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*There may be something disturbing in combining quotidian puzzles about soccer with situations that seem much more far-fetched (duplicate worlds, time travel). Nonetheless, the characters in our stories find themselves dealing with the many facets of a common problem—the problem of Cause and Effect. The poor fellow who leaves a pile of bewildered messages on his friend’s answering machine is not out of his mind when he wonders about his Freedom; what could help him decide whether his actions are caused by his own Will or by his doppelganger? Before fantasizing about what one would do if one could travel in time, one should ponder what one could do; what could our actions cause, if the before comes after and the after, before? He and She settle on an arbitrary way out of the many-causes puzzle, with a fifty-fifty solution that will leave many a Reader disappointed. But why the disappointment? Perhaps our concept of causation is just not made to fit such cases? The quandaries we have already run into will be silently lying in wait for us in much of what follows. Philosophy is often the offshoot of unexpected conceptual tensions—of difficulties that arise when we try to apply the concepts we are most familiar with to situations that are not familiar at all. We have to test the elasticity of our conceptual scheme, but in order to do that, we sometimes have to envisage fantastic scenarios in which our concepts are stretched to the limit. This will be clearer as we proceed to chapter*

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*in which old and new characters discover that the Mind is an elusive entity, that they can talk in their sleep and leave their interlocutor wondering in bewilderment whether they are Conscious or not, that tastes are anything but easy to define, that without memories it may well be impossible to speak of Responsibility—and perhaps even of Persons—and in which the nosy Meddler will demonstrate that the Brain is even more elusive than the Mind, to the point that in a Brain transplant, it is almost better to be a donor than a receiver.*

## ZOMBIE, INC. SLEEPING PILLS

STEWARD'S VOICE. Fasten your seat belts.

HE, *courteously getting up from his seat*. Let me let you through. These seats can be very uncomfortable.

PASSENGER. Thank you. I'm not exactly a fan of economy class, either. (*Opens her purse.*) I'm going to take a pill right away.

HE. "Zombie" sleeping pills? Sounds strong. I gather our conversation ends here . . . Shall I wake you up before landing?

PASSENGER. Oh, don't worry. The pill will only blunt my consciousness; all my other intellectual and physical functions will be unaffected. I'll be able to speak with you, watch the movie, fill out the immigration papers. It's a good way to get through the flight without looking like a bag of potatoes.

HE. What do you mean? If you lose consciousness, don't you fall asleep?

PASSENGER. This is what happens from *my* point of view. The pill results in total blackout, and the light comes back when the effect is over. But from *your* point of view, nothing changes. I will continue to speak, to answer your questions—even to ask questions—and you won't be able tell the difference.

HE. I'm not sure I understand . . .

PASSENGER. There is a large philosophical literature on zombies—imaginary creatures that behave in every respect like normal human beings but lack consciousness altogether. Our company managed to get hold of the idea and invested millions to patent the Zombie sleeping pills. You see, consciousness is a very feeble phenomenon—a light froth on top of the oceanic depths of the mind. If you remove the froth, the waves do not

change. The mind continues to function even without consciousness. After all, the brain is a machine for processing information; since my eyes are open, my brain keeps registering and processing all incoming information, and it keeps controlling my actions and decisions. The only difference is that nowhere in my mind is the consciousness-show taking place. But that show is just a luxury, an esthetic *caprice*—as I said, consciousness is just a spray of foam on the surface of a deep and unfathomable ocean.

HE. I actually read that only we human beings have the privilege of consciousness. According to Descartes, cats and dogs are mere automata—like zombies, if I understand correctly.

PASSENGER. Which does not prevent us from treating cats and dogs in a different manner than we treat robots. As a matter of fact, you're treating me in a perfectly normal way, too—you're not treating me as if I were a zombie.

HE. You're right. But how long before the sleeping pills take effect?

PASSENGER. Oh, they take immediate effect. As soon as I took the pill I lost consciousness. You can't tell, but I'm fast asleep.

HE. Good grief! Do you mean to say that you have been speaking in your dreams?

PASSENGER. Dreams? Not at all, otherwise there would be no zombie effect. My dream would be indistinguishable from reality, so why take the pills? Descartes himself said that dreaming is a form of consciousness. No, right now my mind must be totally blacked out.

HE. I'm not sure I want to continue this conversation. . . . But how can you tell whether you are awake or asleep?

PASSENGER. I know these pills are a good product, so I can safely say that at this moment I am completely unconscious. Here, have a look at the brochure. I have fallen into deep, dreamless cataplexy. But, as I said, this has no effect on my interactions with the world around me. Perhaps this conversation is bothering you? I'm very sorry if it is.

HE. No, on the contrary! Have you been with Zombie, Inc., for a long time, if I may ask?

PASSENGER. A couple of years—why?

