

The ontology of the Embodied Person View

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In this paper I argue in favor of an account of personal identity based on the Embodied Person View (EP) advocated by Derek Parfit.¹ The main focus is to evaluate how well this view fares as an account of personal ontology. Since EP as presented in *We Are Not Human Beings* 1) is vaguely formulated in the sense that it makes room for further explicating 2) has received relevant criticism that needs to be met for it to sustain its strength, I attempt to explicate and recast the view in a way that hopefully enables it to answer some of the objections made against it. There are three areas of criticism: the first concerns EP's alleged commitment to Thinking Subject Minimalism and the problems that follow from it, the second concerns identity over time and the last concerns the ontology of EP. Since the main focus of this paper is personal ontology, the most important objections are those of the first and last category. However, I attempt to answer the other objections here as well since the view's strength partly depends on its consequences in other aspects of personal identity. I argue that the ontological objections can be resolved by adopting an ontology of temporal parts,² and the kind of temporal parts ontology examined for this purpose is the stage view. In the last section of the paper I endeavour to draw conclusions regarding the strength of the revised version of EP in light of the foregoing discussion.

Now for some opening clarifications. Since there are several ways of defining "person", no single introductory definition is offered here; instead I try to make explicit throughout the text which one is posited and by whom. A second reason to this is that defining "person" is the problem of personhood, and not that of personal ontology, and I try to avoid getting too enmeshed in the wrong questions.³ Another important distinction to note before moving on is that this paper covers numerical identity and not qualitative identity.⁴ Since questions about persistence is important to the topic, this needs to be spelled out. In other words, what I am after when discussing identity over time is not whether you and your future self are qualitatively identical. The kind of identity relevant to this paper is the numerical identity that holds between you and some future self of yours.

1. The Embodied Person View

In *We Are Not Human Beings*, Derek Parfit introduces and argues in favor of EP,⁵ and in this section I attempt to make this view as explicit as possible. The posit of EP that needs to be mentioned first is the criterion that for something to be a person, it has to be a person in the

¹ Parfit, Derek. "We Are Not Human Beings", *Philosophy*, 87(1), 5–28, 2012. doi: 10.1017/S0031819111000520.

² Olson, Eric. "On Parfit's View That We Are Not Human Beings", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 76, 39–56, 2015. doi:10.1017/S1358246115000107. Here I follow Olson's proposal, although he himself considers temporal parts an unattractive solution to problems of personal ontology (Olson 2007).

³ Olson, Eric. "Personal Identity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, edited by Edward N. Zalta. URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/identity-personal/>>.

⁴ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 5–6.

⁵ Ibid. 17.

Lockean sense. The “Lockean sense” preferred by Parfit is his Narrow, Brain-Based Psychological Criterion:

If some future person would be uniquely psychologically continuous with me as I am now, and this continuity would have its normal cause, enough of the same brain, this person would be me. If some future person would neither be uniquely psychologically continuous with me as I am now, nor have enough of the same brain, this person would *not* be me. In all other cases, there would be no answer to the question whether some future person would be me.⁶

The general Lockean definition of personal identity is simply some (indeterminate) psychological criterion, so this narrow criterion differs from it in that it adds to the psychological aspect that the relevant mental goings-on of the present person respectively the future person needs to be physically realized in the same brain.⁷ Another effect of this is that it cannot be an animalist view, since animalism posits physical continuity instead of psychological continuity.⁸

The criterion does not say very much about the EP view on personal ontology, but it is the base on which the ontological claim of EP rests. It implies that the persistence of a person has something to do with some psychological phenomena, but it also demands some physical qualification. This leads us to the second, crucial ontological claim of EP, namely that: “human animals think by having a conscious thinking part [...]” and this part is the person if it meets the narrow criterion. Rather than a *constitutionalist* Lockean position according to which a person is non-identically constituted by a human animal, EP is a *non-constitutionalist* view as it claims that a person is a proper *part* of a human animal.⁹ Consequently, combining the ontological claim with a commitment to the narrow criterion, the proper part of a human animal which qualifies as a person should reasonably be the human animal’s brain (or enough of it). To illustrate this further: according to EP, rather than you being a body with some thinking, conscious part, you are a thinking, conscious part that has a body. According to EP, we are not essentially animals.¹⁰

1.1. Arguments for the Embodied Person View

In what follows I will present some arguments in favor of EP. To begin with, it corresponds with intuitions concerning the location of the self, such as in brain transplant cases. Intuitively, I would expect that if my cerebrum was successfully transplanted into your emptied skull, the person who would wake up in your body after the operation would be me. This is the outcome that EP entails: when the thinking, conscious part is moved from one body to another, so is the person. If that kind of operation was possible, this outcome seems the most plausible to expect. This gives EP an advantage over its main rival view, animalism, since a posit of solely biological continuity entails the less intuitive outcome that the person who wakes up in your body is you,

⁶ Ibid. 6.

