist' view about personal identity which I and others defend – and which is close to the Buddhist view that Steven Collins discusses in his book *Selfless Persons*[28] – on this view, I should say: 'My prospect is about as good as ordinary survival. What it is rational to care about are the various psychological connections which, in ordinary cases, unify a person's life – the connections of character, memory, and the like. Since I am connected to my Replica in all these ways, I have no reason to be concerned.' But, though I accept the reductionist[29] view, I would find these claims hard to believe. It would be far easier to believe that what matters is that, soon, there will be no one living who is me. On this more natural view, though it may be some consolation that I shall have a Replica, my prospect is nearly as bad as ordinary death. This is what, in such a case, most of us would believe. We would think that personal identity is what matters.

In the Branch-Line Case, because my life overlaps with that of my Replica, it is fairly clear that he is not me. It is therefore fairly clear what would happen to me: I would be about to die. I also discussed several cases in which it would be much less clear what I should expect to happen. One example is what I called the Physical Spectrum. This is a range of different possible cases, in each of which some future person would have some proportion of the cells in my brain and body. This proportion would, in the different cases, range from all to none. Since my other cells would be replaced with exact duplicates, the resulting person would in each case be just like me. Once again, these cases are only, though they will always remain, technically impossible.

At the near end of this range, where only 1 per cent of my cells would be replaced, the resulting person would clearly be me. (I remark in passing that scientists have begun to transplant cells from one mammalian brain to another, and that the transplanted tissue does not, like other transplanted organs, provoke rejection by its new body.) In the case at the far end, which is Teletransportation – with complete 'replacement' – most of us would think that the resulting person would not be me. (If this is not our first reaction, we can be pushed towards it by considering the Branch-Line Case.) But, in cases in the middle of this range, what should I expect to happen? Suppose I know that before tomorrow half my cells – or three-quarters, or nine-tenths – will be replaced with exact duplicates. The natural question is, 'Would the resulting person be me, or would he merely be someone else who is just like me?'

A reductionist would claim: 'This is an empty question. These are not two different possibilities, either of which might be true. They are merely two descriptions of the same course of events. When you know which of your cells will be replaced, you know everything.' Here is a similar example. Suppose that a certain club, after existing for years, ceases to meet. Some years later certain people start up a club with the same name, the same rules, and (perhaps) some of the old members. Someone might ask, 'Did these people start up the very same club, or did they merely start up another club, which was exactly similar?' But most of us would regard this as an empty question. And we would think the same about the question of whether I had the same stereo system if I had replaced about half of its parts.

It is hard to take this view, however, when I think about my own future. On the reductionist view, it would be an empty question in these cases whether the resulting person would be me. Even without an answer to this question, I could know everything. But how can I know everything if I do not even know whether I shall live or die? If we imagine being in my place, most of us would think that this question must have an answer. We might say, 'Any future person must be either, and quite simply, me or someone else. If there will later be someone who is in pain, either I shall feel that pain, or I shan't. One of these must be true.'

Professor Swinburne suggested that, on the reductionist view, the answer in such a case is that the pain would be partly mine. I didn't intend to suggest that. I agree with him that we cannot make sense of this. This is well argued by Bernard Williams in his paper 'The Self and the Future',[30] though in most ways Williams's view is very different from Swinburne's.

On the reductionist view, our continued existence over time just involves various kinds of physical and psychological connection. In the imaginary cases I have just described, the physical connections would hold to different degrees. In other cases, some of them actual, it is the psychological connections which

would be matters of degree. As our reactions to such cases shows, most of us are not reductionists. We do not believe that our own continued existence merely involves such connections. It seems to us to be a further fact, of a deep and simple kind: a fact which, in every case, must be either wholly present or wholly absent.

I then tried to show that our beliefs are false. There is no such further fact. I shall not summarize here how I tried to show this – except to remark that the question seems to me only in part one that might be settled by philosophical arguments, since it is also partly a matter of observable fact, or of how we should interpret various kinds of evidence.

If we give up these natural beliefs and become reductionists, this may affect some of our emotions. It is when we think about ourselves that the reductionist view is hardest to believe, and this is where the main effects would come. We have two kinds of concern about our own future. One is direct concern, such as our fear or dread of pain and death. The other is derivative concern: a concern about ourselves which results from having various other concerns. We want, for example, to remain active so that we can achieve certain ambitions, and protect those whom we love. If we became reductionists, this would not affect our derivative concern, but it might affect our direct concern.

Reconsider the Branch-Line Case. I claimed that, since the reductionist view is true, my relation to my Replica is as good as ordinary survival. This claim can be reversed. Ordinary survival is as bad as, or no better than, being destroyed and replicated. What we fear will be missing, after we die, is always missing. Our survival never involves the specially intimate relation in which we are inclined to believe.

If we grasped these truths, we would care less about our own future. We would have for ourselves in the future only the concern that we would have for a mere Replica. Suppose I know that tomorrow I shall be in pain. If I knew that, after my death, a Replica of me would be in pain, I would not fearfully anticipate this pain. And my relation to myself tomorrow is no closer than my relation to my Replica. It is hard to grasp this truth. When I forget the arguments, my belief in the further fact returns. But when I reconvince myself, this for a while stuns my direct concern.

There is a similar effect on my attitude to death. Instead of thinking, 'I shall die,' I should redescribe this fact in reductionist terms. I should think, 'After a certain time, none of the experiences that occur will be connected, in certain ways, to these present experiences.' In this redescription my death seems to disappear.

I turn, finally, to one of the moral conclusions which, if we became reductionists, we might draw. Suppose that, in the Branch-Line Case, I had

earlier committed some crime. When I talk to Backup – as my Replica is called – I warn him to escape. But he is caught and convicted. The judge says: 'Given the gravity of Parfit's crime, you deserve a life sentence. Though you are not Parfit, between you and him there are all of the normal psychological connections. You have apparent memories of Parfit's life, and in every other way you resemble him. These connections are enough to make you guilty.' Backup protests: 'This is outrageous. These connections are irrelevant. I did not choose to resemble Parfit, or to have these apparent memories. I cannot deserve to be punished for what Parfit did before I even existed.'

Most of us would side with Backup. We would believe that, in the absence of personal identity, these psychological connections cannot carry with them desert or guilt. But on the reductionist view personal identity merely consists in these connections. Backup is not me only because, in this case, these connections do not have their normal cause: the continued existence of my brain. Is it the absence of this normal cause which makes Backup innocent? Most of us would answer no. We would think him innocent because he is not me.

This reply would show that we are not reductionists. The fact that Backup is not me seems to us to be different from, and more important than, the fact that the psychological connections have an abnormal cause. What we believe to be missing is not the normal cause, but the further fact: the specially intimate relation which we assume to be involved in our own continued existence over time. This is the fact which, on our view, carries with it desert and guilt.

Suppose next that we become reductionists: we decide that there is no such fact. An obvious conclusion follows. If it was only this fact which could carry with it desert and guilt, these have also disappeared. No one ever deserves to be punished for anything they did.

I hope these remarks may at least roughly suggest how, if we change our view about the nature of personal identity, we might also change our view about its significance.

DISCUSSION

ROBIN ATTFIELD. I wish to make a point about method. Gillett has referred to our concepts being stretched beyond recognition so that vertigo sets in when we consider some of these fictional cases. I wonder if the point could be better expressed in terms of coherence. It does seem to me that on a straightforward reading of the initial passage [in D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*] teletransportation, the identity of the person before the transition and the replica afterwards are just assumed. Is the idea that these two are identical, coherent? I would have thought that on a great many traditions this coherence would not be granted.