HE. I was wondering how your product is doing on the market. I read somewhere that some people think consciousness is a curse in some ways,

and not just because of the annoyance of flying. There are many circumstances in our lives when we would be a lot happier if we didn't know what was going on, so I wouldn't be surprised if you told me that you have plenty of customers.

**PASSENGER.** Oh, very many indeed. As I was boarding the aircraft, I noticed that even our pilots have a good supply of our product. I can only sympathize: it must be awfully boring to cross the ocean four times a month.

**HE.** What? This aircraft is being flown by zombies?

**PASSENGER.** Don't worry. The pills have been tested and certified by all international medical authorities. Actually, since you look a bit anxious, why don't you take a pill, too?

**HE.** Thank you. So this will soon be a conversation between two zombies. I guess I should take a few notes if I want to remember what happened.

**PASSENGER.** That's not necessary. The Zombie pills efface consciousness in the present, but all experience gets recorded somewhere, and we can always *remember* it later. When we wake up, we won't be two strangers but two people who shared a pleasant afternoon talking philosophy. Indeed, our whole personal identity is built on memory—the memory of the events that make up our life.

## PARTIAL AMNESIA

FROM: K. J., PRISONER

TO: THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENITENTIARY

Dear Director, forgive me if I take the liberty of writing again to reiterate my query (see my letters of February 10 and February 21). Since when have I been held in custody at this penitentiary, and what are the reasons for my detention? I realize it may sound absurd but, as I have tried to explain, I don't seem to be able to recall either the crimes for which I have been convicted or the date of my imprisonment. Would you be so kind as to remind me?

FROM: MEDICAL OFFICER

TO: THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENITENTIARY

This is to certify that Mr. K. J., held in custody at the State Penitentiary for the Smith affair, has undergone serious memory loss as a result of a fall. Our analyses show that Mr. K. J. is suffering from irreversible amnesia regarding all the events in connection with the crime for which he is being detained, as well as for other facts related to the trial and the date of his imprisonment. As for the rest, all of his intellectual and emotional faculties appear to be intact.

“DAILY NEWS,” FROM OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENT

*Officers at the State Penitentiary are facing an unusual deontological conundrum. Mr. K.J., found guilty in relation to the Smith affair, appears to have lost all memory of his crimes. During his period of incarceration, Mr. K.J. is reported to have given clear signs of remorse, repeatedly asking to be forgiven for whatever despicable acts he might have committed. A model prisoner, he is also the promoter of an initiative called “The Power of Remembrance,” which aims to help all prisoners who have an opportunity to reenter society by getting them to focus on their memories of their misconduct. The administration of the penitentiary is considering the situation. At the moment, it has not even been decided whether Mr. K.J. should be informed of the reasons of his incarceration, for fear of further traumatic consequences.*

FROM: M. SMITH

TO: THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENITENTIARY

Dear Director, I have been informed that Mr. K. J. is being kept ignorant of the reasons for his incarceration. I think we had better refresh his memory. This individual committed infamous acts that stained the good name of our family, and I don't see why we should be the only ones to carry the burden of this recollection. I hope no one will say that K. J. is a different person today from the one who was found guilty, just because he has now forgotten what he

did. I have certainly forgotten many episodes of my past, but nobody would even dream of treating me as another person. That idea that personal identity depends on the memory of our past experiences is an interesting philosophical theory of the Empiricists, but here we are no longer in college.

**FROM: L. SMITH**

**TO: THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENITENTIARY**

Dear Director, I am writing in strong support of the move to pardon Mr. K. J., who pleaded guilty in relation to the scandal that hit my family two years ago. I understand that the medical appraisal has established beyond all doubt that Mr. K. J. has lost all memory of his crimes due to an irreversible form of partial amnesia. I therefore find it cruel and unfair to condemn him to serve a sentence for an event that has been completely deleted from his mind. From this point of view, Mr. K. J. is no different from any person who, without having committed any crime, wakes up one morning in jail faced with the prospect of serving a sentence for reasons that are utterly mysterious to him.

**FROM: K. J., PRISONER**

**TO: THE DIRECTOR OF THE PENITENTIARY**

Dear Director, despite your much-appreciated discretion, I have now come to learn of my own amnesiac disorder, as well as the reasons that led to my imprisonment in this penitentiary. I am therefore writing to express my firm intention of serving my full sentence. On the basis of the information that has been disclosed to me, there is no question that I am guilty as charged and consequently that I have to serve the total term or terms to which I have been sentenced, even though I continue to lack any memory of the crimes that I seem to have committed. I do not, in fact, believe that memory is the only criterion for deciding the identity of a person, nor that the subject should be the ultimate judge of his or her own knowledge. There are objective conditions for knowledge and responsibility that transcend the powers of the subject.