⁷ Olson, E. T. “On Parfit’s View That We Are Not Human Beings”, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 76, 39–56, 2015. doi: 10.1017/S1358246115000107. 39.

⁸ Olson. *Personal Identity*.

⁹ Blatti, Stephan, “Animalism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, forthcoming, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2016 URL: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/animalism/>>.

¹⁰ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 19.

but with a new cerebrum.¹¹ For those who are not satisfied with arguments from brain-transplant cases *qua* thought experiments, the intuitive strength of EP can be illustrated by some actual cases. In cases of conjoined twinning where two separate heads share the same body we would not say anything other than that there are two people sharing the same body. One might also think that EP has an intuitive advantage in cases where a person enters an irreversible vegetative state, arguing that the human being in question does not meet the criteria of EP (by not meeting the narrow criterion and - maybe - not having a thinking, conscious part) and that EP therefore can explain why the previously existing person does not seem to persist although the human animal is still alive, and that we, at the same time, are not sure whether this is the case or not.¹² However, intuitions concerning irreversible vegetative states might vary depending on your experiences and which view on personal ontology you are committed to, so I would like to call on some extra caution when arguing from this last case.¹³ Conclusively, EP, with its part psychological part physical criteria, seems to grasp some intuitive aspect of personhood which its main rival view cannot account for.

The next argument in favor of EP is that it solves what is called the Thinking Part Problem. This is a problem for any constitutionalist or animalist view since they are committed to the claim that human people are in some way identical to human bodies. The brain indeed seems to be the thinking part of an animal. Now the problem is that if you believe that you are an animal, it seems as if *you*, the animal, only think in a derivative sense from having a thinking part.¹⁴ This is not a desirable position when your aim is an account of the ontology of *people*, since the Thinking Part Problem implies that the brain, and not the animal, is the person, as it (seemingly) is the best candidate for being the primary, non-derivative thinker. On the other hand, the solution to accept this and postulate that we are just brains has serious problems of its own, which I do not rehearse here.¹⁵ Now since EP is a non-constitutionalist view, the Thinking Part Problem does not apply to it. It denies that we are human beings, and states that we really are the conscious, thinking, and controlling parts of human animals.¹⁶ As Parfit puts it: “The Thinking Parts Problem has a thinking parts solution.”¹⁷

This stance consequently avoids another common problem for Lockean accounts of personal ontology, namely the Too Many Thinkers Problem. It poses a concern for views which to the question of the fundamental nature of people would answer that people are more or something else than human animals, such as EP. Accordingly, the Too Many Thinkers Problem is an argument in favor of animalism, then called the Thinking Animal Argument, and can be formulated as follows:

¹¹ Ibid. 11-13.

¹² Ibid. 17-18.

¹³ A significantly different intuition can be found in (Olson 2007).

¹⁴ Olson. *What Are We?*. Section 4.2. The name “Thinking Part Problem” is Parfit’s, but the problem itself is the same as Olson’s Thinking-Brain Problem.

¹⁵ For a survey of problems for Brain Views, see (Olson 2007).

¹⁶ McMahan, Jeff. *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003. doi: 10.1093/0195079981.001.0001. Cited in: Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*, 14.

¹⁷ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*, 14.

- (P1) Presently sitting in your chair is a human animal.
- (P2) The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking.
- (P3) You are the thinking being sitting in your chair.
- (C) Therefore, the human animal sitting in your chair is you.¹⁸

Now, if your view claims that you are something else than the animal, there seem to be two thinking beings in your chair - you and the animal. Parfit mentions the Too Many Thinkers Problem briefly, stating that there is no problem with a human animal having a part which performs a certain task, in this case thinking, in the same way a human animal having its nose as its sneezing part does not generate a Too Many Sneezers Problem.¹⁹ I believe there is another way for EP to avoid this problem, which is coherent with Parfit's answer. The solution is to use the claims of EP to revise the Thinking Animal Argument:

- (P1) Presently sitting in your chair is a human animal.
- (P2*) The human animal sitting in your chair is thinking in a derivative sense by having a thinking part that thinks non-derivatively.

P2* is simply the EP explanation of what is the case in P2. For the revision of P3, what Parfit calls the *own-thinker principle* needs to be introduced. This was formulated by Olson in favor of animalism, but was later hijacked by Parfit, claiming it actually to be in favor of EP.²⁰ It says that if there are one derivative thinker and one non-derivative thinker sharing the same thoughts, the one that is the person is the non-derivative thinker.²¹ Now, this combined with P2* gives us the rest of the revised argument:

- (P3* + OTP) You are the non-derivative thinker, i.e. the thinking part of the human animal sitting in your chair.
- (C*) Therefore, the human animal sitting in your chair is *not* you.

