

An Argument Against Our Concept of Reality

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I agree that the mind has such vast capacity for contemplation including past, present, and possible future events. The fact that we can calculate mathematical equations, engage in conceptual meditations, and control every function of the body all from the same source is beyond fantastic.

However, I disagree that we could possibly not be brains in vats based on the capacity of the mind. I think the mind is so intense that if it were kept alive in a vat of enzymes and fed electrical impulses we could live entire lifetimes in this virtual world that would seem to us, for all intents and purposes, to be as real as the keyboard I am typing on. We would not question our sensory data; we would rely on it because it is all that we have known.

What if a person's death in this world is actually the removal of a brain from a vat and the computer feeding us information that simulated a person's (or persona's) death, including police investigations, autopsy reports, funeral, the tremendous grief the loved ones would experience and so on.

Would we recognize that personality in the real world after we have been implanted into a new person? Who can say? For centuries, various cultures have struggled with understanding the phenomena of reincarnation. Whether you personally believe in it is only a small portion of the story. Have you ever felt incredible Déjà Vu about a person or place without ever meeting them or being there? Have you ever had vivid dreams about being in another culture, time, or even in a different body? I think we all have at some point in our lives.

If reincarnation were a fact, would we recognize the people we loved from our past life in their current incarnation? Have you ever met someone who you instantly had a rapport with? People always say that "*we have chemistry*," but where does that come from? I went to the University of Phoenix with a girl named Jenny. We had chemistry. In fact, others in our class claimed we were married in a previous life. That is an interesting observation they made. I am married so I never pursued Jenny. However, when we met we had an instant bond that went beyond similarities in our experiences. She was from Belize, I was from Massachusetts, and yet we understood each other thoroughly.

So instead of scientists keeping our brains alive in vats for transplants, I am talking about our minds living lifetimes in various bodies. What memories do we carry over? What spiritual ascendency follows us? Do the experiences in each lifetime affect the next incarnation? These are heavy questions worth contemplating. The answers we arrive at may not only surprise you but may elevate your mind.

Considering the brain in a vat argument, when I took philosophy classes at Northeastern University I read about Wilder Penfield. Penfield was a Canadian physician who would perform brain surgery while patients were awake. He would take an electric probe and stimulate parts of the brain and the patients would discuss experiences they were having. These were not memories, but vivid experiences like sitting at a train station or playing fetch with a dog.

When I read this, it blew my mind. I was telling my wife that maybe we are globs of cellular material in cosmic pools that possess minds that are being stimulated by electrical currents. Our virtual world would certainly seem very real to us as it did to Penfield's patients.

Even if we reject the brain in a vat theory, we are still left with the concepts of a material world. A brick wall is solid. It hurts our fist if we punch it. Yet our fist and the wall are both made of molecules that are not actually solid matter but sparks of energy and information rotating in gaseous bubbles. So why can we not simply push our hands through the wall and leave both the wall and hand intact? This is what keeps me awake at night.