

Perdurantism, Fecklessness and the Veil of Ignorance

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There has been a growing charge that perdurantism—with its bloated ontology of very person-like objects that coincide persons—implies the repugnant conclusion that we are morally obliged to be feckless. I argue that this charge critically overlooks the epistemic situation—what I call the ‘veil of ignorance’—that perdurantists find themselves in. Though the veil of ignorance still requires an alteration of our commonsense understanding of the demands on action, I argue for two conclusions. The first is that the alteration that is required isn’t a moral one, but rather an alteration of prudential reasoning. Second, and more importantly, this alteration isn’t necessarily a repugnant one. In fact, given that it prudentially pushes one towards greater impartiality, it may be seen as a point in favor of perdurantism.

There has been a growing complaint (raised in one form or another by Dean Zimmerman (2003, 502), Eric Olson (2010), Mark Johnston (2016, 2017) and Alex Kaiserman (forthcoming)) that perdurantist accounts on which persons are four-dimensional mereological sums of person-stages have drastic and unpalatable ethical consequences. For perdurantism, when married with unrestricted mereological composition, holds that there are countless many other person-like objects—i.e. ‘personites’—that coincide with persons. And once the perdurantist rightfully recognizes that such personites have just as much moral worth as persons, the perdurantist should recognize that fecklessness is morally required. (Johnston (2017, 629-31) has also raised problems concerning the morality of lying and punishment. But this paper will be concerned only with addressing the more prominent fecklessness problem.)

In this paper, I argue that this alleged problem overlooks the epistemic situation—what I'll call the 'veil of ignorance'—that perdurantists should find themselves in. Though I agree with objectors that perdurantism does require a reconfiguration of what demands on action there are, I disagree with them on two accounts. First, I think it requires a reconfiguration of one's understanding of *prudence* rather than of morality. And second, I disagree that such a reconfiguration is necessarily unpalatable—in fact some may find it attractive since it gives one greater prudential reason to be impartial.

The structure of the paper is this. In section 1, I explain the charge of morally obligated fecklessness raised against perdurantism. I then explain, in section 2, how the alleged problem critically fails to take into account the perdurantist's veil of ignorance. Given the veil of ignorance, I then explore in section 3 how prudential reason is affected, arguing that it in fact has a certain appeal to it.

1. Morally-obligated fecklessness

On the perdurantist view of persons, persons persist through time by having temporal parts much like persons extend through space by having spatial parts. But perdurantists also typically accept unrestricted composition. This is the view that, for any objects, the *x*s, there is an object composed of the *x*s. We should note that the locution 'for any objects' here is intended to employ a 'timeless' quantifier; thus, unrestricted composition implies that, say, all of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon's temporal parts and the Great Wall of China's current temporal part, taken together, compose an object. But perdurantism, when married with unrestricted composition, implies that subsets of a person's temporal parts also compose a very person-like object. For

instance, take all of the temporal parts of person *S* except for the ones that are part of *S* for the very last hour of *S*'s life. Those temporal parts will compose a personite that is exactly like *S*, save for the fact that it goes out of existence an hour before *S* does. And there are personites that are composed of even smaller subsets of *S*'s temporal parts. In fact, at every moment, *S* has personites coming into and out of existence.

But, allegedly, given the existence of these personites, we run into a moral issue. In presenting the problem, I will primarily follow Mark Johnston's (2017), which I take to be the most rigorous and forceful presentation. The problem can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Personites have full moral status.
- (2) "Part of having a full moral status is possessing a stringent moral claim against being used without informed consent or compensation." (2017, 623)
- (3) Prudentially driven self-sacrifice involves using personites without informed consent or compensation.
- (4) Therefore, there's a stringent moral claim against prudentially driven self-sacrifice.

