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## Identifying the Problem of Personal Identity

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### 1 Introduction

This paper has two main aims. The first is to propose a new way of characterizing the problem of personal identity. The second is to show that the metaphysical picture that underlies my proposal has important implications for the 3D/4D debate. I start by spelling out several of the old ways of characterizing the problem of personal identity and saying what I think is wrong with each of them. Next I present and motivate some metaphysical principles concerning property instantiations that underlie my proposal. Then I introduce the new way of characterizing the problem of personal identity that I am recommending, and I show that it avoids the difficulties facing the old ways. I also mention several vexing problems that arise in connection with certain popular views about personal identity, and I argue that if we formulate the problem of personal identity in the way that I am proposing, then each of these problems can be handled fairly easily. Finally, I show that there is an additional benefit to adopting my proposal, namely, that several other important problems facing anyone who endorses a 3D view of persistence (as opposed to the 4D, "temporal parts" view of persistence) can all be resolved in a relatively straightforward manner by one who adopts the metaphysical principles concerning property instantiations that underlie the proposal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the 3D and 4D views see Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*.

## 2 Four Ways of Characterizing the Problem of Personal Identity

Many philosophers, in their introductory lectures on personal identity, say something like this: "Suppose you have a person at one time and you have a person at another time. Then how can you determine whether the person at the first time is the same person as the person at the second time?" This often leads to a formulation of the problem that looks more or less like the following.

### The Naïve Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which person  $x$  at  $t_1$  is the same person as person  $y$  at  $t_2$ ?

Although The Naïve Characterization is an intuitively satisfying way to get people onto the problem of personal identity, there are several difficulties with this way of characterizing the problem. The first is that it appears to be based on the assumption that there are such things as "person  $x$  at  $t_1$ " and "person  $y$  at  $t_2$ ". But what could such phrases refer to? One who holds the 4D view of persistence will have an easy answer to this question, namely, that "person  $x$  at  $t_1$ " refers to the  $t_1$  temporal part of  $x$ , and that "person  $y$  at  $t_2$ " refers to the  $t_2$  temporal part of  $y$ . But of course this option is not open to the 3Der, who does not believe in temporal parts of physical objects.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps because of this difficulty, a number of philosophers introduce the topic of personal identity by saying something about the problem of determining, with respect to something that is a person at one time and something that is a person at a later time, whether the first person is the *same*

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<sup>2</sup> In light of these considerations, it is perhaps a misnomer to label The Naïve Characterization naïve (since it seems to be based on a sophisticated metaphysical assumption, namely, that people have temporal parts). What is more clearly naïve in the present context is the 3Der who blithely goes along with The Naïve Characterization as a way to capture the problem of personal identity.

*person* as the second one.<sup>3</sup> That is, many of us give something like the following characterization of the problem of personal identity.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Standard Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity**

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which something that is a person at  $t_1$  is the same person as something that is a person at  $t_2$ ?

The Standard Characterization is also an intuitively satisfying way to get people onto the problem of personal identity, and it has the virtue of being more obviously compatible with the 3D view than The Naïve Characterization. But it is nevertheless susceptible to an important objection<sup>5</sup> (which, by the way, also applies to The Naïve Characterization). For The Standard Characterization seems to presuppose that the problem concerns a certain relation – the *same person* relation – between a thing and a thing. But, the objection goes, there is no such relation. The objector will grant that there is the relation of classical identity, and that this relation often holds between a thing that is a person and a thing that is a person. But, the objector will insist, there is no relation distinct from identity that we can perspicuously call the “same person” relation.

Philosophers who make this objection to The Standard Characterization usually endorse a stronger claim. They say that there is no such thing as “concept-relative identity” or “identity under a sortal” or “sortal identity”. That is, they say that locutions of the form “ $x$  is the same  $\phi$  as  $y$ ” are either

<sup>3</sup> For the reason mentioned in the next footnote, we are eventually likely to take back the stipulation that the problem always involves a person at one time and a person at a later time.

<sup>4</sup> Where ‘ $t_1$ ’ refers to a time, ‘ $t_2$ ’ refers to a time, and  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  may or may not be identical. The idea is that most cases we will be interested in will involve two different times, but that, since we don’t want our characterization of the problem of personal identity to rule out the possibility of a time traveler visiting his former self, we should allow at least the theoretical possibility of that happening in our characterization of the problem.

