

More than Words Can Settle

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Abstract

How to explain how objects persist from one-time location to the other within a metaphysical framework is known as the problem of persistence. Superficialism, relying on alternative argument, argues that the problem of persistence is a mere verbal dispute. This study identified the absurdity and inconsistencies in the alternative language. This is to show that superficialism is self-stultifying. The study showed, contrary to the claim of superficialism, that the alternative language argument is not a sufficient ground to dismiss the debate between endurantism and perdurantism and consequently other debates in philosophy as a non-substantive metaphysical debate. The paper also found the alternative argument of superficialism unreliable and absurd.

Keywords: superficialism, metaphysics, persistence, endurantism, perdurantism, alternative language.

1. Introduction

The first significant record of anti-metaphysical positions dates back to the mid-twentieth century, with Rudolph Carnap as the major actor. The summary of Carnap's position on metaphysical enterprise is that metaphysics is mere semantics and nothing more than linguistic choice. Thus, contrary to the position of ontologists, metaphysics has no bearing on objective reality. With the demise of verificationism, especially because it is self-stultifying, Carnap argues that all of metaphysics borders on the mere usage of language. Carnap claims that metaphysical questions and statements are mere proposals that are not capable of being true or false.¹

Although traditional metaphysics survived Carnap, a school of thought argues that metaphysics is largely not as important as presented. This school of thought avoids an outright dismissive attitude towards metaphysics. They adopt a deflationary and not dismissive attitude to metaphysics.² The proponents of this school of thought, such as Eli Hirsch and Kristie Miller, are classified as superficialists. Superficialism, as the name suggests, implies that a large number of ontological disputes lack depth, thoroughness, character, and serious thought. It particularly uses

¹ Carnap, Rudolph. Carnap Rudolf, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology." *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*. Ed. Richard Rorty. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 73.

² Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 231-259, Thomasson, Amie. "Answerable and Unanswerable Questions." *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 444-445.

the problem of persistence as the flagship for the position that most metaphysical disputes are non-substantive. It argues that most metaphysical disputes are of the nature of the debate on the problem of persistence. Hence, once the claim that the problem of persistence is superficial is successfully argued, the claim will extend to many other metaphysical disputes.

Superficialists argue that if an alternative language is successfully created and sustained for the problem of persistence, it follows that ordinary language and the common-sense approach can adequately address the problem of persistence. Thus, there is no need to address the problem of persistence within a metaphysical framework. This essay will engage superficialism on the alternative language argument and argue that the alternative language argument failed in its quest to show that the problem of persistence is not substantive.

2. Superficialism on the problem of persistence

The problem of persistence is an ontological dispute on how objects persist through time. The problem of persistence makes a distinction between two identities of an object – numeric identity and diachronic identity. The identity of an object at a particular time location is the numeric identity of that object. While the identity of the object with itself at another time location is the diachronic identity.³ Persistence assumes that at each point in time, an object is identical to itself and this is not controversial. However, an attempt to explain the diachronic identity of objects is problematic. Hence, the problem of persistence in metaphysics is concerned with how best to explain how an object at T_1 is the same object at T_2, \dots , and T_n , that is, the diachronic identity of an object, and the relationship it has with its numeric identity.

Superficialism is the position that most metaphysical disputes are non-substantive; hence, metaphysics is not as important as ontologists claim it is. The summary of the superficialists arguments is that most metaphysical disputes are either verbal, non-substantive, merely terminological and therefore superficial; hence, the name Superficialism. To support this claim, Eli Hirsch, a proponent of Superficialism selects the problem of persistence as its flagship for the claim that most ontological disputes are mere verbal disputes. According to him, most ontological disputes are of the nature of the problem of persistence. Hence, once it is shown that, the problem of persistence is a mere verbal dispute and not a substantive ontological dispute, the arguments used can apply to other non-substantive ontological debates. In Hirsch's words:

One central kind of ontological dispute that I think is verbal concerns which sets of (successions of) bits of matter constitute a unitary physical object. Disputes of this kind have been pervasive in the recent literature. Perdurantists, endurantists, mereological essentialists, four dimensionalists, and sundry nihilists have engaged each other in lengthy and often highly theoretical disputes, though many of the disputes are, on my position, merely verbal... my arguments here in regard to the verbalness of this issue are to be understood as generalizable to many of the other issues in physical-object ontology.⁴

Thus, for Hirsch, any supposed dispute in physical-object ontology is a verbal dispute.

What immediately comes to mind when one is confronted with a 'verbal dispute' in philosophy is that there is a seeming dispute between at least two parties, and each party assumes there is a disagreement when there is none. In other words, a verbal dispute occurs when the disagreement is over meaning or words and not facts. While the disputants assume there is a genuine dispute, clarification of language or key terms can resolve the pseudo-dispute. This description of a verbal argument is aptly captured in the words of David Chalmers:

³ Lewis, David. *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, 204.