## FROM: THE STATE LEGAL OFFICE

*With reference to the plea for a pardon on behalf of prisoner K.J.: Insofar as it is justified by considerations of personal identity, it is reasonable to maintain that a sentence should generally not depend on the convict's psychological condition subsequent to the criminal act, but only on the conditions concomitant to the act (for example, an inability to understand the nature of what he or she was doing). It is nonetheless reasonable to maintain that the sentence itself loses its value if the convict is unable to connect it to some memory of the criminal act, given that under such circumstances the relevant conditions of personal identity are uncertain. In the absence of precise guidelines, this Office is not in a position to deliberate on the plea. We therefore recommend a thorough investigation of the criteria by which we determine the personal identity of those to whom the penal code applies.*

## PERSON TRANSPLANT

HE, *stopping in front of a glass door*. What a terrible headache. (*Reads the sign on the door and grows excited.*) "Zoom Clinic. Transplants. Any organ." Any organ? Exactly what I need. (*Enters.*) Good morning.

NURSE. Good morning. May I help you?

HE. You do organ transplants, right?

NURSE. Yes sir. It's our specialty.

HE. Of any organ, if I understand correctly.

NURSE. Absolutely. Without false modesty, we are among the very few centers in the world that can offer a complete service. Over two hundred organs: vital and auxiliary, internal and external . . . you name it. Here's the whole list.

HE. You also perform brain transplants? I would really like to replace mine—I get such terrible headaches.

NURSE. Of course. Just fill out this form. Date of birth and all that.

HE, *picking up the form and beginning to write*. Profession . . . address . . . and what should I write here?

NURSE. Where?

HE. Here. You want to know whether I wish to be a *donor* or a *receiver*.

NURSE. Yes, you have to choose. In the first case, you make your brain available to those who might be interested in it. In the second case, you place a request for a new brain, and we'll check to see what is available.

HE. Hmm, I don't know . . . Is there a price difference?

NURSE. As a donor, you must pay ten thousand dollars. As a receiver, we pay you ten thousand dollars.

HE. Wow! That's a big difference. I could certainly use ten grand! So I'll go for receiver.

NURSE. Very well. Please sign here . . .

THE MEDDLER, *coming in from a side door*. Wait!

NURSE. What? Who are you?

THE MEDDLER. I'm telling you, think about it.

HE. About what?

THE MEDDLER. About the fact that they pay you as a receiver but not as a donor. Since when do people pay to give something and get paid to receive something?

NURSE. Well, sometimes it happens. For instance, there's a tax on garbage: all citizens must pay to get rid of it, and the city is paid to collect it.

HE. Right. That's exactly why I want to be paid. If I were the one to pay, my brain would be like garbage.

THE MEDDLER. Don't say that again, because somebody might take you seriously. Anyway . . . (*The phone rings.*)

NURSE. Zoom Clinic, how can I help you? Yes . . . a brain transplant? As a donor? Very well . . . You have already paid the full amount? Of course . . . As a matter of fact, we have a receiver in the clinic right now. Shall I ask him? . . . All right then, thank you. Have a nice day. (*Hangs up.*)

HE. Did I hear correctly? I have a donor?

NURSE. Exactly. If you agree, we could do the whole thing tomorrow. You will leave here with a brand new brain and a check for ten thousand dollars.

THE MEDDLER. Come on, think about it. What does it mean to get a new brain?

HE. I suppose it's like getting a new liver. Or a new heart. Or a new left arm.

NURSE. Or a whole new body! We transplant absolutely everything!

THE MEDDLER. Right. But if they transplant everything, what remains of *you*?

HE. But I don't want to get everything transplanted. I just want a new brain.

THE MEDDLER. Put it this way. Suppose you had everything transplanted—everything except your brain. Wouldn't that be like transplanting your brain into a different body?

HE. I suppose so . . .

THE MEDDLER. So it would be like donating your brain. Thus, to go back to our case, your brain donor automatically becomes a receiver of your body. So you, the brain receiver, become a body donor.

HE. Eh? I don't want to sign up as a body donor. It would cost me a fortune!

NURSE. Nonsense. Just sign here and forget about it.

THE MEDDLER. Never mind the money! Your brain is not just an organ. Your brain is *you*. Don't get rid of it so easily.

HE. I am my brain? Perhaps this is what scientists and materialist philosophers maintain, but I might not agree. What is your line, here at the clinic?

NURSE. You could always have one half of your brain transplanted tomorrow, and the other half at a later time. Our clinic considers the two brain hemispheres as two distinct organs. Let me check . . . the file says that we pay five thousand dollars for each hemisphere, so the total would still be ten thousand.

HE. This is an excellent suggestion.

THE MEDDLER. Think about it, I said. There is only one way you could survive the first transplant, and that is if your personhood is completely contained in the original hemisphere you still have left. Otherwise, the person coming out of the operation wouldn't be *you*, but someone else. But then we're back to where we were: replacing one half of your brain is tantamount to donating the rest of your body!