Now, one need not have animalist preferences to feel that something is missing here. Some more exhaustive account of how people are related to their human animal bodies is needed; otherwise the intuitive strength of EP might be impaired. At least two problems can be formulated in line with this worry. The Physical Properties Objection claims that since we have physical properties such as having certain body parts, those must be part of us, the people. Parfit answers to this objection by emphasizing that EP claims us to be *embodied* people, and explains this by our use

¹⁸ Blatti. *Animalism*.

¹⁹ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*, 14-15.

²⁰ Ibid. 18.

²¹ Chisholm, Roderick. *Person and Object*, Open Court, 1976, 104. Cited in: Olson, E. T. "Animalism and the Remnant-Person Problem", *Philosophical Perspectives on the Self*, edited by J. Fonseca & J. Gonçalves, 2015, 21-40. http://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.173538!/file/lisbon.pdf.

of personal pronouns.²² According to Parfit personal pronouns are ambiguous, and he argues that we already use them accordingly (eg., if your trousers were splashed with mud, you could say “I am splashed with mud” without anyone raising their eyebrows). This explains how we can use pronouns to refer to our bodies while at the same time believing that we are not human animals. In other words, an ambiguous use of pronouns combined with the embodied-relation between person and animal eliminates the Physical Properties Objection.²³

There is also an epistemic problem with EP, despite its solution to the Thinking Animal Argument. The solution is supposed to show that the primary thinker, viz. the person, is not the human animal but its thinking part, and accordingly deny that we are human animals. Important to note though is that there are two thinkers: the primary, non-derivatively thinking person and the secondary, derivative - but still thinking - animal. What EP has done is to explicate the qualitative differences between the two; consequently, there are not too many people. But are there too many thinkers? The epistemic problem is this: if both think your thoughts simultaneously, how could you ever know if you are the animal thinking some thought derivatively or the person thinking the thought non-derivatively?²⁴ Parfit asserts that on an unambiguous conception of personal pronouns this seems to be a problem, but on an ambiguous conception of pronouns it does not need to be.²⁵ To make the answer accessible, I think some suppositions of EP need to be spelled out. As we have seen, EP demarcates the differences between human animal and person. This might give the impression of them being very separated from each other. But despite of their different properties, they have a very close connection. To get the picture it is essential to see that even if there are two thinkers, there is only one episode of thought. This means that the way in which the animal thinks derivatively is in an especially strong sense. Everything that that the animal understands it does by having a part, the person, that does. This includes thoughts such as “Outer-I thinks because Inner-I does”, since without the understanding that Inner-I provides with, Outer-I would not have understood the thought.²⁶ This view of our connection with our human animal bodies might actually be an intuitive advantage in that it explains how we can feel closely connected to our human bodies, such that we can refer to it by using first person pronouns, while at the same time be convinced that we could survive losing most of it.

1.2. Arguments against the Embodied Person View

I now move on to criticism of EP put forward by Olson. We have already stated that the narrow criterion implies that the thinking part that is the person according to EP is the brain. Olson notes that for it not to be an arbitrary choice of part, EP needs to commit itself to a principle of Thinking-Subject Minimalism: that a true thinker must be made up of *all and only* the objects directly involved in its thinking. Without such a restriction, the thinking part could be the head,

²² What henceforth is said about personal pronouns I count as commitments of EP.

²³ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*, 20.

²⁴ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 20. Quoting: Olson, E.T. “Thinking Animals and the Reference of ‘I’”, *Philosophical Topics* 30, 2002, 189-208.

²⁵ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 20-24.

²⁶ Ibid. “Inner-I” and “Outer-I” are two more specific uses of “I”, which Parfit introduces to give examples of how the aforementioned ambiguity can make sense of there being two qualitatively different thinkers thinking the same thought.

the upper half of the body - or the entire animal.²⁷ In this paper I assume that EP does and in fact needs to endorse this criterion. Olson mentions three problematic aspects of minimalism. First, there is a problem of how and whether it could be generalized. Since thinking is an activity performed by human animals, should not minimalism also hold for other activities, such as walking, talking, eating, etc.? If so, a person would only walk in a derivative sense by being the part of the animal that calls on other parts of the animal to carry out certain activities, such as walking.²⁸ To accept this more or less odd consequence of minimalism might seem like a small price to pay considering the strengths of EP at large. Perhaps there are ways to avoid this altogether, but regardless of how innocuous the objection is, EP faces harder problems.