⁴ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 232.

Intuitively, a dispute between two parties is verbal when the two parties agree on the relevant facts about a domain of concern, and just disagree about the language used to describe that domain. In such a case, one has the sense that the two parties are “not really disagreeing”: that is, they are not really disagreeing about the domain of concern, and are only disagreeing over linguistic matters.⁵

For example, in America a football is spherical, has two pointed edges, and is brown. However, in Britain, a football is round, has no edge, and is black and white. If an American and a Briton are not aware of this difference, they may disagree over the appropriate description for a ball.⁶ A dispute of this sort is verbal, and to resolve it the disputants can be educated on the differences in what is called football in both countries. Awareness that a football can be round and black and white in some climes, and spherical and brown in some climes can resolve the dispute.

This is the sort of verbal dispute superficialists claim is common to many ontological disputes, and its whiff is easily detected in the problem of persistence. According to superficialism, the dispute on the problem of persistence is a debate between endurantism and perdurantism on whether persistence is three-dimensional or four-dimensional. The debate is reducible to whether objects have temporal parts or not; endurantists deny this, while perdurantism affirms it. While endurantism argues that persistence is three-dimensional, perdurantism argues that persistence is four-dimensional.⁷ Both the endurantist and the perdurantist insist the disagreement between them is substantive and not verbal.

However, according to superficialism, the disputants use different language to make the same claim and they are ignorant of this. Hirsch characterised it thus:

In my view, an issue in ontology (or elsewhere) is “merely verbal” in the sense of reducing to a linguistic choice only if the following condition is satisfied: Each side can plausibly interpret the other side as speaking a language in which the latter’s asserted sentences are true.⁸

Hence, in the language of perdurantism the claim that temporal parts exist is true, while in the language of endurantism the claim that temporal parts exist is false. Hence, it is not the case that temporal parts exist in objective reality, but it is a case of linguistic choice. The striking feature in this verbal dispute is that both disputants make the right assertions in their respective languages. Hence, in this ontological dispute on the problem of persistence, the dispute is verbal and the arguments for each side of the dispute are reducible to linguistic choice. Hirsch thus argues that:

We can, if we wish, think of X as forming its own linguistic community. If side X is perdurantism then X’s language is the language that would belong to an imagined linguistic community typical members of which talk like perdurantists, i.e., they assert the sentences that perdurantists assert and endurantists reject.⁹

In other words, the preferred language of perdurantism favours the term temporal parts in characterising persistence, while that of endurantism rejects it. In this case, it is a verbal dispute, and the assertions of the disputants are both right, even though they are not aware of this. Hence, the first feature of the verbal dispute that plagues the problem of persistence and consequently many ontological disputes is that the assertions of the disputants are both correct.

⁵ Chalmers, David. “Verbal Disputes.” *Philosophical Review*. 120:4 (2011), 515.

⁶ Manley, David. “Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics.” *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 8.

⁷ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 233.

⁸ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 231.

⁹ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative languages.” 239.

A verbal dispute in the sense in which superficialism uses it has some characteristics peculiar to it. The first characteristic is that the assumed correct answer posed by each disputant does not depend on facts about the world, but depends on the meaning of the words used in the dispute. In other words, there is no evidence that the dispute is about facts, there is only evidence that it is about words. The disputants disagree more on the appropriate words to describe their reality, rather than describing the reality in the world.¹⁰ For example, if there is a dispute over a car, the disputants are more concerned about the best way to talk about the car, than disagree about the car itself.

The second characteristic of a verbal dispute according to superficialism is that the disputants agree on how the world is or the fundamental facts of reality. There is no genuine disagreement over the state of the reality at the center of their dispute.¹¹ For example, in a dispute over a car, the disputants all agree that a car is a vehicle, a car uses at least four wheels, a car has an engine, and so on. There is hardly any substantive disagreement on what a car is. All the disputants have a fair agreement on what the term 'car' is.

A third characteristic is that when a disputant is asked how the truth of her claim can be known, the disputant employs her linguistic intuitions to justify her 'truth'.¹² For example, the disputant may argue that her truth in the dispute over a car can be understood by those who know the meaning of a particular language used to describe the act of a car in motion. In the case of endurantism and perdurantism, superficialism argues that to justify the commitment to temporal parts, a perdurantist appeals to some basic intuitions on the use of temporal parts. With these three features, superficialism argues that a verbal dispute in ontology occurs when disputants who, although make the same claim, employ the use of different semantic preferences or different linguistic communities arising from their preferred convictions. Hirsch thus argues that:

... a dispute in which, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. This can be put more briefly by saying that in a verbal dispute each party ought to agree that the other party speak the truth in its own language.¹³

Hirsch argues that ontological disputes on physical objects are of this nature. Each linguistic community is just talking past the other, and there is no substantial dispute at stake. This is because each community only employs an alternative language for referring to the same thing. The real object of dispute is not denied, but the problem is the words or key terms used in describing or referring to it. According to superficialism, the problem of persistence satisfies all the major features of a verbal dispute in ontology; hence, it is not a substantive metaphysical dispute.