<sup>5</sup> Several, actually. For another objection to The Standard Characterization (different from the objection I discuss in the text), see Olson, *The Human Animal*, Ch. 2.

nonsense or else merely express the proposition that  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$ s and are identical.

I take it that what is at issue in the debate over sortal identity is whether there are any true instances of any of the following three sentence schemas.<sup>6</sup>

(S1)  $x$  is the same  $\phi$  as  $y$  but  $x$  is not the same  $\psi$  as  $y$ .

(S2)  $x$  is the same  $\phi$  as  $y$  but  $x \neq y$ .

(S3)  $x = y$  but  $x$  is not the same  $\phi$  as  $y$ .

Those who believe in sortal identity maintain that there can be true instances of S1, S2, or S3. But, according to the objection under consideration, there really cannot be.

I am sympathetic to this objection. I agree that the notion of sortal identity is problematic. But I also think that the idea of identity under a sortal, as well as The Standard Characterization itself, can nevertheless be salvaged. In fact, I think that the idea of identity under a sortal can be salvaged in a way that also allows the 3Der to make sense of The Naïve Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity. I will return to this topic below. But first, let's consider two alternatives to The Naïve Characterization and The Standard Characterization that avoid any appearance of being concerned with the notion of identity under a sortal. The first is the approach that is adopted by Eric Olson in his book *The Human Animal*, and the second is a similar approach that Olson eschews for reasons that I won't discuss here.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Some qualifications are needed here. In the case of S1, we probably want to add that  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$ s and also that they are both  $\psi$ s. (For the claim that I am the same person as some earlier boy but not the same boy is not the kind of instance of S1 that the sortal identity theorist and the classical identity theorist disagree over.) Similarly, in the case of S3, we probably want to add that  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$ s. Also, instances of S2 like 'Ned is the same height as Ted but Ned is not identical to Ted' suggest that what terms can go in place of  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  must be somehow restricted in our characterization of the disagreement between the sortal identity theorist and the classical identity theorist. (Thanks to Eric Olson and Ted Sider for these points.)

Note also that some defenders of sortal identity will insist that there is in fact no such thing as classical identity. Such philosophers will maintain that while there are true instances of S1, all instances of S2 and S3 are either meaningless or false.

<sup>7</sup> Olson, *The Human Animal*, Ch. 2. Olson gives these characterizations of the problem different names, and formulates them in slightly different ways.

### **Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity**

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which something that is a person at  $t_1$  is identical with something that exists at  $t_2$ ?

### **A Variation on Olson's Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity**

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which something that is a person at  $t_1$  is identical with something that is a person at  $t_2$ ?

I have two worries about these characterizations of the problem. The first one involves examples like the following. Suppose that some person lives a long and happy life, and then dies. Suppose his body is then preserved in some unusual way – in a peat bog, say, or in a glacier, or as a petrified rock. And suppose that a million years later some powerful being finds this object and rearranges its particles in such a way that it comes to be alive, and a person, once again – although this time as a woman, who looks utterly different from the man of a million years earlier, and who has a completely different psychology from his.

Now, many of us will want to say both (i) that there is a single thing in the story that is a man at the beginning and a woman at the end, and (ii) that the man from the beginning of the story and the woman from the end of the story are different people. But if we adopt either Olson's Characterization or A Variation on Olson's Characterization as our characterization of the problem of personal identity, then we will be forced to say that any theory of personal identity according to which there is a single thing in the story that is a man at the beginning and a woman at the end, but also says that that man and that woman are different people, is automatically false. To me, this seems like a major strike against these characterizations of the problem of personal identity.

My second worry about Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization involves David Wiggins's notion of a *substance*

*concept*.<sup>8</sup> The substance concept of an object is, roughly, the answer to the question *What is it?* as applied to that object. More precisely, an object's substance concept is the concept or property, among those exemplified by that object, that determines its persistence conditions.

