

Where does personal identity reside? essay sample

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Personal identity theory is a theory that questions our existence philosophically: it asks who we are and how do we know? In the essay "Will Tommy Vladek Survive?" John Perry described a controversial topic on identity by analyzing an essay called The Meeting by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Konigluth. In the essay there were two boys -Tommy Vladek a destructive boy, who was mentally challenged but healthy-bodied and Sam a normal boy, who had an accident that damaged his body but left his brain healthy. Tommy's family was facing difficulties because of the special care needed for him. A Dr. Nicholson gave Tommy's parents the choice of a new brain that will make "upgrade" Tommy and they had eighteen hours to make their choice. In the essay, Perry describes different views on the topic of identity, mainly on who will survive the operation, whether it would be the destructive Tommy or Sam the normal boy.

The different views Perry has on identity are shown in the table below. In the essay Perry identifies concepts that could explain who Harry Vladek is likely to bring home from hospital; identity and similarity, body transfers, brain theory, and memory theory. Throughout the essay Perry hinted that he did not think Tommy will be the one to survive because of the theory which he thinks makes the strongest defense (explained more in later paragraph). The first concept that Perry discussed is identity and similarity. When Perry uses identity (identical), he means there is just one being (or thing) involved. For example, if you buy two cloud cars that are pink and the same model, they look identical. According to Perry they are not identical because if they were, only one cloud car would exist. Similarity is the state or fact of being the same. So if you bought two cloud cars you would say they are similar not

identical. The difference between identical and similarity: Identical means one thing and similarity is the state of being the same.

With this Perry examines the likeliness of both Tommy and Sam surviving. It could be said that Tommy's physical appearance is the same and Sam's mental state is the same. If one survives physically and the other mentally both boys are one person. In the story the person who thought both boys would survive as one person was Dr. Nicholson because he says " They'll give you custody of the child—your child, yours and theirs" to Mr. Vladek. This alludes to Dr. Nicholson's opinion that both boys are one identical boy. Which is not the case because as stated above it Sam's brain existing within Tommy's body. Body transfer is the theory that when you pass away your soul goes into another body. There is no speculation that the body that will emerge from the operation will be Tommy's. The body itself has changed because now it contains Sam's brain. However, even though the body is Tommy's because of the body transfer, the survivor would be Sam because his soul entered Tommy's body.

In the story Dr. Nicholson and Mr. Vladek think that body transfer is most likely to occur and it is exhibited when the doctor gives Mr. Vladek a " sales pitch" for Sam's brain. Mr. Vladek later said " Is that supposed to make it easier for me to murder my son" (TP 191). Personal identity is a problem with the theory of body transfers. If we were to die our soul entered a different body who are we? What is our identity? " John Locke, in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, answers these question through a situation- if the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, entered the body of a cobbler. Who exists? Locke seems to <https://assignbuster.com/where-does-personal-identity-reside-essay-sample/>

think the person with the prince's memories would be the prince, though he would have a lot of trouble convincing people he was not the cobbler". (TP 197) This is true because people cannot physically see whose soul is in you. The next concept that Perry discusses is body theory. According to this theory the body itself is our unique identity. Having the same body dictates being the same person.

According to body theory even though Sam's brain has been transplanted into Tommy, Tommy will survive. This is because we don't need every single piece of an entity to stay the same in order to have the same thing. For example in the Star Wars Darth Vader slices off the hand of Luke Skywalker, and on the next scene he had an artificial arm. No one said he died because not all parts of the body matter. Unlike body transfer which includes non-visual things like soul transfer, body identity you can see if the same body is visible. In the same way we are able to track cars, we are able to trace cars we are able to identify ourselves. Another concept that Perry describes is brain theory—personal identity is brain identity. Brain identity states "to be the same person is to have the same brain" (TP 197). The most apparent problem for this theory is why the brain?

Why can it not be the heart that provides sustenance to all organs? Or any other organ? People undergo many transplants, and when they leave the operating room people still think they are the same person. The answer is that people are more interested in psychological or mental attributes when interacting with other people, therefore we take the brain which is solely responsible for this as the source of personal identity. A different way of looking at this theory is the dead engine scenario. Say a 2010 Honda Civic's
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engine died and you had a Bugatti Veyron carcass (functioning engine and wrecked body). If the Bugatti's engine was placed in the Civics' body, do you have a Bugatti or a Civic? Majority of people would say you have a Civic because that is what is visible to them. However if you believe in brain identity, you perceive the engine as the brain.