Hirsch argues that if there is still doubt that the dispute on persistence is a verbal dispute and endurantism and perdurantism are equivalent theories after 'all has been said and done'; the sceptic may subject the dispute to an alternative language. The alternative language argument is, according to superficialism, the best way to realize that the problem of persistence is a mere verbal dispute and does not deserve a serious ontological discourse.¹⁴ The alternative language test reveals when two positions only adopt alternative ways of speaking on the same

¹⁰ Manley, David. "Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics." 11-12.

¹¹ Manley, David. "Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics." 12.

¹² Manley David. "Introduction: A Guided Tour of Metametaphysics." 12-13.

¹³ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 239.

¹⁴ Yablo, Stephen. "Must Existence-Questions have Answers?" *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009, 506, Thomasson, Amie. "Answerable and Unanswerable Questions." *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009, 466.

things.¹⁵ In other words, if an alternative language can be successfully created and sustained for a dispute, the dispute is verbal and its theories are equivalent. Hence, if an alternative language can be created and sustained for the problem of persistence in metaphysics, then it follows that it is true that it is a mere verbal dispute. Consequently, the dispute can be subjected to linguistic interpretations in ordinary language, which can decide the appropriate language to describe the reality in contention.¹⁶ Hirsch thus argued that alternative language is necessary and sufficient to show that ordinary language suffices in resolving the problem of persistence, and consequently some other ontological disputes.¹⁷

3. Alternative language for endurantism and perdurantism

Alternative language is a peculiar language where a disputant can speak the truth in the language of the other disputant. In other words, alternative language is a situation where a disputant can express her claims in the language of the other disputant. A dispute is a mere verbal dispute when an alternative language is created for each side of the dispute and both sides can be interpreted as true in each alternative language. For example, if an alternative language is created for endurantism, both endurantism and perdurantism must be interpreted as true in that alternative language. Where an alternative language is created, but both sides of the dispute cannot be interpreted as true in the language, the dispute is not verbal. There is a substantive issue in that dispute. Hence, a successful alternative language is necessary and sufficient to show that a dispute is a mere verbal dispute.

Alternative language is such that a disputant P with conviction P can speak in a manner that the rival disputant E with conviction E will believe disputant P holds conviction E, yet disputant P still holds conviction P. Disputant E can also adopt a language that allows disputant P to believe that disputant E belongs to P's school of thought. Expatiating on this, Hirsch states that,

An "alternative language" for a given position is a language in which the proponents of that position could express all the (object-level) propositions they believe while asserting only sentences that proponents of the other position would assert.¹⁸

Some assumptions guide this alternative language suggested by superficialism. Hirsch adopted definitions for proposition, character of a sentence, and interpretation of a language, to set the foundation for the sort of language superficialism proposes as an alternative language. A proposition is a set of possible worlds, and in a sentence it is the set of worlds the sentence affirms to be true.¹⁹ The character of a sentence is a function that in context of utterance, assigns a proposition to that sentence.²⁰ The character is also defined as what gives the sentence its truth conditions, in context of utterance. Then interpretation of a language is determined by the character of its sentences; thus, the interpretation of a language makes it unique, and a distinct language cannot have the same interpretation. These are necessary to define the sort of language used as alternative language, and to set the restrictions for an alternative language.

¹⁵ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 233-240.

¹⁶ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 244-252.

¹⁷ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 234, 239.

¹⁸ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages" *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 235.

¹⁹ Lewis, David. *On the Plurality of Worlds*. 1986, Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages" 234.

²⁰ Kaplan, David. "Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives." *Themes from Kaplan*. Eds. Joseph Almog et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 485-487, Hirsch, "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 234.

According to superficialism, an alternative language can be created for any dispute, but it can only be sustained when the dispute is a mere terminological dispute. Hence, an alternative language for the problem of persistence will succeed, while an alternative language for the dispute between the Jews and Christians will fail.

To illustrate this, Hirsch imagined a scenario where a die-hard endurantist by the name Edna, who as an endurantist, belongs to the E-community and speaks E-English. Edna is a researcher in a Department of Philosophy in a local university, but is interested in moving to a bigger and more reputable university. However, all the researchers in the Department of Philosophy of this bigger and more reputable university are die-hard perdurantists. These researchers have little tolerance for endurantism; Edna herself has little tolerance for perdurantism.