Olson's second worry poses a more stressing problem for EP to solve: how do you know which parts are and which are not directly involved in someone's thinking? For instance, which role does the parts of the human body that enables the brain to function, such as those involved in supplying it with oxygenated blood, have in this context, and why should they be considered indirectly rather than directly involved in a person's mental processes? EP needs to provide with a strategy that makes us able to distinguish the one from the other, otherwise its choice of the brain as being the thinking conscious part of a human animal is alarmingly arbitrary. If EP cannot say which parts of a human animal are directly involved in its thinking, it thereby cannot say what constitutes the person, which is a serious blow to EP *qua* an account of personal ontology.²⁹

Regardless of whether EP could solve the two aforementioned problems or not, one separate problem with the commitment to minimalism would remain. It arises with the fact that different parts of the brain are involved in different mental activities: the act of remembering names are governed by certain neurons, while imagining faces are governed by some other, etc. Since only certain neurons are directly involved in certain thoughts, according to minimalism, these neurons are the primary thinker of these thoughts. So it seems that the thinking part EP suggests in fact consists of a large number of primary thinkers, none of which could possibly meet the narrow criterion. This combined with the facts that it can be hard to distinguish which neurons are directly involved in what, and that they might overlap, makes this a hard problem for EP to answer to.³⁰

Even though questions concerning demarcation constitutes a very interesting area of concern, I am not sure about which impact it should be seen as having on EP. It certainly should lie in the interest of any proponent of EP to ascertain for example which parts are and are not directly involved in one's thinking, but the question does not appear to be a purely philosophical one. It seems to me that the possibility of progress in this question is to a large extent, if not solely, depends on empirical research. If we could know for certain that there could never be any progress in neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori* investigation in the matter, then the problems of minimalism would be a serious concern for the proponent of EP. But as long as we cannot establish the inefficacy of such investigation it might be more fitting to view the questions of

²⁷ Olson. *On Parfit's View*. 49.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 49-50.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 50.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 51.

demarcation as a still markedly unexplored area, rather than viewing EP's inability to account for the exact boundaries of a thinking part as a fatal shortcoming of the view.

I now move on to discuss a potentially problematic consequence of EP concerning persistence. Recall that one important asset of the view is that its results in cases concerning identity over time, such as the brain-transplant case mentioned earlier, match commonplace intuitions about persistence. Because of this, the following criticism needs an answer since it questions EP's ability to explain identity over time. But before we continue, it is important to observe a way in which my reading of Parfit differs from Olson's. I count the narrow criterion as a part of EP, while Olson does not. However, he holds Parfit accountable for positing both what he interprets EP to be (viz. the ontological claim of EP) and the narrow criterion (and particularly the compatibility of the two!), so the difference is really just terminological - at least at this stage. In order to avoid confusion I stick to my terminology while discussing Olson's criticism, but for the sake of perspicuity, let us repeat and formulate EP as following:

(The ontological claim of EP) A person is the thinking, conscious part of a human animal.³¹

(The Narrow, Brain-Based Psychological Criterion) If some future person would be uniquely psychologically continuous with me as I am now, and this continuity would have its normal cause, enough of the same brain, this person would be me. If some future person would neither be uniquely psychologically continuous with me as I am now, nor have enough of the same brain, this person would not be me. In all other cases, there would be no answer to the question whether some future person would be me.³²

With these clarifications in mind, we can move on to the criticism. Olson writes:

Physiologists tell us that my brain came into being early in gestation, long before it could support any mental activity. If I am my brain, as the embodied-part view appears to imply, then I must have persisted then without any psychological continuity.³³

This, Olson argues, is incompatible with the narrow criterion because it claims psychological continuity to be necessary for a person to persist.³⁴ First, I would like to point out that I believe Olson has overlooked one attribute of the narrow criterion, which when present makes his argument miss its target. We have already noted that conformity with intuitions is important to EP. What Parfit seems to do is to explicate a definition of "person" which correlates with our intuitive use of the word. Keeping this in mind, we should take into account that the term "person" is open-textured, something that is accounted for by the narrow criterion since it leaves open what would happen to a person in "all other cases". If Parfit would attempt to answer what would happen in those cases where our commonplace conception of "person" does not provide

³¹ It might be worth noting that EP could be phrased in a broader sense to include the possibility of non-human people, but since the point of this paper is not to discuss the question of the existence of non-human people, I believe this narrower formulation serves the purpose of the relevant discussion better.

³² Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*, 6-7.

³³ Olson. *On Parfit's View*, 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 51-52.

an answer, the narrow criterion might become less intuitive, in which case he would risk losing this asset.³⁵ Olson's argument presupposes that Parfit's aim is to phrase a more or less exhaustive explanation of our identity over time and that if this is not accomplished, which Olson suggests, EP's explanation of our persistence conditions is "radically incomplete".³⁶ However, as we have seen, Parfit need not agree on these terms, and might even appreciate how his criterion illustrates the open texture of "person". Moving on to the incompatibility between the ontological claim of EP and the narrow criterion, we need to look at the ontological claim. In the case of the fetus which has developed a brain that lacks mental activity, the answer to the criticism is evident: this human animal does not have any part that is thinking or conscious, and is therefore not a person. And since it is no person, the fact that it has a brain is not incompatible with the narrow criterion (the lack of mental activity makes it impossible for it to be psychologically continuous with anything).