Premise (1), which I will grant here, seems true given that personites are much like persons, and the only differences between the two seem irrelevant for recognizing that one, but not the other, has full moral status. And I will also grant premise (2). As for premise (3), Johnston illustrates it in the following way: suppose Johnston is considering studying Hungarian for the purpose of conversing with locals during his visit to Budapest for three months in the following year. Though he recognizes that months of studying the language leading up to the trip would cause him much agony, he nevertheless calculates that the later benefits far outweigh that short-term

drawback. Hence, as commonsense would have it, there is nothing problematic about Johnston deciding to study the language. But, as premise (3) intends to point out, if there are in fact personites, this impression is mistaken. The decision to study the language in fact neglects the well-being of one's personites. Consider one of the personites that coincide with Johnston but goes out of existence just prior to Johnston's arrival at Budapest. Such a personite will receive all the drawbacks of studying Hungarian without reaping any of the compensating rewards. Furthermore, even though Johnston's personite doesn't object to Johnston's decision, the personite doesn't give its *informed* consent. For the personite doesn't recognize that such a project is not in its own self-interest; it is completely unaware that it will cease to exist before Johnston gets to Hungary. Thus, premise (3), as applied to this case, is true: by studying Hungarian, Johnston is using such a personite without its informed consent or compensation for its hard work. Furthermore, countless activities would use personites in this way: "study, dieting, physical exercise, house-training your puppy, enduring the depredations of homeland (in-)security when you travel, advancing through irritating career stages to get somewhere satisfying, or doing the unpleasant things required to hold down your job" (Johnston 2017, 623). In sum, the perdurantist view leads us to the absurd result that these sorts of activities are immoral. Instead, moral duty would require us to be "comfortable and unambitious" (Olson 2010, 265) and "feckless" (Johnston 2017, 624).

In this paper, I will focus on premise 3, arguing that it is mistaken. Proponents of (3) hold that personites are somehow being used or taken advantage of. As Olson (2010, 265) says "causing a being to devote the remainder of his existence to the benefit of others when he is entirely ignorant of its effects on him is unjust." And Johnston (2007, 632) compares it to slavery: "[personites] are 'prisoners of want'; in this case, prisoners of my wants, prisoners waiting to

‘arise’ and be liberated.... For given four-dimensionalism [perdurantism in particular¹] and the like, there is a clear sense in which we persons are all holders of compliant and silenced slaves.” But I think this notion of a person using and taking advantage of their personites is mistaken. To explain why, let me draw out the analogy further by considering the following:

The Slave-Ship

Suppose Jones has a decent life living on Homelandia, but Jones knows that he can improve his life by moving to Happy Island. Unfortunately, due to all the rowing involved, getting to Happy Island is a strenuous journey. Jones decides to nonetheless undertake the journey, and eventually makes it to Happy Island, enjoying the life afforded there. Unknown to Jones, however, is that two other Homelandians, Bip and Bop, had accompanied him on his journey, helping to row the boat in the lower deck—without their help, Jones couldn’t have reached the island. Furthermore, Bip and Bop were also rowing the boat with Jones’ same hopes of enjoying the pleasures of the island. Unfortunately, it was unknown to them that, as a pure matter of their natural lifespan, they all died off before reaching the island. Had they instead remained at Homelandia, Bip and Bop could have enjoyed the remainder of their short lives enjoying the decent quality of life they originally had.

It seems that objectors think that perdurantists are related to their personites much in the same way that Jones is related to Bip and Bop. When perdurantists undergo prudentially-driven self-sacrifice, their treatment of their personites is morally analogous to Jones’ treatment of Bip and Bop. But one problem with the above analogy is that Jones doesn’t seem to be morally blameworthy in any way. Since Jones is *unaware* of both (i) the existence of Bip and Bop, and

¹ See Kaiserman (forthcoming) for an argument that exdurantism, or stage-theory, doesn’t suffer the same problem.

(ii) the fact that they will die off early, Jones seems morally off the hook for their unfortunate circumstance. Jones doesn't 'use' Bip and Bop in a morally blameworthy way. Likewise, perdurantists who are unaware of personites and their lifespans don't actually 'use' personites in a morally blameworthy way. So I take it that what objectors really have in mind is the *enlightened* perdurantist—the perdurantist that recognizes the existence of personites and their full moral status. Just as enlightened Jones—Jones with the knowledge of Bip and Bop and their unfortunately short lifespans—is acting immorally in taking the trip, so the enlightened perdurantist is acting immorally in choosing to learn Hungarian.