However, Edna's desire to be in this other Department of Philosophy far outweighs her intolerance for perdurantism. Edna then comes up with a trick: she convinces herself that since the point of departure between endurantism and perdurantism is on the existence of temporal parts, she will start speaking in a way that perdurantists will assume she is a perdurantist. However, in her mind she will remember that she is an endurantist. For example, when confronted with a yellow banana in the new department of philosophy, rather than say the "Banana is yellow", she will say the "Banana has a temporal part that is yellow". However, by "temporal part that is yellow" she actually means the banana is yellow" or "the colour of the banana is yellow". That way she will stay committed to her E-convictions, but a typical perdurantist will assume she speaks P-English and thus, belongs to P-community. With this Edna moves to the bigger Department of Philosophy where she will speak P-English, yet hold her E-convictions.

Now, there is a twist to this thought experiment, there is a man by name Pedro who is an unrepentant perdurantist, but is in love with Edna. Pedro assumes Edna will not grant him audience because of her intolerance for perdurantism. Pedro then decides to assume a language where he will speak like an endurantist, but retain his ontological commitment to temporal parts. Pedro if confronted with a banana in front of Edna, rather than say "The banana has a temporal part that is yellow", he will say "The banana is yellow" or "The color of the banana is yellow". With this E-English, Edna will embrace Pedro as a member of E-community and give him a chance. With this secret language, Pedro approaches Edna and got the chance he wished for. Edna did not know Pedro is actually a perdurantist, Edna's colleagues in her new department did not know she is an endurantist.

Edna confides in Pedro that she adopted P-English at work to be accepted in the department. Pedro, excited, tells her he will join her in using the alternative P-English. Pedro then switches to his P-English without Edna knowing he is actually a die-hard perdurantist. Pedro and Edna were married for several years and lived together successfully using the P-English. Edna worked in the bigger Department of Philosophy for several years without any of her colleagues realising she is a fake perdurantist. The morale of this thought experiment is that it is possible for a perdurantist to speak like an endurantist, without betraying his perdurantists commitment to temporal parts. It is also possible for an endurantist to speak like a perdurantist, without betraying her commitment to objects persisting wholly.

The more interesting aspect of this alternative language that a perdurantist will accept an endurantist as speaking the truth in P-English, and an endurantist will accept a perdurantist as speaking the truth in E-English. In other words, in shifting between P-English and E-English, nothing is lost because there is no substance which is the object of dispute between the two which the P-English or E-English will pick out. P-English is a comfortable alternative for E-English and E-English is a comfortable alternative for P-English.

To buttress the claim that an alternative language for a substantive dispute can be created, but cannot be sustained, Hirsch used an illustration of the Jews and Christians. Just as

superficialism narrowed the core of the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism to the existence of temporal parts, they also narrow the dispute between the Jews and Christians to whether Jesus is the saviour or not. While Christians insist that Jesus is the saviour, the Jews insist that Jesus is not the saviour. Now imagine that during the Second World War, some Jews find themselves in a situation where they have to pretend, they are Christians to survive. Now these Jews decide to adopt a secret language such that when they refer to Jesus, they actually mean Moses, and once they mention water, they actually mean mountain. Therefore, when they say, “Jesus walked on water”, they actually mean, “Moses descended from the mountain.” Imagine a scenario where someone is actually descending from the mountain, it will be strange if the Jews then say, “The man is walking on water.” Even if the Jews then find another secret phrase to represent “The man”, there will be too much confusion and complications arising from this alternative language between the Jews and Christians.²¹

Although, an alternative language for the dispute between Jews and Christians can be created, it cannot be sustained. There cannot be a sustainable alternative language for Jews and Christians, in which the set of characters in the sentences are fixed. Except the set of characters used for J-English, assuming this is the language of the Jews is changed from that of C-English, assuming this is the language of the Christians. The outcome will be confusion and complications. Hence, J-English is not a comfortable alternative for C-English and C-English is not a comfortable alternative for J-English. Shifting between C-English and J-English without losing anything, as it is in the case of P-English and E-English is not possible. That is, only if the alternative language created for the dispute between the Jews and Christians do not obey the principles guiding creating an alternative language will it be possible to sustain an alternative language for the dispute between the Jews and Christians. Any alternative language created for a substantive dispute, cannot be of the nature of that of a non-substantive dispute such as that between endurantism and perdurantism.

The implication of this alternative language argument is that while the beliefs of the Jews are not equivalent to that of the Christians, the thesis of endurantism is equivalent and translatable into the thesis of perdurantism. Hence, it is possible to create and sustain an alternative language for the problem of persistence, unlike for the dispute between the Jews and Christians.

4. Absurdity of the alternative language argument

One major challenge with superficialism on the alternative language argument is that it assumes that all metaphysical disputes are at par. According to Karen Bennett, there is nothing wrong with focusing on a particular ontological dispute and argue it is a non-substantive dispute. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that all metaphysical disputes are at par. That there is something wrong with a particular metaphysical dispute if indeed something is wrong, does not imply that something is wrong with all other metaphysical disputes; neither does it imply that something is wrong with metaphysics itself.²² Bennett argues that each ontological dispute should be handled on its own merit.

