

Readings Tutorial 6

Brain Transplantation and Personal Identity R Puccetti

I found this paper both interesting and mildly irritating at the same time. Interesting for the actual discussion, but irritating because the writer seemed to feel that the procedure caused a lot of logical problems that I feel arise more from the fact that this sort of procedure has never been performed than from anything else. I felt that a lot of the possibilities seemed equally likely, given what we currently know, and thus speculating on which one is the case is futile.

Apart from the minor irritation, the actual situations were interesting. I think I need to clarify my thought here. The thing that irritated me was coming down on one side or another when there is not enough data to support either way. For example the sexual identity problem is something that would only be clarified if such a procedure was actually performed, as I think there is too much unknown about the basis of sexuality for speculation to be of any use other than enumerating options.

Again, the situations posed were interesting, particularly the last one. I can conceive of some race constructing a capsule which would hold a disembodied brain and draw its power from whatever source it could, while the brain inside dreams happy dreams forever, or for at least the life of the universe... Sounds about as close to the old Sunday preacher's version of heaven as a mechanistic universe can get.

Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness T Nagel

This paper was very interesting indeed. The technical detail I was already familiar with from some Psych subjects I have done, but the considerations of whether a sectioned brain constitutes one or two minds is very interesting. I really do feel that the situation falls outside of the standard definition of 'mind', and so we get all this confusion about whether the awareness (es) residing in the halves of the brain constitute a mind or not. I think that the idea of a wholeness of a mind, ie one that has not been damaged in some way, is crucial in defining whether or not a set of processes constitutes a mind or not. Take your example of the person who has an accident and has a hemispherectomy. I think you are right about the person having a mind of some sort, but I think that most people would be uncomfortable with labelling it a 'real' mind, because a 'real' mind implies one without major trauma. This is probably really unclear, but I guess my thoughts on it aren't very clear either...