2. The Veil of Ignorance

But if the perdurantist is enlightened about the existence of the moral status of personites, I think such enlightenment should bring a further recognition that *the perdurantist herself could be a personite*. Let's put this more precisely in terms of the following:

Individual *i* is under the veil of ignorance =_{df} *i* is epistemically unable to determine whether *i* is a person (with the corresponding person-persistence-conditions) or one of the person's coinciding personites (with the corresponding personite-persistence-conditions).

Trapping Principle

If personites exist and have full moral status, then, for every person or personite *i*, *i* is under the veil of ignorance.

The Trapping Principle is plausible since a person and the person's coinciding personites have all the same evidence available to them for thinking they are a person. After all, a person and her personites share the *exact same* mind and thoughts. Likewise none of those individuals have evidence for thinking they are one of the shorter-lived personites rather than one of the longer-lived ones. So on internalist theories of knowledge, which restrict justification to what can be directly accessed in one's mind, the Trapping Principle is surely inescapable. Externalists, on the other hand, appeal to factors that the individual isn't aware of to determine the belief's epistemic state. These external factors, such as reliability (Goldman, 1986) or safety (Sosa, 1999), could be used to explain how we know that we aren't brains in vats despite the fact that such brains could have phenomenologically identical experiences to us. But the case of personites is very different, since not only do persons and their corresponding personites share the exact same mind, but they also share the exact same environment. In fact, other than a difference in persistence conditions and identity, they have everything else in common. And it seems that the slight difference that exists between them is too frail of a reed to satisfactorily explain how the person, but not the personites, knows that they are a person² (for further discussion of externalist responses to a similar epistemic problem see Madden (2016, 185-8)).

Perdurantists might resist the veil of ignorance and avoid the skeptical situation by denying personites robust thinking abilities. For instance, they might take inspiration from Shoemaker's (2008) or Madden's (2016) suggestion, made in a similar connection, and hold that personites

² One might point out that persons at least meet a safety condition for knowledge: since I am necessarily a person, in all the closest possible worlds in which I believe that I'm a person, I'm correct. But safety is normally only proposed as a necessary condition for knowledge (see for instance Sosa (1999)). Perhaps one could find some further principles that would, along with the safety principle, imply that such a belief is also knowledge. But I take it as a datum of intuition—around which one's epistemic theory should be constructed—that given the great similarity between both internal and external factors, the person can't know that she is a person rather than a personite. I suspect many will share this intuition.

don't have consciousness at all.³ Thus, perdurantists know that, since they are conscious—i.e. that they have mental properties—they are persons. But if the perdurantist goes this route, then supposedly personites wouldn't have intrinsic moral status anyway, since they lack any possibility for consciousness⁴. So even if personites weren't conscious, I don't think that would be a problem for the Trapping Principle, which is conditional on personites having full moral status. (Notice also that the perdurantist who takes the Shoemaker-style strategy could also deny premise (1) of the fecklessness charge. But see Arnadottir (2010) for criticism of Shoemaker.)

Thus, the Trapping Principle seems true—at the very least, it's open to the perdurantist to accept it. But given the Trapping Principle, there's a crucial disanalogy between Jones and the perdurantist. Where the Trapping Principle implies that the enlightened perdurantist should also recognize that she could be one of the personites, there's no analogous trapping principle for Jones. Thus, even if it would be morally wrong for enlightened Jones to decide to take the journey, the disanalogy prevents us from transferring the same moral judgment on to the perdurantist's case.

We might therefore tweak Jones' story again to make the analogy tighter.

The Veiled-Slave Ship

As before, suppose that Jones, Bip and Bop all want to go to Happy Island, and know that it's a strenuous journey to get there. But all three are also behind a veil of ignorance: they know that one of them has a long enough lifespan that would survive the trip and enjoy Happy

³ Apart from the above psychological response to the skeptical issue, Madden (2016) also considers some epistemic responses. But he finds them all wanting. We will also see later in the section some semantic responses as well.

⁴ Unlike a coma patient who, though unconscious, at least has a robust sense in which she could *possibly* conscious.

Island, whereas the other two have shorter-lifespans that would expire before making it to the island; but none of Jones, Bip or Bop knows whose lifespan is whose.