I agree with Bennett that ontological disputes ought to be engaged individually and not collectively, without sufficient evidence for the collective treatment. For example, Hirsch did not bother to give a sufficient argument for why his assertions on the problem of persistence should imply that all ontological disputes on physical-objects are verbal. Hirsch argues thus:

²¹ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 235-236.

²² Bennett, Karen, “Composition, Colocation and Metaontology.” *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 43.

I will focus on the issue between perdurantists and endurantists to illustrate the sense in which it seems to me that disputes in the ontology of physical-objects are verbal. My arguments here in regard to the verbalness of this issue are to be understood as generalizable to many of the other issues in physical-object ontology.²³

The question that arises from Hirsh's argument is on what ground(s) did he make the collective generalization?

Bennett takes the argument further to imply that metaphysics is unfairly singled out as a scapegoat for a characteristic problem.²⁴ Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy; hence, if it is true that metaphysics is impaired, would it follow that philosophy is impaired? Let us assume for the purpose of argument that metaphysics is meaningless, would it then follow that philosophy is meaningless? If the answer is no, then why is it that on the suspicion that something is wrong with an ontological dispute, it extends to other ontological disputes? In other words, suspicions that a particular metaphysical dispute is verbal, should not extend to other metaphysical disputes. To make this generalisation, superficialism must first produce the justification that other metaphysical disputes they dismiss are like that particular ontological dispute used as a yardstick.

One other major response to superficialists on the alternative language argument is that it isolates metaphysical questions. Metaphysical issues cannot be as bare as presented by superficialism. Superficialism reduced the dispute on persistence to whether temporal parts exist or not. However, metaphysical theories are premised on other theories or assumptions, they hardly stand-alone. For example, part of the motivation for endurantism is monism, the law of parsimony and the theory of universals. While the motivation for perdurantism are intrinsic properties, plurality of entities and the theory of particulars. According to Ryan Marquez,

Take, as an example, the relationship between perdurantism, modality, and properties espoused by Lewis as part of his counterpart theory; according to him, individuals do not wholly exist at any one point in time, which connects to his belief that individuals can exist in multiple possible worlds, which, in turn, connects to his belief that properties can be shared by individuals across possible worlds. In this case, the positions themselves and justifications that support them are all interconnected, casting doubt on the practicality of targeting disputes concerning a single one of them, and greater doubt on the likelihood that disputes between Lewis's view and other contenders would be "merely verbal" by Hirsch's lights.²⁵

Contrary to the assumption of superficialism, engaging the problem of persistence goes beyond the existence or non-existence of temporal parts. Both theories of persistence are influenced by other ontological theories such as nominalism and universals and particulars, and these other theories cannot be ignored in engaging the problem of persistence.

Moreover, restricting the problem of persistence to the affirmation or denial of the existence of temporal parts is an inadequate characterisation of the problem of persistence. Hawthorne accuses superficialism of deliberately ignoring ways that ontological disputes can have intensional significance.²⁶ Superficialism often ignores other significant aspects of the problem of persistence that can highlight the significance of the discourse on persistence. Nikk Effingham, for

²³ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 232.

²⁴ Bennett, "Composition, Colocation and Metaontology." 41.

²⁵ Marquez, Ryan. "Against Metametaphysical Semanticism." *Portland State University McNair Online Journal*: Vol.7: Issue1, Article 14 (2013), 10.15760/mcnair2013.69, 9.

²⁶ Hawthorne, John, "Superficialism in Ontology." *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Eds. David Chalmers and Ryan Wasserman. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 230.

example, argues that there are three versions of the problem of persistence. They include, the dimensionalists version, the occupationalist version and the populationist version.²⁷

The dimensionalist version is the aspect of the problem of persistence that is concerned with whether objects have temporal parts or not. In other words, the dimensionalist version of the problem of persistence features debate on whether things are three-dimensional or four-dimensional. This is the bulk of the debate on the problem of persistence, and this is the only aspect superficialism concentrates on. However, dimensionalism has some consequences that can lead to other issues on persistence, such as populationism. The populationist version of the problem of persistence rests on the consequence of allowing temporal parts into our ontology. Populationists argue over whether allowing temporal parts into our ontology inflates ontology or not. In other words, they argue on how temporal parts will add or not add instantaneous objects to our ontology.²⁸

Occupationalism focuses on how objects are located in space-time. In other words, occupationalists debate on the relation of an object and the space it occupies at each time of its existence. Physicists, who mention the problem of persistence, approach the problem from this version. The discourse in occupationalism is on how an object can occupy multiple regions in time or not.²⁹ The importance of an ontological discourse of the problem of persistence goes beyond temporal parts, but also asks important questions on how objects occupy space regions without contradictions. Moreover, it will raise questions on whether inflation of objects will occur because of temporal parts, and the consequence of an inflated ontology. Superficialism did not consider these other versions and consequences of theories of persistence in the alternative language argument, and this makes it easier for superficialism to claim that the problem of persistence is a verbal dispute. These other aspects of the problem of persistence will add more value to the problem of persistence, and make it a more interesting and robust debate in metaphysics.

