

Comments on Problem Set 7

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1. “The A-body person has gotten what he wanted, but not what he chose, while the B-body person has gotten what he chose, but not what he wanted.”

- (i) Explain the underlined claim. How does this claim support the conclusion that the A-body-person is B and the B-body person is A?

Here is one way the claim supports the conclusion:

1. The A-body person did not choose that the A-body person get \$100000.
2. A did choose that that A-body person get \$100000.
3. So A is not the A-body person.
4. The A-body person is A or B.
5. So the A-body person is B.

To show how the claim supports the conclusion, you did not need to say anything about memory. Also, some of you when explaining how the claim supports the conclusion took as a premise of the argument that A and B switch bodies. But that is to take as a premise the very thing you are trying to prove—not a good way to argue.

2. Williams argues that if the “body-switching operation” really is properly described as a body-switching operation, then it must be impossible for a person to survive certain far-reaching psychological changes even when these do no occur in the context of a “body-switching operation.”

- (i) Explain Williams’s argument for this claim.
(ii) How plausible is the premise to which Williams appeals in the argument?

The argument is basically this:

1. Suppose (vi) is a body switching operation.
2. Then after the operation in (vi), the A-body person is not A.
3. But in the operation in (v), all the same things happen to the A-body person during the operation as in (vi). (The difference between the cases involves what happens to someone else).
4. If in two operations all the same things happen to the A-body person, then either the A-body person is A after both operations, or after neither.
5. So the A-body person is not A after the operation in (v) either.

This argument makes no mention of fearing future pain or of cases (i) through (iv). Many thought that these two things needed to be mentioned here, but they did not.

3. *Can Williams' argument against the view that body-switching could be achieved by transferring information from one brain to another also be used to argue against the view that body-switching could be achieved by transplanting a brain from one body to another? Explain your answer.*

Many people said “yes” or “no” and then launched into a discussion of whether switching two people’s brains would be a body-switching operation. But the question was more specific than that: it did not ask if there are any good arguments against this being a body-switching operation, but only if *Williams’* argument about his example could be converted to a similar argument against this being a body-switching operation. In order to do this well, though, you need to say what you take Williams’ argument to be, and then explain why it does (or does not) work in this new case. At the very least, if you think Williams’ argument does not work here, you need to say what premise of Williams’ argument fails in this example.

4. *In the last paragraph of the article, Williams gives an argument for preferring ‘the principle that one’s fears can extend to future pain whatever psychological changes precede it’ to the view that body-switching could be achieved by the transfer of information. Explain Williams’ argument. Is it convincing?*

It is not entirely clear what Williams’s argument is in this paragraph. Here is one strand of argument that seems to run through it.

In case (vi), there is a best description of what happens to A: he switches bodies with B. But there are many similar cases where there is no best description of what happens to A. Since we are not sure what to say about those other cases, we should not be so sure that A switches bodies with B in (vi).

In other words, the other cases undermine our confidence that (vi) is a body-switching operation, so we should prefer the competing principle: that one’s fears (etc).

There is related line of argument which seems to go like this:

We could be confident that (vi) is a body-switching operation even in the face of the other cases only if some kind of dualism were true—only if people were souls associated with certain bodies. Then we could regard the operation in (vi) as the one special operation which switches the souls. But dualism is not true, so we should not be so confident.

Few people attributed either of these arguments to Williams. Many people simply mentioned some other argument Williams gives for the same conclusion, usually one we discussed in class. But that was not the assignment.

As a general point, problem set questions often ask you to explain some argument in a particular paragraph of the reading. But it is not always clear to me what argument you

are attributing to the author. The clearer your answer, the more likely it is that you will get a high grade. *So let no barrier to clarity stand in your way! If you want to write down the argument as a list of numbered premises and conclusions, then do so.* There are many good reasons to do that: it will be clearer to you what you are saying, it will be clearer to me what you are saying, and your answer will be shorter, which saves everyone (including you) time. [When you write your papers, this approach may not be such a good idea, but in problem sets it is a very good idea.]