The last criticism concerns the ontology of EP. We have already noted that the ontological claim of EP is that a person is the thinking, conscious part of a human animal. This claim combined with the narrow criterion implies that the part which is the person is the brain,³⁷ but not the brain in any state. According to EP, a person consists of a brain which is psychologically continuous in the sense mentioned in the narrow criterion. Consequently, a brain lacking the capacity of supporting mental activity is not a person. Let us call the ones that do support the kind of mental activity needed to meet the narrow criterion *functioning brains*. This distinction between brains and functioning brains has some alarming and quite confusing consequences, which I will try to make as clear as possible. First, we need to take a look at what Parfit says about the relation between person and brain:

The thinking part of a human animal, we could say, is related to this animal's cerebrum or upper brain in a way that is roughly similar to that in which this animal is related to its whole body. Most of us distinguish between ourselves and our bodies. If we deny that human animals *are* their bodies, we could similarly deny that the thinking part of these animals is their upper brain.³⁸ [author italics]

Because the thinking part and the brain are coextensive in the same way an animal and its body are coextensive, Parfit's claim seems to imply that there are two coextensive objects which both qualify as thinking parts, only differing in one sense: by having different modal properties, i.e. persistence conditions. When the organism dies, the functioning brain disappears and the regular brain persists.³⁹ I do not know if Parfit would agree on this or not, but let us for the sake of argument assume that this is an inevitable effect of EP. If this is the case, EP has a Thinking Part Problem the like of which it was supposed to avoid (see section 1.1.), and the question remains -

³⁵ Possible ground for that this in fact is Parfit goal can be found in EP and the ambiguity of personal pronouns, where he argues from our everyday use of them. See also (Parfit 2007): "... nor is [EP] merely a philosophical invention, since it states more clearly what many non-philosophers already believe, or would after reflection believe."

³⁶ Olson. *On Parfit's View*. 52.

³⁷ Here I put aside considerations on which parts of the brain the person consists of (just the cerebrum, the cerebrum + brainstem, how much of the cerebrum that need to persist for a person to persist, etc.).

³⁸ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 15.

³⁹ Olson. *On Parfit's View*. 53-55.

how do you know which part you are? In this case there are two *coextensive* but modally distinct parts that both qualify as the primary thinker.⁴⁰ Olson mentions another possible consequence of the brain-functioning brain distinction, which he himself does not distinguish from the aforementioned consequence, but I do since they need not both be the case. This second possible effect of the brain-functioning brain distinction is that the functioning brain is not another object, but a property of the brain. In that case, EP risks ending up with an ontology containing one separate (thinking, conscious) part for every property the brain has: the waking brain, the sleeping brain, the sober brain, etc. All of these brains share spatial (and partly temporal) extension with the functioning brain, and assuming that physically identical objects have identical mental properties, the waking/sleeping/sober brains should, at the time they exist, also qualify as people.⁴¹ Consequently, this amounts to a new Too Many Thinkers Problem. Olson concludes his article by suggesting how Parfit could solve the problems of functioning brains.⁴² The following section is dedicated to examining the consequences of one of Olson's proposed solutions.

2. Temporal parts

The best way to resolve the new Thinking Parts Problem for EP, according to Olson, is to adopt an ontology of temporal parts. Since he does not go into any particular detail on what a commitment of this sort would amount to, this section is dedicated to shedding some more light on possible effects of EP combined with an ontology of temporal parts. The kind of temporal parts ontology I have chosen to examine for this purpose is the stage view, advocated by eg. Ted Sider. It says that people are stages (temporal parts), as opposed to being space time worms (i.e. *aggregates* of stages).⁴³ Because of this, we act or think in a strict sense but do not persist according to the former, while the latter states the opposite. Since a person according to EP is a primary, non-derivative thinker, I find the stage view more fit for the purpose of developing EP.⁴⁴ Another reason to choose the stage view is that it is coherent with views on persistence in which identity and psychological continuity play a vital role.⁴⁵ Further, for EP more decisive, assets of the stage view will be presented in the following subsection.

2.1. EP and the stage view

How the stage view could solve the ontological problems goes hand in hand with its account of persistence, so I start by further explicating the stage view and what it says about identity over time. According to the stage view, when you speak of a former you, say, the five-year-old child you once was, it is not you that you speak of, but a temporal counterpart, a stage, with which you stand in some certain relation to. This has the unintuitive effect that people do not persist. How

⁴⁰ Maybe one (three dimensionalist) EP solution to the Thinking Part Problem could be to add the criterion that for a part of a human animal to be a person it need not only be the non-derivative, primary thinker, but also have certain modal properties. In this paper I do not attempt to examine the adequacy of solving the problem in said way.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Olson. *On Parfit's View*. 55-56.