Engaging the problem of persistence, within a metaphysical framework, requires examining all the significant aspects and versions. Superficialism erred in not engaging the problem of persistence holistically. There is a need to engage the immediate positions that are dependent on the arguments on persistence.

Apart from deliberately ignoring other versions of the discourse on persistence, superficialism mixed up some details that affect the alternative language argument. Superficialism argues that alternative language is necessary and sufficient to determine when a dispute is substantive and non-substantive. Superficialism used the example of a failed alternative language for the dispute between the Jews and Christians to argue that, unlike the dispute on persistence, the dispute between the Jews and Christians is substantive. However, as identified by Hawthorne, Hirsch uses behaviour and a priori necessity, which are non-linguistic attitudes to argue that the dispute between Jews and Christians is substantial, while that between endurantism and perdurantism is non-substantive.³⁰

Hirsch argues that,

Jews and Christians differ over their non-linguistic behaviour and attitudes, but there are no such differences between endurantists and perdurantists... perdurantists and endurantists regard their respective positions as a priori necessary, and as having no bearing on their judgements about what experiences people have had and will have. Jews and Christians do not regard their positions as

²⁷ Effingham 2012, "Endurantism and Perdurantism." *Continuum Companion to Metaphysics*. Eds. Robert Barnard and Neil Manson. Continuum International Pub. Groups. 2012.170.

²⁸ Effingham, Nikk, "Endurantism and Perdurantism." 172.

²⁹ Effingham, Nikk, "Endurantism and Perdurantism." 186-187.

³⁰ Hawthorne, John, "Superficialism in Ontology." 216.

a priori necessary, and do regard them as having a bearing on what experiences people have. (A related point is that Jews and Christians, but not endurantists and perdurantists, will give conflicting pictorial representations of certain aspects of reality.) All of these considerations enter into charity to use.³¹

In this argument, Hirsch identified a priori necessity as characteristic of the dispute on persistence, but not that of the Jews and Christians. Hence, there are behavioral differences that influence the alternative languages for the disputes between the Jews and Christians. These behavioral attitudes affect the alternative language for the dispute between the Jews and the Christians.

There are attitude differences between the Jews and Christians that makes it impossible for them to speak alternative languages. For example, the Jews probably do not eat pork, while Christians do. Hirsch argues that there are no such behavioral differences between endurantism and perdurantism; hence, it is possible to sustain an alternative language for them. John Hawthorne disagrees with Hirsch on this and argues that first it is not true that there no behavioural attitude exists between endurantism and perdurantism. Neither is it true that either theory of persistence claims a priori necessity. Hawthorne argues that,

For example, perdurantists are more prone to think abortion disputes are shallow on the grounds that their metaphysic naturally lends itself to multiple candidates for the referent of 'I' of varying temporal lengths, while standard versions of endurantism repudiate multiple candidates. This in turn tends to have some effect on the depth of emotional response to the relevant ethical disputes.³²

Hawthorne's argument implies that there is at least one behavioral difference between endurantism and perdurantism, contrary to the claim of superficialism that there is none.³³ Simply put, the alternative language argument is an unreliable and absurd way to determine if a dispute is substantive.

Another challenge with the alternative language argument is that it fails its own test and consequently is absurd. I will illustrate this by stretching the scenario given by Hirsch as an alternative language for the debate between endurantists and perdurantists.

5. More on alternative language for endurantism and perdurantism

Once again meet Edna and Pedro, introduced to us by Hirsch.³⁴ Edna is a die-hard endurantist who decides to seek employment into a department of die-hard perdurantists. Edna knows that if the perdurantists in this department knows that she is an endurantist, she may not be employed in the department. Hence, Edna decides to pretend she is a perdurantist. Pedro is an unrepentant perdurantist who is in love with Edna, he knows Edna is a die-hard endurantist but is determined to marry her. Pedro knows that if Edna is aware he is a perdurantist she will likely not be interested in him. Hence, Pedro decides to disguise as an endurantist to get the attention of Edna. Hirsch classifies the language of endurantism as E-language and the language of perdurantism as P-language. Edna adopts P-language to represent her endurantism convictions,³⁵

³¹ Hirsch, Eli, "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 247.

³² Hawthorne, John. "Superficialism in Ontology." 216.

³³ I believe superficialism would have noticed this if they examined the issue of persistence holistically. This is yet another fall out of their failure to do a balanced examination of the problem of persistence in ontology.

