

Study Questions 4

Brain in a Vat

In Dennett's brain in a vat scenario, his consciousness is presumably tied to his brain which is installed in a tank. His brain's only connection to sensation is through electronics (not entirely unlike our own nervous systems).

In Dennett's imagining of this scenario, he can imagine himself away to far off distances like the moon or the sun. Also, while his brain is connected to a body he can certainly feel himself within this body, but he can't seem to place himself within the vat. He then remarks that his 'soul' seems to be able to jump great distances in mere moments as it is immaterial.

In this scenario the question "Where am I?" requires answering "What am I?" I follow the bundle of sticks theory such that I'm one consciousness created from a system of various sensory inputs, reactionary outputs, and logical 'circuits.' Without the logical circuits I could not think, and without the sensory inputs and reactionary outputs, I could not interact with the world.

In Dennett's scenario, connecting him to a body simply creates more of him.

As such, when a brain is sitting in a vat but not connected to any communicational nerves, the brain (if that alone can be said to be a person) is simply in the vat. Once said brain is connected, the person is in seemingly two places at once.

If two people could connect such that each person could share thoughts and feelings and control the other's actions, would there still be multiple people? I think that would be much more akin to one person in two places.