**NURSE.** We have made partial transplants of both types: right hemisphere and left hemisphere. I can assure you that in both cases our patients have survived perfectly well.

**THE MEDDLER.** I doubt we agree on the meaning of “survive,” but never mind. Suppose you are right. Then you must admit that independently of which hemisphere is transplanted first, after the operation, our patient will have donated the rest of his body.

**HE.** But then I would end up paying twice as a body donor while making the profit of a single brain receiver. Forget about it! (*Ponders.*) What if I got a transplant of both hemispheres at the same time, but from different donors? In that case, neither donor could claim to be the receiver of the rest of my body, so I wouldn’t have to pay anything . . .

**NURSE.** And you would still earn your ten thousand as a brain receiver. Sounds perfect to me.

**HE.** Then it’s a deal. Where do I sign?

**THE MEDDLER.** Deal? Listen to me. Your brain is not just an organ, no matter how you split it. It is you in person. Rather than replacing it, I suggest you start using it.

## MY ICE CREAM, YOUR ICE CREAM

**HE.** How is your ice cream?

**SHE.** Good. Pistachio and strawberry. Yours?

**HE.** Strawberry and pistachio.

**SHE.** Same flavor, then.

**HE.** Almost. Yours is pistachio and strawberry, mine is strawberry and pistachio. Close your eyes and have a taste. Here is my strawberry.

**SHE,** *with her eyes closed.* But this is pistachio!

**HE.** I told you they’re not the same!

**SHE.** Come on. You ask me to close my eyes and then you cheated. You said “strawberry,” but it was pistachio.

HE. Not at all. Look, try the green one and tell me if it doesn't taste like strawberry.

SHE. Wait a moment—the green one is pistachio!

HE. That's what everybody says. To me the green one tastes like strawberry and the red one like pistachio. To you the red is strawberry and the green—pistachio. Right?

SHE. Perhaps they used different colorants for your ice cream?

HE. No. We bought it at the same place, remember?

SHE, *scrutinizing her ice cream*. You're not making fun of me? You are sincerely saying that the *green* flavor is strawberry to you and pistachio to me?

HE. And vice versa: the *red* flavor is strawberry to you and pistachio to me.

SHE. But isn't it just a matter of names? Perhaps when you were a child you were taught to call the "strawberry flavor" what I was taught to call the "pistachio flavor"—and vice versa.

HE. You really think badly of my parents, don't you? It doesn't stop with strawberry and pistachio either.

SHE. You mean to say . . .

HE. I mean to say that those yellow, juicy things that taste like lemons to you, taste like blueberries to me, and those small, blue things that taste like blueberries to you have the taste of lemon to me. That's why I like to put blueberries on my pistachio ice cream—so I have the impression of eating strawberries with lemon.

SHE, *very puzzled*. You must be wrong . . .

HE. Of course I am! I am wrong about all tastes.

SHE. No, that's not what I meant. There's something wrong with what you're telling me. You're saying that your parents didn't play tricks with you. They taught you to speak English like me, correct? So they would give you pistachio ice cream and they would say: "This tastes like pistachio."

HE. That's right.

SHE. And the ice cream had a certain flavor to you, correct? A flavor that you called "pistachio."

HE. Yes.

SHE. So why do you call it “strawberry” now?

HE. Because in the meantime everything has changed! As I was growing up, my sense of taste got switched around. At some point, strawberries began to taste like pistachios and lemons like blueberries. All of a sudden. Nothing serious, really: in a way I enjoyed it—and I still do. I often find myself experimenting with new combinations.

SHE. But how can I be sure that you’re not making this up? (*She notices his mortified expression.*) Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you. I do trust you. I was just playing the skeptic.

HE, *still bitter*. Don’t mention it.

SHE. I always thought that when philosophers talked about these things, they were just dealing with imaginary situations. I am surprised to learn that it is not always like that . . . But wait—you still look sad!

HE. I was thinking that perhaps I really am mistaken. Perhaps I didn’t suffer a taste switch after all.

SHE. What do you mean?

HE. Perhaps I don’t *remember* what things tasted like when I was small. Perhaps this whole story is just a memory illusion: I didn’t suffer a taste switch but a memory switch. I *seem* to remember that strawberry ice cream had a different flavor than it has now.

SHE. I can believe you when you say that your sense of taste got switched around. I can overcome skepticism about other peoples’ minds. But I can’t see how *you* can overcome skepticism about your own memories.

HE. Oh dear, and now my ice cream has melted, too.

SHE. So has mine . . . Well, now one *really* can’t tell strawberry from pistachio, or pistachio from strawberry—so at least that problem is gone.

HE. And we can be sure that our ice creams taste exactly the same.