Now, on my view, *person* is not the substance concept of the objects that are people. Instead, *person* is, in Wiggins's terminology, a "phase sortal" – a property that is typically exemplified by a thing for only a portion of the time that that thing exists. For example, it seems clear that I was not a person in the earliest days of my existence, when I was either a newly fertilized egg, or an embryo, or a fetus, or something else (take your pick, depending on your favorite theory of when a human being typically comes into existence).<sup>9</sup> In fact, it seems likely that even when I was a newborn I did not yet have what it takes to be a person. Similarly, it is hard to deny that there will come a time when I still exist but am no longer a person – for some day I will be a corpse that lacks the ability to reason and deliberate, and also lacks the rights and responsibilities that go with being a person.<sup>10</sup>

But, given that *person* is a phase sortal rather than the substance concept of the objects that are typically people, it follows that Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization are peculiar ways of asking the questions that they pose. For if *person* is a phase sortal, then *x*'s being a person at  $t_1$  (and, in the case of A Variation on Olson's Characterization, *y*'s being a person at  $t_2$ ) will have little or nothing to do with the question of whether *x* is identical to *y*. Instead, that will be determined by the persistence conditions of *x*, which will themselves be determined by *x*'s substance concept. Moreover, since it is not possible for an object to change its substance concept over time (this follows from the stipulation that an object's substance concept determines its persistence conditions), the fact that *x* is going through a person-phase at  $t_1$  (or that *y* is going through a person-phase at  $t_2$ ) will be largely irrelevant to whether *x* is identical to *y*.

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<sup>8</sup> Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*.

<sup>9</sup> I am here assuming that each one of us is identical to some human being.

<sup>10</sup> I am not proposing any analysis of the concept of a person, but am merely accepting the popular view that having certain rights and responsibilities, as well as the ability to reason and deliberate, are necessary conditions for being a person.

Given all of this, the questions raised by Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization really amount to asking this question: *What are the persistence conditions for the objects that sometimes exemplify personhood?* This is surely an interesting question, but it is not what Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization appear at first glance to be asking about. Moreover, this question that Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization are really asking does not seem to capture what we are trying to get at when we ask about personal identity. (In the case of Olson's Characterization this worry is especially acute, since we take ourselves to be asking about which future *people* we will be identical to, not about which future petrified rocks or scattered objects we will be identical to.)

Notice that this second worry points out that the way we talk about personal identity makes it at least *sound* like we're discussing a special relation between a person and a person, and not merely a relation between a person and any old thing. But of course, if we take seriously the idea that we are asking about some special relation between a person and a person, then it looks like we will need to return to the problematic notion of a *same person* relation.

### 3 Some Underlying Metaphysical Principles

My attempt to rehabilitate the problematic notion of a same person relation, and the characterization of the problem of personal identity that goes with it, are based on some underlying metaphysical principles that need to be made explicit. To being with, I assume that there are such things as *instantiations* (also known as *exemplifications*) of properties.<sup>11</sup> Here are some examples: your being a human being, my being under seven feet tall, the Earth's being roughly spherical, the number two's being a prime number, and Alpha Centauri's being a star.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to instantiations of properties, there are also instantiations of other universals: two-place relations, three-place relations, and do on. For the sake of simplicity, I will here talk only about instantiations of properties, but most of what I say would also apply to the other instantiations.

Note that I do not mean by ‘instantiations’ what philosophers sometimes mean by ‘tropes’.<sup>12</sup> Tropes, if there are any, are “abstract particulars” like Montana’s greatness and the blueness of my shirt. Montana’s greatness is meant to differ from, for example, Favre’s greatness, even though both are tropes that involve the same property. The idea is that the greatness of each great quarterback is something unique to that individual, and that, moreover, this would be the case even if two quarterbacks were great in exactly the same way. If there are such things as tropes, then each trope corresponds to a unique instantiation, but is nevertheless distinct from that instantiation.

What I do mean by ‘instantiations of properties’ are instances of properties, such as Montana’s being great and my shirt’s being blue. An instantiation of a property is a complex entity that occurs during some specific period of time and that involves, in addition to the property being instantiated, some object that is doing the instantiating.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, instantiations typically last for some extended period of time.