Nonetheless suppose that they still jointly decide to make the trip. In this case, it doesn't seem that anyone has done anything *morally* wrong in making that decision. Jones hasn't used Bip or Bop in any way without their informed consent—they're all informed as far as epistemically possible about their possible fates. And if they decide to go, it doesn't seem that any compensation is required for those who don't make it to the island—we don't generally think compensation is required to losers of a gamble. Likewise, I think the same holds for the truly enlightened perdurantist—if the perdurantist, from behind the veil of ignorance, were to decide to study Hungarian, he wouldn't be using personites in any morally problematic way.

One might complain that a crucial difference between the perdurantist and Jones is that Jones makes his decision by consulting Bip and Bop; the perdurantist, on the other hand, makes the decision on his own. But this difference exists only because the perdurantist and his personites share the exact same mind. When the perdurantist makes the decision to study Hungarian—knowingly taking the risk of being one of the unfortunate short-lived personites—so the person and all the personites make the decision as well. Of course, it's not in the best interest of the short-lived personite to make that decision since it won't receive the benefits. But the veil of ignorance makes it impossible for the short-lived personite to know and deliberate on that fact. The personite can only deliberate on what is available to it. If the personite consents, its consent is as informed as possible. Everything from there is up to chance.

This completes my essential response to the fecklessness charge. But there are two pressing questions that need to be addressed. One question is 'even if it would be *morally* permissible to

choose to study Hungarian, wouldn't it be *imprudent* to do so?' This is a question I will address in the next section. A different question I will address now is: isn't it too high of a cost to admit that the perdurantist is 'trapped' in a 'veil of ignorance'? For, even if it saves one from the fecklessness charge, the perdurantist must now give up the commonsense intuition that she is a person! That is, the perdurantist could no longer hold that she will continue to exist until the time that we refer to as 'her death', for she might just pop out of existence as a personite does prior to that event!

In response, one might employ a well-known semantic response to this objection that makes a distinction between an 'I'-user and the referent of 'I' (see Noonan (1998, 2010), Sutton (2014, 636) and Kovacs (2016, 1077) for advocates; and even Olson (2010, 267) employs the distinction.) Though a personite thinks or utters the word 'I', the referent isn't that very personite; instead, 'I' refers to the person. Thus both the person and the personites know that "I am a person" and that "I have the persistence conditions of a person"—since the referent of I (the person) is indeed a person and has the corresponding persistence conditions. The commonsense intuition is preserved.

It may seem that the veil of ignorance response to the personite problem is incompatible with the semantic approach, for one could no longer say things like "since I'm under the veil of ignorance, I don't know whether I'm a person or one of the many personites". Nonetheless, we could introduce a term, say 'O', and stipulate that when an individual *i* utters or thinks token *t* of that term, *t* refers to *i*. And if the personites (and the coinciding person) utter the exact same token of 'O', let us further stipulate: if individuals *i* and *i'* both utter token *u* of 'O', *i* refers only to *i*, and not to *i'*, when uttering *t*; likewise *i'* refers only to *i'*, and not to *i*, when uttering *t*. In this way, *t* will have multiple meanings, each referring to a different individual. (On the other hand, if

we instead hold that, when uttering ‘O’, the person and personites each utter a numerically distinct token of ‘O’, then we needn’t add this further stipulation.)⁵ Thus, one could instead say “since O am under the veil of ignorance, O don’t know whether O am a person or one of the many personites”. One could likewise introduce other terms as correlates of ‘you’, ‘he’, etc. So as long as we understand the veil of ignorance response in terms of some such technical vocabulary, one can simultaneously hold the semantic response to the skeptical problem. (For purposes of fluidity and readability, however, I will continue to use the commonsense terms of ‘I’, ‘you’ ‘he’, etc. But the reader may instead use the more technical vocabulary for precision.)

Of course, the semantic approach isn’t immune to objection. Perhaps one has complaints with it along the lines of Olson (2002) and Zimmerman (2003, 502-3). But I won’t attempt to engage such objections, for it’s outside of the scope of this paper to argue that the semantic response is a *good* one; I have only tried to respond to the original worry that the veil of ignorance response substantially *exacerbates* the skeptical problem for perdurantists. And my response has been that it does not since it’s compatible with the popular semantic response (and as I have suggested above, if one prefers a Shoemaker-Madden-style psychological response, one could instead just reject premise (1) of the fecklessness charge).