⁴³ Sider, T. "All the world's a stage", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 74, No 3, 1996. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1080/00048409612347421>.

⁴⁴ Olson. *What Are We?*. Section 5.8. This does not mean that the stage view is the only four dimensionalist view that can solve the problems of EP. Olson (2015) suggests a worm view solution.

⁴⁵ Sider. *All the world's a stage*. 451.

could a proponent of the stage view deal with this unwanted clash with our intuitions? The solution to this which is based on (Sider 1996) includes showing how the stage view is compatible with the idea that both identity and psychological continuity matters in persistence, and assigning to person stages certain temporal properties. Identity and psychological continuity are considered relations between stages. I follow Sider hereinafter and call this sort of relations *I-relations*.⁴⁶ Sider's general definitions of the identity relation and the psychological continuity relation are the following, where $M(P^*, P)$ is a four-place relation between two people and two times (M = matters, P = person, and the times left are unstated):

*(Identity)*⁴⁷ For any person P and any person P^* existing at some time in the future, $M(P^*, P)$ iff P will be identical to P^* then.⁴⁸

(Psychological continuity) For any person P and any person P^* existing at some time in the future, $M(P^*, P)$ iff P 's current stage is psychologically continuous with P^* 's stage at that time.⁴⁹

The aforementioned relations are to be considered analogous with the counterpart relation in counterpart theory. So far, your temporal counterparts are still some other people than yourself: it seems as if your former experiences did not happen to you but to someone else. This is where the temporal properties play their part. Compared to counterpart theory, they are analogous with modal properties (eg. "will be" means the same as "possibly").⁵⁰ So when you make a tensed statement like "I was once a five-year-old child", the person having the temporal property "was once a five-year-old child" is you, and not anyone else. You have these properties in virtue of some I-relation holding between you and the stage which you would refer to as the five-year-old you. The only thing that is odd here is that this property of yours involves another stage that is not you. However, I do not consider this fact odd enough to outdo the feats of the stage view. Firstly because it claims that *you* really have been five year old (since you have that temporal property), and second, the relations holding between you and your temporal counterpart, identity and psychological continuity, is sufficient persistence conditions for qualifying as an adequate view of persistence. I will return to this topic further on.

Now we can return to the ontological problems. Recall that it concerned the brain-functioning brain distinction, which either had the consequence for EP that there were two coextensive thinking parts with different modal properties or that the functioning brain was a property of the brain, which ended in a surplus of different people sharing spatial extension. In both cases the result is that there are too many people. EPS (EP + the stage view, "Embodied Person Stages") is able to avoid both consequences. One way, which is accessible to all temporal-part views, is to state that in the case of people there is always just one primary, thinking conscious part: the stage. Since we can define this stage as the temporal part of your brain (and *qua* temporal part includes everything within the brain's spatial extension for as long as the part exists) there are no

⁴⁶ Sider, in turn, borrows the terminology from (Lewis 1983).

⁴⁷ Terminology mine.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 438.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 436.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 437.

other person candidates, just one stage at a time: what Olson called a sleeping-brain person is simply some stage where your brain is asleep (inter alia), and the same goes for the rest of the properties of your brain.⁵¹ This is just one way of solving the ontological problems of EP. In case it is not satisfying enough, there is another more clarifying account of how they can be solved by adopting the stage view. Before this is introduced, the I-relations relevant to EPS need to be spelled out. In combination with EP, both the identity relation and the psychological-continuity relation need to hold between two or more stages for them to be considered person stages. The psychological-continuity relation as formulated by Sider will suffice for our purposes, but the first relation needs to be rewritten to represent the physical criteria of the narrow criterion:

(The Physical-Continuity Relation) For any person P and any person P* existing at some time in the future, M(P*, P) iff P will have enough of the same brain as P* then.

Postulate that there are two spatially coincident objects which differ only in respect to some temporal properties (which was the case in the new Thinking Part Problem). One of these properties is *existing as an unconscious fetus at t*, which the functioning brain lacks. We can say that:

(1) The brain is such that it has existed as an unconscious fetus at *t*.

(2) The functioning brain is not such that it has existed as an unconscious fetus at *t*.

To avoid the problem of contradicting properties or too many thinkers, the proponent of the stage view can invoke ambiguity in temporal construction. This is the final component of the stage view. (1) and (2) are related by the property assigned to the brain by (1) being the property that the functioning brain is denied in (2). The relevant ambiguity in this case concerns the question of which I-relation holds between which temporal counterparts. Since we know the persistence conditions of the brain respectively the functioning brain (which is why the problems arose in the first place), and since I-relations are persistence conditions, we can make use of the stage view to describe the case accordingly:

(1*) The brain is *brain I-related* to something that exists at *t*.