You would not have a Honda Civic anymore you would have a Bugatti Veyron - the Bugatti had a body transplant. This is the problem that the Vladek family faces because the child would look like Tommy but it would be Sam who received a body transplant. Perry chose the theory that would have the strongest defense on who would go home with the Vladek family. Memory theory states that your memories are unique to you and therefore identify you. According to memory theory people cannot share identical memories, because if they could, they would be the one person. Another way to understand this is through a science fiction example—let's say there was a fluid that you could drink to gain the memories from a person who had lived a fascinating life. You happened to acquire the memory juice for Prince Hubertus of Hohenlohe-Langenburg (most interesting man in the world), you will be remembering memories you yourself did not have. According to the definition of memory theory, memories are unique to you, and at the time you have his memory they are unique to you.

Does this mean you are a prince now? No, but because of this the definition of memory theory will have to be slightly altered to. Even though there is a problem with the uniqueness of memories Perry is confident that the memory theory has the better defense. According to the memory theory the survivor is Sam, in the sense that all of his memories will still be present. The <https://assignbuster.com/where-does-personal-identity-reside-essay-sample/>

only difference would be that Sam's memories are in Tommy's body.

Because it is Tommy's body the argument that Tommy's muscle memory might still exist is a possibility. Even common surgeries like heart transplants sometimes result in changes in taste or suddenly finding something appealing that was not appealing before or actual memories exchanged. The people who receive others' memories are not the same as the other person because it is

impossible. This results in another gap in the memory theory because it leaves an exception.

It is quite possible for Tommy's body to keep its muscle memories. The child who will leave the operating room will be Sam with minor muscle memories from Tommy. Personally, I think the memory theory is the most appealing however I also think that identity is more than just that. There are many different circumstances that could occur during the transplant like for example a double-death (death of Tommy and Sam) or Samantha's brain instead of Sam's brain. If one believes in body theory a double death is not possible. This is because Tommy's body has will retain its identity. Also if Samantha's brain was in Tommy, it would not matter because the body is the identity. In brain theory a double-death will not occur because identity is within the brain; this will result in Sam's survival still. In the case that Samantha's brain was given the body transplant, she would survive. If one believed in memory theory, the survivor would be Sam and Samantha if Samantha's brain was put in Tommy's brain because memories are identity.

I think the theory of identity that seems to make sense is Anticriterialism, which suggests that personal persistence is simple and unanalyzable. This <https://assignbuster.com/where-does-personal-identity-reside-essay-sample/>

theory denies that there should be something that is necessary for us to continue to live. It further states that mental and physical continuity are evidence for identity but they are not necessary to maintain identity.

Anticriterialism says that a person existing at one time is identical with a being existing in another time if and only if they are identical. To understand Anticriterialism Theseus's paradox is used: Theseus was a voyager who had decided to call it a day on exploring. When he retired Theseus wanted to repair his ship and restore it to its former state by replacing all the planks of wood out of which the ship was made out of. When the work was done the ship had new wood and all the old wood was discarded.

However when Theseus came to view his boat he said " well, it looks very nice and all, but I don't really see in what sense this is MY ship at all - for this is an entirely new ship, which has no material in common with my old, beloved vessel." According to Anticriterialism we can say the ships are identical to each other because they look identical and they have an identical owner, even though they exist in different spaces in time. According to this theory the survivor could be a double-death, Tommy or Sam. However according to the previous definition it will not be Sam or Tommy because the new boy is not identical to either of them. I think the chance of a double-double is more likely, but because as stated before identity is simple and unanalyzable therefore the survivor could be anyone. According to Anticriterialism if instead of Sam, Samantha donated her brain to put in Tommy's body there would not be many differences.

The child would continue existing. The child's identity could result in a combination of Tommy and Samantha, it could be Tommy or Samantha there
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is no right answer. What is identity? Is it in the body? Brain? Memories? Or is it unanalyzable? The response to this will greatly affect Harry Vladek's decision in getting the brain transplant for Tommy. According to body theory the survivor would be Tommy because it is his body. Brain theory says the survivor would be the owner of the brain therefore Sam will waken in Tommy's body. According to memory theory the survivor is the Sam because he has all of his memories. However according to Anticriterialism the survivor is more likely to be neither Tommy nor Sam, since identity is unanalyzable.

Works Cited

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