⁵ Noonan seems to suggest that a person’s coinciders couldn’t employ such terms. Noonan (2010, 98) writes “why can quite different kinds of thing with quite different kinds of persistence condition not be objects of first-person reference...? This is a very good question. The only answer, I think, is the transplant intuition, which has to be accommodated.” Thus Noonan seems to think that even introducing new terms wouldn’t even allow a person’s coinciders to refer to themselves. But even if the transplant intuition—which holds that in a brain transplant, a person goes where the cerebrum goes—is strong, I find it utterly baffling that a personite couldn’t use technical vocabulary to refer to itself. (In any case, it seems that the perdurantist who holds unrestricted composition can preserve the transplant intuition, since there is an object that goes where the cerebrum goes.)

3. Prudence and personites

I have argued that it doesn't make sense to say that the truly enlightened perdurantist 'uses' or 'takes advantage of' their personites, since such a perdurantist recognizes that she might in fact be *identical* to any such personite. The perdurantist needs to take the well-being of each of the personites into consideration, given that the personite's fate might literally be her own. Thus, if the perdurantist decides to, say, learn Hungarian, she hasn't immorally taken advantage of anyone. But a looming worry for this response is that even if the decision to study Hungarian is *morally* permissible, surely it's greatly *prudentially* inadvisable. Given that there's a decent chance that you will be a short-lived personite, there's also a decent chance you wouldn't benefit from the short-term sacrifice. Thus, there's still good prudential reason to be feckless!

In response, I agree with this objection insofar as it points out that the veil of ignorance requires a reconfiguration of prudential rationality. But I don't think the objection quite identifies what that reconfiguration is, since it fails to take stock of all the relevant sorts of personites that there are. So far we have only considered shorter-lived continuous personites that coincide with one's current person stage, live on for a while, and then find their final rest some time short of the coinciding person's death. But given the unrestricted composition principle that generates the existence of such personites (see section 1), there are also 'gappy' personites—personites that coincide with one's current person stage, then go out of existence, then come back into existence by coinciding with one's later person stages. Such gappy personites would in fact benefit greatly from Johnston's decision to study Hungarian—especially those that don't exist for the laborious study period, but pop into existence just in time to reap the benefits. So Johnston's recognition

that he might in fact be such a gappy personite would balance out the odds⁶ by adding substantial motivation to learn Hungarian.

We might wonder if these gappy personites are in fact relevant here. Johnston thinks shorter-lived personites are relevant due to the following consideration: though person *S* in the actual world lives 70 years, had *S* lived 69 years, *S* would have been a morally relevant being; and since *S*'s counter-factual 69 year-old self is intrinsically identical to the 69-year-long personite that *actually* coincides with him, that personite is also a morally relevant being. But this style of argument doesn't extend to gappy personites. Nonetheless, gappy personites still have conscious experiences including pain and suffering. Thus the perdurantist can take this as the property that determines moral relevance (as Bentham (1780) famously says "the question is not 'Can they reason?' nor, 'Can they talk?' but 'Can they suffer?"). But more fundamentally, Johnston's argument only concerns whether personites are *morally* relevant, whereas the issue here is whether gappy personites are *epistemically* relevant. And indeed they are, since it's impossible to know whether one is a person rather than a gappy person. For the person shares the exact same mind and environment as the gappy personite; and, as with the shorter-lived personites, the fact

⁶ If there are a finite number of personites that coincide persons, then we can straightforwardly see how this "balancing out" would work: there's a comparable (or larger) number of the gappy personites that would benefit compared to the number of short-lived personites that don't benefit. But if time is continuous, then at any moment, an infinite amount of personites comes into existence—likewise there's an infinite number of the gappy and short-lived personites. How could we compare these sets of infinities? A first pass is to do it much like we compare measures of time: even though one second and two seconds of time both contain infinite amounts of moments (if time is continuous), the latter is larger than the former. Likewise we can define a measure over personites based on when those personites come into existence. So if we take the infinite set, S_1 , of person *S*'s personites that come into existence during one second and compare it to the infinite set, S_2 , that come into existence during a two second period, the latter set will be larger than the former. (This basic idea can be refined. We would supposedly want to consider when the personites go out of existence. For suppose set A contains all and only the personites that come into existence in the first second, t_1 , who also go out of existence within t_1 , and set B contains all and only the personites that come into existence at t_1 who also go out of existence within t_1 or the next second, t_2 . Intuitively, B is larger than A since the former has a larger end range. We would also need further additions if we wanted to make comparisons that include person-swappers—individuals introduced below.) These considerations support the thought that, even in a temporally continuous world, the gappy personites would help balance out the odds against the shorter-lived personites.