(2*) The functioning brain is not *functioning brain I-related* to something at *t*.

(1*) and (2*) spells out what (1) and (2) means if true. According to the stage view, there can be another relation that holds between the brain and the functioning brain, namely the *lump-of-organic-matter I-relation*, and this relation still holds between the brain and the functioning brain now and their coextensive temporal counterparts at *t*.⁵²

Consequently, we have a case of temporary identity since we have shown how the brain and the functioning brain can be spatially coextensive without the contradicting properties, viz., they are

⁵¹ Olson. *On Parfit's View*. 55. Olson also mentions these assets of the stage view in (Olson 2007).

⁵² Sider. *All the world's a stage*. Section V.

identical today but not at t .⁵³ We can say that a person is some stage that holds the proper *functioning-brain I-relations* (which according to EPS is the physical-continuity relation and the psychological-continuity relation) to some other stage. If the brain and the functioning brain are identical when it matters, that is, when some stage holds the right *functioning-brain I-relations* to another stage, then it can rightfully be said that there are not two different thinkers because they now share all their properties, while we at the same time can account for the different persistence conditions, i.e., the I-relations holding between this one stage (which seemed to be two: a brain and a functioning brain) and other stages. Since the Thinking Parts problem arose because there were two coextensive but non-identical objects, the problem now vanishes. Moving on to the Too Many Thinkers Problem, it hinged on the assumption that the functioning brain was a property of the brain. We need not accept this assumption since we can show how the functioning brain is an object identical to the brain, and accordingly, this problem is eliminated as well. If the first solution to the ontological problems was not satisfactory, this might be more persuasive. With the stage view and how it solves the ontological problems presented, I find it suitable to at last revise the two claims of EP:

(The ontological claim of EPS) A person is a temporal stage of the thinking conscious part of a human animal.

(The Narrow, Brain-Based I-Relation Criterion) If some future person would be uniquely related to me by the Psychological-Continuity Relation, and by the Physical-Continuity Relation, this person would be me. If some future person would neither be uniquely related to me by the Psychological-Continuity relation, nor by the Physical-Continuity Relation, this person would not be me. In all other cases, there would be no answer to the question whether some future person would be me.

2.2. New Problems

I previously discussed the open texture of “person”, that, to preserve the intuitive strength of his view, Parfit might want an account of persistence which respects the fact that the term does not tell us what will happen in certain cases. EPS, however, offers a far more exhaustive account of both persistence and ontology. Being an account of personal identity, this should be considered a strength. But how could a four dimensionalist view such as the stage view, with unintuitive claims such as people do not strictly persist, be combined with the intuition-based EP?

I assert that the differences between the two views need not be a problem for EPS, and that there actually are similarities between the two, but let us first focus on the problematic aspects of EPS and intuition. One might object that 1) it does not match our intuitions about persistence since according to them, people persist in a strict sense 2) according to EPS, a larger amount of people exist than it does according to our intuitions 3) that EPS is incoherent because our ordinary conception of “person” does not allow momentary beings, such as stages, to be people.⁵⁴ To answer these objections, a distinction needs to be introduced, which is crucial to the strength of EPS. Following a common four-dimensionalist route, I draw a distinction between our intuitive

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Olson. *What Are We?*. 127-128.

everyday conception of “person”, and the philosopher’s metaphysical definition, and that our commonplace talk of persistence is really just the way that best suits our commonplace purposes.⁵⁵ EPS has a definition of person in EP that is coherent with ordinary intuitions - this is the work of EP in EPS. EP is the intuitive framework which determines which I-relations hold or does not hold between stages, and which stages have which temporary properties, i.e. what can and cannot be a person. The stage view explains why we conceive of ourselves as persisting over time in a strict sense (because a certain I-relation holds between certain stages/because some particular stage has some particular temporal property), but does not claim it to be the most efficient way of talking about persistence in everyday life. In other words, EPS is compatible with our intuitions because they play a different role - the role of the stage view in EPS is to provide with a metaphysical explanation to the nature of personal identity.

Now for the similarities between the stage view and EP. Recall that the narrow criterion makes claims such as “If some *future person* would be uniquely psychologically continuous with me [...] *this person* would be me.”⁵⁶, which resembles a four dimensionalist way of talking about personal identity over time in terms of different people. The ontological claim also appears to pave the way for a temporal parts ontology by defining a person as a part.⁵⁷ The ambiguity of personal pronouns endorsed by EP resembles the stage view as well, since they both need to claim that in several cases, people use personal pronouns to refer to something else than themselves. In the same way, a person stage - which is spatially coextensive with the thinking part of a human animal - can refer to some other part, namely the body which the thinking part inhabits, even though those are numerically different, in the same way as EP.