This last point – that instantiations typically last for some extended period of time – is an important and unduly neglected one. It is widely recognized that physical objects persist through time, and sometimes also recognized that events persist through time. But philosophers do not often explicitly acknowledge that instantiations also persist through time.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, instantiations most certainly do persist. For example, consider a typical leaf from an oak tree in Western Massachusetts. First the leaf is green. That lasts all summer. Then it turns red in October, and its being red lasts for about a week. Then it becomes brown, and stays brown for the rest of its days. Or

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<sup>12</sup> See Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*, Chapters 1 and 6, and Bacon, “Tropes.”

<sup>13</sup> Some readers will wonder what the difference is between what I am calling instantiations and what Jaegwon Kim calls events. The answer is that there is no difference. More on this topic below.

By the way, I don’t believe in non-temporal instantiations (or non-temporal objects, for that matter). If you do, no worries. I am talking here only about instantiations of properties that occur in time.

<sup>14</sup> One philosopher who discusses the question of whether instantiations persist is Douglas Ehring, in his book *Causation and Persistence*, where he argues that it is in fact tropes and not instantiations that persist.



consider a basketball player with a swollen knee. She goes to a doctor, who asks, “How long has it been like this?”

Once we have noticed that instantiations persist through time, we are in a position to raise some important questions about instantiations. For example, just as we can ask questions about the identity over time of a particular object, so too can we ask questions about the identity over time of a given instantiation. If  $x$  has the property  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ , and  $y$  has  $\phi$  at  $t_2$ , then we can wonder whether  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ .

In fact, it's a bit of an understatement to say that we can ask such questions. For it is also true that there must be answers to these questions. If  $x$  has  $\phi$  at  $t_1$  and  $y$  has  $\phi$  at  $t_2$ , then either  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ , or else it isn't. (Those who accept ontological vagueness may want to add a third option here, namely, that it is an indeterminate matter whether  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ . But either way, there must be an answer to the question.)<sup>15</sup>

An example might help to make it clearer what I'm talking about here. Suppose you see me in a blue shirt one day, and you see me a week later in a similar blue shirt. Then you can wonder whether the shirt's being blue on the second occasion is part of the same episode of blueness that you observed on the earlier occasion. If it turns out that the same shirt is involved in both cases, and if it has remained blue from the first occasion to the second, then the answer is clearly *Yes, the second instance of blueness is part of the same episode of blueness as the first one*. But if, on the other hand, it turns out that there are two different shirts involved, or if there is a single shirt that was dyed red for part of the intervening time, then it seems clear that the answer is *No, the second instance of blueness is not a part of the same episode of blueness as the first one*.

Notice that there is an analogous question involving events. Suppose you see two guys playing chess, you subsequently go away for an hour, and then

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<sup>15</sup> Notice that the claim made in the text – that either  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ , or else it isn't – is consistent with its often being underdetermined which property is picked out by a particular use of a given predicate. For I am talking about properties and not predicates. Note also that I am not claiming that we do (or even can) always know the answer to the question of whether some  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as some  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ .

you come back to find the same two guys playing chess. Then you can ask whether the chess game you see on your return is the same game that you saw before you left.

Notice also that, in the case of events, the question of whether this is the same event as the event before is not automatically resolved just by settling the question of which things are involved. For when you see the same players playing chess again an hour later, you still don't know whether you're seeing a new game on the second occasion. And even if you see different people playing chess on the second occasion, it might turn out that it's still the same game as before (but with new players having taken over for the original players).

Speaking of events, it is worth commenting on some similarities and differences between instantiations, as I understand them, and events. On one conception of events, championed by Jaegwon Kim, events are complex entities, each one of which involves some object exemplifying some property at some time.<sup>16</sup> Such complexes are of course no different from what I am calling instantiations. But on another conception of events, endorsed by such philosophers as Arthur Prior, events are changes in things.<sup>17</sup> If we understand events in this second way, then we can say that an instantiation is just about the exact opposite of an event: for whereas an event consists of a change in some thing, according to this conception of events, an instantiation consists of some thing's remaining the same in some respect (such as color, or size, or whatever).

Personally, I am inclined to think that events (at least in the ordinary language sense, in which football games and earthquakes are events) are neither property exemplifications (as Kim says) nor changes in things (as Prior suggests); but for the purposes of this paper I will remain neutral on the question of what we should call events. What I cannot remain neutral on is whether there are property instantiations. Nor can I remain neutral on whether property instantiations can persist through time. For I am committed to saying both that there are such things as property instantiations and that

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Kim's "Events as Property Exemplifications." (As I do in the text, Kim also takes there to be exemplifications of multi-place relations, but for simplicity talks mainly about exemplifications of one-place properties.)