that the latter has gappy persistence conditions seems too frail to explain a difference in knowledge.⁷

The case of gappy personites shows why considering only short-lived continuous personites is too hasty. But simply bringing such gappy personites into view would also be too hasty, for there's still yet a host of wild and wonderful kinds out there. Consider the 'person-swappers'. Unrestricted composition implies that (as Olson (2010, 260) points out) there are personites that coincide with your current person stages, but later swap-over onto a person on the other side of the world. Such is a spatial person-swapper. But there are temporal swappers too—personites that coincide with your current stage, and later coincide with person-stages that exist far (even millennia) into the future. From behind the veil, you could be any one of these personites that cross borders of space and time that you never dreamt of traversing.

But it's also important to recognize that personites can also end up coinciding with non-conscious objects—like plants, rocks, space-dust, atoms, etc. This brings along the realization that *a great host* of one's personites are 'consciousness-deficient'—that is, that they will spend little or no time in the future coinciding a conscious object. For, consider a person S at time t ; for every object O that exists in the universe at the next moment, t' , there's an object that coincides with S at t and O at t' . Thus, given that the vast majority of the objects in the universe are not conscious beings, most of the objects that coincide with S won't be conscious in the next moment—hence they are consciousness-deficient in the next moment. Consciousness-deficiency does come in degrees, however. The most deficient personites will never coincide with a conscious being ever again, while slightly less deficient personites will do so, but for only the shortest periods of time.

⁷ I will also introduce other types of personites below. It seems to me that essentially the same points hold for them as well."

Once we recognize all the personites out there, should this alter our commonsense understanding of prudence? And, if so, how? I think the most obvious required change is a change towards impartiality. Since we normally think that one's person is identical to oneself, we normally equate self-interest with one's *person's*-interest. But the existence of person-swappers severs that equation. Such swappers give you greater prudential reason to care for other persons' well-being, given that their well-being might *literally* become your own. And while spatial person-swappers give you prudential reason to care about the well-being of persons regardless of spatial distance from you, so temporal person-swappers give you prudential reason to care about persons regardless of how far into the future they are.⁸ So where the commonsense view of prudence might fail to give you prudential reason to care for persons that are spatially or temporally remote from you—since they are too remote to benefit you personally—the existence of person-swapping personites *would* give us prudential reason to care. Thus, on this score, personites might in fact be seen as a reason to *favor* perdurantism.

Yet, there might be worries that the existence of consciousness-deficient personites would *negatively* alter our commonsense view of prudence. Consciousness-deficiency is so widespread, it's very likely that you yourself suffer from it—hence there's not much of a future for you to enjoy. We can think about this in relation to the veiled slave-ship as well. Suppose that an enormous number of people are considering whether to go to Happy Island. They know that if they go, though a small number of the people will succeed and enjoy the island, a vast majority of them will instead randomly pop up in another corner of the universe never to have mental

⁸ Some may think that near-bias—a preference for pleasurable experiences to be in our near, rather than distant, future and for painful experiences to be in our distant, rather than near, future—is rational. But if the population continued to grow, one is more likely to exist in the distant rather than near future. Thus the current view would take near-bias as imprudent, and, for the same reason, take *future-bias as prudent*. Though many (see for instance Sidgwick (1884, 380-1), Rawls (1971, 293-4), Sullivan (2018)) already hold near-bias to be irrational, they don't take the further step of recommending future-bias.

states again. Since you don't know which is you, why bother going on the trip given that it's vanishingly unlikely that you'll get there anyway? Thus, even if person-swappers give us reason to be more impartial—to put the care we have towards other persons' future more on a par to the care we have for our current person's future—the fact of consciousness-deficiency gives us prudential reason to care little about *anyone's* future.