I have shown an example of how EPS can avoid the ontological problems of EP. How about the problems of minimalism? Are minimalism and EPS compatible at all? According to minimalism, a true thinker must be made up of *all and only* the objects directly involved in its thinking. This seems compatible with EPS: the person stage contains in its extension the thinking conscious part of a human animal, which in turn is made up of *all and only* the objects directly involved in its thinking. However, the problems of minimalism seem to remain. EPS does not offer any strategy of demarcating which parts of a person’s body are directly involved in its thinking - the exact spatial extension of a person stage remains undetermined. The same goes for the third problem of minimalism. The person stage contains all the neurons that themselves, according to minimalism, are the primary thinker of the thoughts that they govern, and the overlapping neurons are still there. However, there seems to be the alternative approaches: either to show that EP's need not commit to minimalism, or to accept it and either show how its advantages outdo the disadvantages or find a way to solve the problems of minimalism. Anyhow, as mentioned earlier, to solve these problems is an area of its own which calls on further research on several areas.

Before drawing any conclusions, some objections to the stage view need to be brought up. I have already mentioned why it could be seen as a satisfactory account of persistence, but more can be

⁵⁵ Ibid. 125-128.

⁵⁶ Parfit. *We Are Not Human Beings*. 6. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ In (Olson 2015), Olson mentions how Parfit recurrently has seemed to presuppose an ontology temporal parts, although never endorsed one.

said concerning its adequacy as such. For example, one consequence of the stage view, as Sider points out, is that a present tensed identity statement about a stage that you conceive of as you in the past, such as when you point at a picture of yourself as a child, and say, “I *am* that five-year-old child”, is false according to the stage view. But it will be true to say “I *was* that five-year-old child”. Is not the latter sentence what we mean when we talk about ourselves?⁵⁸ I certainly am not a five-year-old now, but I certainly was. The truth value of sentences referring to some former stage as being presently identical to you, only seems to be a problem if you have reason to believe that this kind of sentences need to be true. Another aspect of the stage view that can be deterring is that identity holds between (different) stages and not one and the same object. However, this is a trait that all four dimensionalist views share, so this objection is only available for three dimensionalists and is not fatal unless four dimensionalism is shown to be false.⁵⁹

One can also object simply by claiming that the stage view analysis of persistence is too far-fetched and not to be considered an adequate account of persistence, since we do not think about persistence as I-relations and temporal properties concerning other person stages. Sider’s answer to this is that the common-sense foundation of talk of persistence is simply that things generally have temporal properties, which they do according to the stage view. Everything else is theoretical, and therefore, if the stage view is the most beneficial analysis of persistence, it should be allowed to be unconventional.⁶⁰

The final objection I will rehearse here concerns the infinite amount of person stages that exists according to the stage view. In the case of timeless counting, with there being infinitely many stages between one moment and another, the stage view needs to accept talk of aggregates or stages, or space time worms. This undermines the stage view because some of the arguments Sider builds his view on rely on that the objects we quantify over do not coincide,⁶¹ and since space time worms sometimes do, this is a problem. Sider claims that this need not amount to too much trouble, arguing first that he need not say that objects *never* coincide, and second that it is only in cases such as timeless counting that we talk about worms rather than stages, but in almost all other cases, stages suffices for our purposes - it depends on where our interests lie.⁶² Sider admits that this weakens the appeal of the view, although not fatally, but there are other worries. According to Joshua Stuchlik, the stage view seems to presume an atomistic view of time, which puts the view in the inconvenient position where it either needs to rule out that time is gunky, or accept worm theory.⁶³

3. Conclusion

In this paper I started off by presenting EP and criticism it has received. By formulating EP as committed to the ontological claim and the narrow criterion, I hope to have shown how Olson’s first objection against the EP account of persistence did not apply. EP combined with the stage

⁵⁸ Sider. 446.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 447.

⁶⁰ Sider. 447.

⁶¹ Ibid. Section V.

⁶² Ibid. 448-449.

⁶³ Stuchlik, J.M. “Not All Worlds Are Stages”, *Philosophical Studies*, 116: 309, 2003.
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view resulted in a more exhaustive account of not only personal ontology, but personal identity at large, than the one proposed by Parfit. Although the problems of minimalism remain for EPS, though their impact is still unclear, the ontological objections could be met successfully by EP adopting the stage view. To answer the new problems of the stage view is vital for EPS. Even though the pursue to solve these issues is outside scope of this paper, I hope that I will have shown the project of combining EP with an ontology of temporal parts to be a promising task to engage in for anyone with Lockean preferences and a friendly enough attitude towards four dimensionalism.