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Prior, "Changes in Events and Changes in Things."

they can persist through time. But I don't think either of these claims should be seen as controversial.

So far I have been using terms like 'instantiation' and 'episode' fairly loosely, but it is now time to settle on some official and uniform terminology. From now on I will take *instances* to be those momentary items, each one of which consists of some object's having some property at some instant of time (such as my being human at exactly noon today). I will take *instantiations* to include such momentary instances as well as their temporally extended cousins (such as my being human all day today); moreover, I will take extended instantiations to have momentary instances among their temporal parts, and to be fusions of such instances. And finally, I will understand *episodes* to be instantiations that are maximal in the following sense: instantiation E of property  $\phi$  is *maximal* iff the fusion of E with any further instance of  $\phi$ -ness (i.e., one that is not a part of E) is not a single instantiation of  $\phi$ -ness.<sup>18</sup>

The metaphysical principles underlying my proposed characterization of the problem of personal identity, then, are these. First, there are such things as instantiations of properties. Second, instantiations come in episodes, which are event-like entities that can be extended in time. And third, it makes sense to talk about whether x's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as y's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$ .

#### 4 The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity

Here's how all of this is relevant to salvaging the notion of identity under a sortal. Once we acknowledge that there are such things as episodes of property instantiations, and that it is legitimate to ask whether a particular instance of  $\phi$ -ness is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as a certain earlier instance of  $\phi$ -ness, we have paved the way to a new conception of identity

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<sup>18</sup> Notice that an important consequence of accepting that there are instantiations, and that longer instantiations are fusions of instances (a.k.a. momentary instantiations), is that we have a new mereological question to address, namely, under what conditions do two or more instances of a single property have a fusion? This is The Special Composition Question for Property Instances, which is an analogue of Peter van Inwagen's Special Composition Question, which asks about the conditions under which two or more physical objects have a fusion. On The Special Composition Question see van Inwagen, *Material Beings*.

under a sortal. To say that some thing,  $y$ , that is  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is the *same*  $\phi$  as some thing,  $x$ , that is  $\phi$  at  $t_1$  is to say that  $y$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_2$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as  $x$ 's being  $\phi$  at  $t_1$ .

On this way of thinking, the *same*  $\phi$  relation is really a relation between instances of  $\phi$ -ness. Thus, the *same*  $\phi$  relation is distinct from the relation that holds between an  $x$  and a  $y$  just in case  $x$  is  $\phi$ ,  $y$  is  $\phi$ , and  $x = y$ , and it is distinct from the latter relation for one main reason: it takes different entities (instances of properties rather than things) as its relata. But note also that the above example involving a shirt (the one that is blue for a time and is then dyed red for a while before becoming blue again) demonstrates another important difference between the *same*  $\phi$  relation and the relation that holds between an  $x$  and a  $y$  just in case  $x$  is  $\phi$ ,  $y$  is  $\phi$ , and  $x = y$ . For in the shirt example there are two distinct episodes of the same property – blueness – that both involve the same shirt.

On this conception of identity under a sortal, when we ask whether this shirt today is the same shirt as that shirt yesterday, we are asking whether this instance of shirthood today is part of the same episode of shirthood as that instance of shirthood yesterday. (Or at least, that is one of the main things we may be asking.) And, similarly, when we ask whether this person today is the same person as that person yesterday, we are asking whether this instance of personhood today is part of the same episode of personhood as that instance of personhood yesterday.

We are now in a position to formulate my proposal.

### **The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity**

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which an instance of personhood at  $t_1$  is part of the same episode of personhood as an instance of personhood at  $t_2$ ?