³⁴ Hirsch, Eli. "Ontology and Alternative Languages." 233-234, 256-257.

³⁵ Convictions here do not mean the state of mind of a person, but the thesis of the theory the person believes is correct. I use convictions here because the thesis of the theory is what convinces the person that the theory

without betraying her endurantism convictions and she is employed into her desired department. Pedro adopts E-language to convey his perdurantism convictions without betraying them, yet speaks like an endurantist. Pedro also succeeds in marrying Edna.

All Edna has to do is to replace 'the state of an object at a particular time' with 'temporal parts' in her language. All Pedro has to do is to replace 'temporal parts' with 'the state of an object at a particular time' in his language. In other words, rather than mention 'temporal parts' Pedro will simply describe the state of the object of an object at a particular time location. Rather than describe the state of an object at a particular time, Edna will use temporal part. Let us consider this example, if Edna wants to say, "The car is green." Edna will say, "The car has a temporal part that is green." However, Edna is convinced that by "temporal part" she means, "The car is green at this time location" and nothing more. If Pedro wants to say, "The car has a temporal part that is green." Pedro would rather say, "The car is green at this time location." To the endurantists, Edna's adopted language is false. However, to the perdurantists Edna's adopted language is true. Remember that the perdurantists do not know that by temporal parts, Edna means the whole state of the object. To the endurantists, Pedro's adopted language is true, but to the perdurantists, it is false. However, both Edna and Pedro stayed true to their convictions on persistence. The only thing they did was to adopt the linguistic choice of the other theory.

According to superficialism, the implication of this is that it is possible for an endurantist to conveniently speak like a perdurantist, without betraying her convictions. It is also possible for a perdurantist to conveniently speak like an endurantist without betraying her convictions. If all endurantists then agree that rather than describe 'the state of objects at each particular time location', they will use 'temporal parts', then the problem of persistence is over. If perdurantists agree that rather than use temporal part, they will describe 'the state of an object at a particular time', and then the problem of persistence is over. As far as superficialism is concerned, alternative language exposes the fact that all there is to the problem of persistence is linguistic choice.

Let us assume a scenario where Edna, an endurantist who is pretending to be a perdurantist, is confronted with a situation where she needs to decide whether or not the diachronic identity of an object coincides with its numeric identity. For example, she is in a class in her new department teaching as a disguised perdurantist. She uses P-English to convey her endurantist convictions. Edna uses the phrase temporal part when she describes the state of an object at a particular time. For example, if Edna wants to say that, "The bunch of bananas is green at time location T_1 ", she says, "The bunch of banana has a temporal part that is green at time location T_1 . However, Edna's ontological conviction is not committed to the existence of temporal parts. Edna merely uses temporal part to mask her endurantism convictions. The students are nevertheless already convinced Edna is a perdurantist.

Then she suddenly needs to speak on whether the diachronic identity of an object is identical with its numeric identity or not. For example, if a student suddenly asks in the class if the diachronic identity of the bunch of bananas is identical with its numeric identity. For the perdurantist, the diachronic identity of an object is not identical with its numeric identity, while for the endurantist it is. If Edna affirms that the diachronic identity of an object is identical with its numeric identity, the perdurantist will accept her statement as true. However, affirming that the diachronic identity is identical with the numeric identity of an object will betray the endurantist convictions of Edna. Hence, in this case, the alternative language cannot be sustained.

This is because she cannot convey her conviction that the numeric identity of the bunch of bananas is identical to its diachronic identity with the alternative language. If Edna says,

is correct. For example, what convinces Edna that endurantism is correct is that it argues that objects persist wholly, and she is convinced that objects persist wholly.

“Yes, the numeric identity of the bunch of bananas is not identical with its diachronic identity”, she will maintain her pretense as a perdurantist, but she will betray her conviction as an endurantist. If Edna says “No, the numeric identity of the bunch of bananas is identical with its diachronic identity”, she will betray her pretense and it will be clear that she is not a genuine perdurantist. Hence, her alternative language cannot be sustained.

I will create another scenario where an alternative language for the dispute on persistence cannot be sustained. Supposing Pedro, a perdurantist pretending to be an endurantist, has to use E-English to say that Jane at a particular time location persists to another time location. Pedro then says, “Jane persists from T_1 to T_2 .” Then an excited endurantists, not aware that Pedro merely adopted E-English to mask his perdurantist convictions then say, “You get it, Jane persists wholly from T_1 to T_2 .” Pedro will reply, “Yes, she persists wholly from T_1 to T_2 .” Remember by wholly he means temporal parts. Then the excited endurantist says, “These perdurantists will not get it that the change an object goes through makes no difference in its identity at each time location, right?” If Pedro says, “Yes, of course the change an object goes through makes no difference in its identity at each time location,” the endurantist audience will be further excited, but that will betray the convictions of the perdurantist who argues that by reason of intrinsic change, changes object go through makes significant difference in its identity. At this point, it is either Pedro affirms and betrays his perdurantist convictions and blows his cover. Whichever way, E-English will not be sustainable for perdurantist convictions. This is because the perdurantist conviction cannot be sustained with that alternative language.