Though it's understandable why someone who accepts the existence of personites might take this apathetic attitude, I don't think it would be prudentially *required*. For instance, consciousness-deficiency could instead motivate greater ambition and concern for the direction of humanity. The reason is that we have some control over the extent that consciousness-deficiency takes hold. If, for instance, all conscious beings died off in the next moment for all eternity, then *all* of one's personites would suffer complete and utter consciousness-deficiency. But, on the other extreme, if the growth of humanity and conscious beings continued to grow, eventually permeating all the corners of the universe by establishing vibrant and flourishing colonies, then consciousness-deficiency would be greatly mitigated. For one's chances of experiencing consciousness again, by virtue of coinciding such future beings, would greatly increase. (Notice that this scenario is quite different from having a population explosion in humanity's current condition.⁹) Further, as one might reason: if humanity is lazy and negligent, consciousness-deficiency will only spread; only by being responsible and ambitious can we achieve a flourishing future for humanity. Thus, the realization of consciousness-deficiency could instead prudentially motivate people to have more of an activist's attitude.¹⁰

⁹ Given that such a population explosion in our current environment would likely have devastating effects on peoples' quality of life and humanity's future in general.

¹⁰ This still might not imply that one has good reason to take the veiled-ship voyage. After all, we would normally take the trip to serve the best interests of the person (which we normally identify ourselves with), whereas the activist is more worried about the best interests of humanity as a whole. Nonetheless, the activist might still judge the voyage to be a good way to serve humanity.

It's important to notice that even if humanity flourished, that might not help oneself in any way. For instance, one might suffer *modal* consciousness-deficiency—that is, in *all* (or currently accessible) possible worlds you suffer consciousness-deficiency. If so, then in one sense you would not be benefitting yourself. Nonetheless, given that *for all you know* you aren't so modally unlucky, working towards the flourishing of humanity is, epistemically speaking, prudentially beneficial.

One might still worry that the activist's attitude is a waste of energy. Sure I might be able to help myself avoid consciousness-deficiency by helping humanity flourish. But given that my actions likely have such a miniscule chance of making a difference that would benefit me, fecklessness would still be the better option. In response, it's important to notice that *fecklessness itself* also has a miniscule chance of benefitting oneself. Suppose, for example, I'm carrying some very heavy grocery bags on my way back home to prepare dinner; given the looming threat that I will be a severely consciousness-deficient personite, should I just be feckless and, say, drop my bags and enjoy the moment instead? One problem with doing so is that one couldn't actually put it into practice in a way that actually ensures benefit to *oneself*. It takes time, even if only the briefest moment, to make the decision and start enjoying the moment. Thus, you would only be helping *later* person-stages, rather than your *current* person-stage, enjoy the moment. Likewise, since there's such a small chance that you would coincide with any of those few later person-stages, there's only a small chance that you would benefit. Isn't it better to just continue with the original plan of preparing dinner? For doing so will not only raise that person's overall well-being, but also help the person to be more productive, contributing to the flourishing of humanity. And these are prudentially justifiable goals, since they help to raise both one's chances of being conscious again and one's chances of having a higher quality of experience if/when

conscious. In summary, even if current hard work and self-sacrifice has a slim chance of prudentially benefitting oneself through the minimization of consciousness-deficiency, fecklessness *also* has a slim (if not slimmer) chance of helping oneself. It's therefore hard to conclude that fecklessness would be prudentially preferable.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the original complaint—that the existence of personites morally requires us to be feckless—critically overlooks the veil of ignorance. Once we recognize the veil of ignorance, we should also see that the true battleground concerns whether the existence of personites require an unpalatable revision of prudential reason. I have argued that it need not. The realization that personites have person-swapping abilities gives us greater reason to be more impartial—to put the interest you have in your own person's well-being more on a par with your interest in others' well-being. Though the realization of consciousness-deficiency has the potential to move some towards greater apathy towards life, this is not a prudentially required response; prudence allows one to instead adopt an activist attitude that urges greater responsibility and care for the direction of humanity to combat consciousness-deficiency. Though it might be that the activist would be less concerned with learning Hungarian, the reason would have nothing to do with fecklessness.

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