A brief look at some of the most popular theories of personal identity will help to illustrate the idea behind The Episodic Characterization. Consider what Olson calls The Psychological Approach to personal identity, according to which psychological continuity is the key to personal identity. When it is formulated as an answer to The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, this approach will say that in order for one instance of personhood to be a part of the same episode of personhood as a later instance,

there must be some kind of psychological continuity between the two instances. Or consider what Olson calls The Biological Approach to personal identity, according to which biological continuity is the key to personal identity.<sup>19</sup> When it is formulated as an answer to The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, this approach will say that in order for one instance of personhood to be a part of the same episode of personhood as a later instance, there must be some kind of biological continuity between the two instances. (The Biological Approach, incidentally, is the one that Olson advocates. It is probably the main rival to The Psychological Approach.)

In general, I would go so far as to say that any respectable view about personal identity can be formulated as an answer to the question raised by The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity.

Here is why The Episodic Characterization is an improvement over the other characterizations of the problem. First, The Episodic Characterization, unlike The Naïve Characterization, allows the 3Der to make sense of talk about “person  $x$  at  $t_1$ ” and “person  $y$  at  $t_2$ ”. For on The Episodic Characterization such talk is to be understood as talk about  $x$ ’s instantiation of personhood at  $t_1$  and  $y$ ’s instantiation of personhood at  $t_2$ ; and this kind of talk is unproblematic for the 3Der. Also, like both The Naïve Characterization and The Standard Characterization, The Episodic Characterization allows us to take seriously the notion of a *same person* relation. But unlike those other characterizations, The Episodic Characterization comes with a ready-made and straightforward way of understanding that notion.

Meanwhile, The Episodic Characterization is an improvement over Olson’s Characterization and A Variation on Olson’s Characterization, for two reasons. First, The Episodic Characterization allows us to say, in cases like the person-turned-petrified-rock-turned-person example, that there is a single thing throughout the story, but that the person at the end of the story is not the same person as the person at the beginning of the story. For The Episodic Characterization allows us to say that the later instance of personhood in the story is not a part of the same episode of personhood as the earlier one

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<sup>19</sup> On both The Psychological Approach and The Biological Approach, see Chapter 1 of Olson, *The Human Animal*.

(despite the fact that the same object is involved in each case).<sup>20</sup> And second, The Episodic Characterization does not turn out to involve a disguised way of asking a question (about the persistence conditions of objects that can be, but need not be, people) that fails to get at what we are really trying to ask when we ask about personal identity.

Despite all of these wonderful advantages of The Episodic Characterization over its rivals, there is a certain likely objection to my proposal.<sup>21</sup> When we ask about personal identity, it might be objected, we are asking about something that bears on our *survival*, also known as our *persistence*. I want to know, for example, whether the very thing that is now me will continue to exist after the operation; and you want to know whether the very thing that is now you will survive the transporter machine. In other words, when we ask questions about personal identity, we are asking questions that crucially have to do with the notion of *identity*. But my proposal apparently fails to capture this feature of our talk about personal identity. My proposal, it might be said, takes the identity out of personal identity.

As a first response to this objection, I would point out that there is a sense in which I have not taken identity out of the equation. For on my proposal, when we ask about personal identity, we are asking whether the episode of personhood that we see going on now is identical to the episode of personhood that we saw going on earlier.

I don't expect this reply to satisfy anyone making the relevant objection to my proposal. For what the objector really wants is for identity to be in the equation as a relation between the very thing that is now instantiating personhood and the very thing that will instantiate it later.

In response to this objection (when it is put in this way), I say to the objector, If you really want identity to be in the equation, then we can do that. In fact, there are several ways to get identity back into the mix. One way would be to endorse the following principle.

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<sup>20</sup> Not that characterizing the problem in the manner of The Episodic Characterization commits us to saying this. The point is merely that doing so allows us to say such a thing.

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Eric Olson and Ted Sider for making this objection in response to an earlier version of this paper.

**A Principle About Personhood (PP):** If an instance of personhood at  $t_1$  is part of the same episode of personhood as an instance of personhood at  $t_2$ , then the object instantiating personhood in the first instance must be identical to the object instantiating personhood in the second instance.

Another way to ensure that matters of personal identity are matters of identity would be to endorse a more general version of PP that applies to all properties, like the following.

**A Principle About Property Instantiations (PPI):** For any property,  $\phi$ , if an instance of  $\phi$ -ness at  $t_1$  is part of the same episode of  $\phi$ -ness as an instance of  $\phi$ -ness at  $t_2$ , then the object instantiating  $\phi$ -ness in the first instance must be identical to the object instantiating  $\phi$ -ness in the second instance.