Let us assume that when the Edna and Pedro say ‘yes’, they mean ‘no’ and when they say ‘no’ they mean ‘yes’. Hence, for example, when Pedro says, “Yes, of course the change an object goes through makes no difference in its identity at each time location,” he meant ‘no’. Hence, his pretence and convictions are preserved and the alternative language still sustained. The challenge with this assumption is that it contradicts one of the fundamental rules for creating an alternative language, which is, “A language has only one distinct interpretation.”³⁶ The alternative language for the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism rests on the assumption that the terms or phrases substituted have the same meaning. In other words, temporal part merely describes the state of an object at a particular time location. The language cannot be stretched to the extent that the clear meaning of words or phrases will be denied. Hence, ‘yes’ cannot be used to mean ‘no’ in an alternative language. ‘Yes’ has a distinct interpretation from ‘No’ and they cannot have the same meaning. However, superficialists argue that ‘temporal part’ and ‘the state of an object at a particular time location’ are equivalent.

According to Hirsch,

No restrictions on the semantic structure of an alternative language are assumed beyond the following: the set of characters of the sentences in the alternative language is the same as the set of characters in the original language, the characters being merely redistributed over the sentences in shifting from one language to another. (To the extent that one can associate a sentence’s character with its “meaning” the stipulation is that in shifting from one language to another nothing is gained or lost in what can be “meant” by one’s asserted sentences.)³⁷

Hence, so long as the set of characters in the alternative language and the original language remains the same, such that I can switch from the original language to the alternative language without changing the meaning of the sentences, except for the stipulated meaning, I have preserved the structure of the language. For example, where an endurantist uses “Temporal parts” it should be the case that, “The state of an object at a particular time location” serves as a switch

³⁶ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 235.

³⁷ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 235.

between the alternative language and the original language. The meaning of the original language should not change beyond these stipulated alternative words. In other words, the characters in the alternative language should be such that the original language is preserved when the alternative word or words are switched back.

Bearing in mind however, that the claim of superficialism that an alternative language shows that the dispute between the endurantism and perdurantism is non-substantive fails, even when the semantic structure as argued by Hirsch is preserved. It may be the case however, that the alternative language for both the dispute between the endurantists and perdurantists is a mere terminological debate. On the other hand, it may be that an alternative language, as presented by superficialism is not capable of distinguishing between a substantive and a mere verbal dispute. Nevertheless, is it the case that an alternative language, as outlined by superficialism, can be sustained for the problem of persistence, such that the semantic structure of both the original language and the alternative language is preserved?

Let us imagine a conversation between Edna and a fellow researcher in her new department. Let us assume that Edna and the fellow researcher, who is a perdurantist, are engaged in a conversation about a car that was green in 2010 and red in 2015. Edna needs to use P-language to engage in this conversation, while the researcher speaks as a perdurantist. If there is a need to affirm that “The green temporal part of the car did not persist till 2015, because objects do not persist wholly,” How would Edna say this using P-language? Bearing in mind that by ‘temporal part’ Edna means ‘how an object is at a particular time’.³⁸ Also, bearing in mind that the semantic structure and characters must be preserved. Edna’s original statement will then be, “The car as it is in 2010 did not persist till 2015.” The fellow researcher will accept the statement as true, but will the statement preserve or betray Edna’s original endurantist convictions? The conviction of the endurantist is that objects persist wholly from one time location to another. Hence, Edna’s original endurantist conviction will not be preserved in an alternative language. An attempt to sustain an alternative language between endurantism and perdurantism will be absurd. The implication of this is that although an alternative language for the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism can be created, it cannot be sustained.

For the purpose of argument, assuming that the argument of superficialism on alternative language is correct, the alternative language so far has not succeeded in showing that the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism is a mere verbal dispute and not substantive. Although, there are instances in which the alternative language can function to render the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism verbal, there are also instances where the alternative language can function to render the dispute between endurantism and perdurantism substantive. Subsequently, it is either the alternative language is flawed, or the problem of persistence is substantive.

Hirsch gave other instances of using the alternative language to determine the substantiveness of a dispute. The first is for the dispute between the Jews and Christians and the other is that between the Platonists and Nominalists.³⁹ According to Hirsch, these two instances emphasise that an alternative language cannot be sustained for a substantive dispute. I will examine these two other examples and argue that the alternative language argument can be sustained for the disputes, subsequently; the alternative language is an absurd way to prove that an argument is substantive or otherwise.

³⁸ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 233.

³⁹ Hirsch, Eli. “Ontology and Alternative Languages.” 252-256.

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