And finally, a third way to ensure that we are really talking about identity when we talk about personal identity would be to amend The Episodic Characterization so that the relevant kind of identity is explicitly built into the question, as follows.

**A Variation on the Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity**

The problem of personal identity consists of trying to provide an answer to the following question: What are the conditions under which an instance of personhood at  $t_1$  and an instance of personhood at  $t_2$  are such that (i) the two instances are parts of the same episode of personhood, and (ii) the object instantiating personhood in the first instance is identical to the object instantiating personhood in the second instance?

This variation on my proposal would have most of the advantages of the original proposal, and it would also accommodate the intuition that questions about personal identity are questions about identity. Moreover, I think this variation on my proposal is clearly still in the spirit of the original proposal. So I recommend it to anyone who is inclined to make the objection that personal identity must be about identity, but who does not want to endorse either PP or PPI.

## 5 Further Advantages of The Episodic Characterization Over Its Rivals

In addition to being preferable to Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization for the reasons given above, it also turns out that formulating the problem of personal identity according to The Episodic Characterization allows the 3Der to solve various problems that are otherwise not so easy to solve. For example, there is the well-known Fission Problem. Suppose a person's brain is bisected, and the resulting hemispheres are transplanted into two different bodies, so that each of the resulting people seems to be "the continuation" of the original person. Or suppose a single person is duplicated in such a way that it is indeterminate which of the resulting people is "the continuation" of the original. 4Ders, who believe in temporal parts of objects, and can thus say that there are two people in the story who share their earlier temporal parts, have an easy account of such cases; but 3Ders don't.

Unless we adopt The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, that is. For if we do, then we can say that there are two episodes of personhood in the relevant story, and that they overlap for a while (before the fission). Since the relation *being parts of a single episode of personhood* (unlike the relation of identity) can fail to be transitive, there is no contradiction in the 3Der's saying that each of the people after the fission stands in the *same person* relation to the original person, even though the two people after the fission do not stand in that relation to one another. For if we adopt The Episodic Characterization, this amounts to saying of the two later instances of personhood that each one is a part of some episode of personhood that includes the pre-fission instance of personhood, even though the two later instances are not themselves parts of a single episode of personhood.<sup>22</sup>

Another problem that The Episodic Characterization will help the 3Der to solve is The Time Travel Problem. (This is a problem that has been discussed

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<sup>22</sup> Note, by the way, that this advantage of The Episodic Characterization does not apply to A Variation on the Episodic Characterization. For if the fission case is described in a suitable way, we will want to say that neither of the later instances of personhood involves the same object that is involved in the earlier instance of personhood; which means that we will not be able to say that either one of the later people is the same person as the earlier person. It is partly for this reason that I prefer my original proposal over the variation on it.



by Theodore Sider in his book, *Four-Dimensionalism*.<sup>23</sup>) When Ted travels back in time to visit his former self, there is a problem about the relation between the younger Ted and the time-traveling Ted. Are they the same person? On the one hand, they have different properties (one is sitting, for example, while the other is standing), so it appears that they must be different people. But on the other hand, if we don't say that they are the same person, then it looks like we can't describe the case as involving a meeting of Ted and his former self.

As Sider points out, the 4Der has a solution to this problem. For on the 4D view, the younger Ted and the time-traveling Ted are two distinct spatial parts of a single temporal part of Ted. They are not identical, and so they can have such different properties as sitting and standing, but they nevertheless stand in the same person relation to one another, in virtue of the fact that there is a single "spacetime worm," a.k.a. Ted, that doubles back on itself, and is such that the younger Ted in the time travel scenario and the time-traveling Ted are both stages of this same worm. But it looks like 3Ders do not have available any such solution to this problem.

Unless we adopt The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, that is. For if we do adopt that characterization of the problem, then we can plausibly say, since this is a case in which a time-traveler visits his former self, that the story involves an episode of personhood that "doubles back" on itself. This in turn allows us to say both (i) that the time-traveling Ted and the younger Ted are two distinct things, which are spatial parts of Ted at the time in question; and (ii) that the time-traveling Ted's being a person at that time is a part of the same episode of personhood as the younger Ted's being a person at that time. In short, if we adopt The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity then we can give an account of the time travel scenario that is perfectly analogous to the 4Der's account.

Another example of a problem that The Episodic Characterization can help with is The Fetus Problem, which is a problem for The Psychological Approach to personal identity that is discussed by Olson in Chapter 4 of *The Human Animal*. Recall that on both Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization, the problem of personal identity amounts to the problem of determining what is the substance concept of the objects that can

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<sup>23</sup> Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*, pp. 101-109. See also my "Two Arguments from Sider's Four-Dimensionalism;" and Sider, "Replies to Gallois, Hirsch and Markosian."

be, but need not be, people. According to The Psychological Approach (as an answer to the questions raised by Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization), then, *person* is our substance concept. So on this view, either (a) when you came into existence, you replaced a fetus that was in your mother's womb before you, or else (b) ever since you came into existence, you have been sharing space (and parts, and matter, and even clothes) with a thing that was once a fetus, that has never been a person, and that has always been distinct from you. Neither option seems very attractive. This is of course not a problem for 4D advocates of The Psychological Approach (who can say that you are a temporal part of an organism whose earlier temporal parts include a temporal part that is a fetus), but it is a big problem for 3D advocates of The Psychological Approach.

Unless they adopt The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity, that is. For if they do, then they will not take The Psychological Approach to be answering any question about the substance concept of the things that can be people. Thus, 3D proponents of The Psychological Approach who endorse The Episodic Characterization of the Problem of Personal Identity will be able to say that the same thing that was a fetus is now a grown-up person, even though the episode of personhood in question did not begin until that thing came to have the relevant psychological properties.

A similar problem is The Corpse Problem for The Biological Approach. According to The Biological Approach (as an answer to the questions raised by Olson's Characterization and A Variation on Olson's Characterization, that is), our substance concept is something like *living organism*. So on this view, either (a) when you die, you will be replaced by a brand-new object – a corpse – that was not there before, or (b) when you die, you will go out of existence, and the particles that previously composed you will not compose anything (not even a corpse), or else (c) you are now sharing space (and parts, and matter, and even clothes) with a weird, non-living entity that will one day be a corpse (your corpse, in fact) but that has always been distinct from you. Again, none of these options seems very attractive; and, again, this is not a problem for 4D advocates of The Biological Approach (who can say that you are a temporal part of a temporally extended object whose later temporal parts include a temporal part that is a corpse), but it is a big problem for 3D advocates of The Biological Approach.

Unless they adopt The Episodic Characterization, that is. For if they do, then they can say that the same thing that will be a corpse after you die is now a person, even though the episode of personhood that is going on in your vicinity right now will have ended by the time the relevant object becomes a corpse.

In general, I want to claim that adopting The Episodic Characterization will be a terrific boon for 3Ders. For since episodes, like events, can plausibly be said to have temporal parts, the 3Der (who doesn't believe that objects have temporal parts, but should be willing to say that events and episodes do), can give an account of fission cases, time travel cases, and any other cases that seem to present a special problem for the 3Der, that is analogous to the 4Der's account of those cases.

In fact, I think that this general approach to making sense of talk about identity under a sortal will help the 3Der in other areas as well. Once we adopt this way of talking, for example, we will have an easy time of dealing with such matters as the statue and the lump, without being forced to posit coincident entities. For we can say that there is a single thing – the lump of clay – that goes through a temporary statue phase, and also that the persistence conditions (and modal properties) for an episode of statuehood are different from those for an episode of lumpiness.

## 6 Conclusion

Let me end with a couple of disclaimers. I want to be clear about the fact that I haven't solved the problem of personal identity. Nor am I even claiming that the problem is easier to solve once we adopt this new way of characterizing the problem. It is still going to be an interesting and challenging task to say under what conditions one instance of personhood will be a part of the same episode of personhood as a later instance of personhood.

What I am claiming, however, is that there are important advantages (for the 3Der) that come with this way of characterizing the problem of personal identity. And I'm also claiming that, as a kind of bonus, the general metaphysical picture behind the characterization of the problem that is recommended here also gives us a sensible way to understand talk about

identity under a sortal, and to solve a host of otherwise vexing problems facing the 3Der.<sup>24</sup>

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