

Prudence and Authenticity:
Intrapersonal Conflicts of Value

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Prudence and authenticity are sometimes seen as rival virtues. Prudence, as traditionally conceived, is temporally neutral. It attaches no intrinsic significance to the temporal location of benefits or harms within the agent's life; the prudent agent should be equally concerned about all parts of her life. But people's values and ideals often change over time, sometimes in predictable ways, as when middle age and parenthood often temporize youthful radicalism or spontaneity with concerns for comfort, security, and predictability. In situations involving diachronic, intrapersonal conflicts of value, prudence—in particular, temporal neutrality—appears to require the agent to subordinate her current ideals to her future ones or at least to moderate pursuit of current ideals in light of future ones. But this demand may seem to sacrifice authenticity, if we suppose that authenticity requires acting on the ideals that the agent reflectively and sincerely accepts at the time of action. This tension between prudence and authenticity raises interesting questions about temporal neutrality, the structure of intrapersonal conflicts of value, the nature of ideals, and the demands of authenticity. After examining various aspects of this puzzle, I defend the commitments of prudence in situations involving intrapersonal value conflict and argue that authenticity—understood as being true to oneself—actually supports temporal neutrality. I conclude by suggesting how this defense of prudence lends credibility to the more general demand of temporal neutrality.

1. Prudence and Temporal Neutrality

Prudence demands that an agent act so as to promote his overall good. More generally, prudence seems to require that an agent's deliberations, attitudes, and actions be regulated by a correct conception of his overall good. According to some traditions in the history of ethics, including the eudaimonist tradition in Greek ethics, practical reason is fundamentally prudential and prudence is in a certain sense the ultimate virtue.¹ Such traditions face the question of how, if at all, other familiar virtues and conventional other-regarding moral demands contribute to the agent's overall good and have various resources for

answering it. Other traditions treat prudence as just one aspect of practical reason and as one virtue among other, potentially conflicting virtues. The problem that I want to discuss does not, I think, require us to decide between these and other competing traditions about the status and supremacy of prudence within practical reason or the virtues.

On both ancient and modern conceptions, prudence requires the agent to be concerned about her own overall good. The prudent person should have equal concern for all parts of her life, which requires that she not privilege or indulge her present or near-term interests at the expense of her distant interests. We might say that she is *temporally neutral* insofar as she assigns no normative significance, as such, to the temporal location of benefits and harms within her life. But the demands of prudence and temporal neutrality are complex and call for extended discussion. We might begin by looking at the claims of two historical proponents of prudence.

For instance, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith associates temporal neutrality with prudence, of which the impartial spectator is supposed to approve.

[I]n his steadily sacrificing the ease and enjoyment of the present moment for the probable expectation of the still greater ease and enjoyment of a more distant but more lasting period of time, the prudent man is always both supported and rewarded by the entire approbation of the impartial spectator, and of the representative of the impartial spectator, the man within the breast. The impartial spectator does not feel himself worn out by the present labour of those whose conduct he surveys; nor does he feel himself solicited by the importunate calls of their present appetites. To him their present, and what is likely to be their future situation, are very nearly the same: he sees them nearly at the same distance, and is affected by them very nearly in the same manner. He knows, however, that to the persons principally concerned, they are very different from being the same, and that they naturally affect *them* in a very different manner. He cannot therefore but approve, and even applaud, that proper exertion of self-command, which enables them to act as if their present and their future situation affected them nearly in the same manner in which they affect him.²

As Smith's appeal to an impartial spectator suggests, the demand for temporal neutrality need not be confined to a prudential concern with one's own well-being but can extend to concern for the well-being of *others*. This is why temporal neutrality is often an aspect, explicit or implicit, in conceptions of impartiality and benevolence, as well as prudence. Also, as Smith makes clear, he conceives of temporal neutrality

as a *normative* requirement, not as a description of how people actually reason and behave. As Smith notes, it is an all too familiar fact that people are often temporally *biased*, investing short-term benefits and sacrifices with normative significance out of proportion to their actual magnitude and discounting distant benefits and harms out of proportion to their actual magnitude. This sort of temporal bias is sometimes thought to play a major role in various familiar human failings, such as weakness of will, self-deception, and moral weakness.³ But it is almost always regarded as a mistake, typically a failure of rationality.

In *The Methods of Ethics* Henry Sidgwick recognizes the normative aspect of temporal neutrality in criticizing Bentham for assigning normative significance to the temporal proximity of pleasures and pains.

[P]roximity is a property [of pleasures and pains] which it is reasonable to disregard except in so far as it diminishes uncertainty. For my feelings a year hence should be just as important to me as my feelings next minute, if only I could make an equally sure forecast of them. Indeed this equal and impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life is perhaps the most prominent element in the common notion of the *rational*—as opposed to the merely *impulsive*—pursuit of pleasure.⁴

Later, Sidgwick elaborates on the demands of temporal neutrality and notes that it has broader application than its role in his own version of hedonistic egoism.

Hereafter *as such* is to be regarded neither less nor more than Now. It is not, of course, meant, that the good of the present may not reasonably be preferred to that of the future on account of its greater certainty: or again, that a week ten years hence may not be more important to us than a week now, through an increase in our means or capacities of happiness. All that the principle affirms is that the mere difference of priority and posteriority in time is not a reasonable ground for having more regard to the consciousness of one moment than to that of another. The form in which it practically presents itself to most men is 'that a smaller present good is not to be preferred to a greater future good' (allowing for differences of certainty). ... The commonest view of the principle would no doubt be that the present *pleasure* or *happiness* is reasonably to be foregone with the view of obtaining greater pleasure or happiness hereafter; but the principle need not be restricted to a hedonistic application, it is equally applicable to any other interpretation of 'one's own good', in which good is conceived as a mathematical whole, of which the integrant parts are realised in different parts or moments of a lifetime.⁵

There are several aspects of Sidgwick's account of prudence and temporal neutrality that deserve discussion.

First, Sidgwick recognizes here that prudence's temporal neutrality is a structural constraint about the distribution of goods and harms over time within a single life. As such, it is neutral or agnostic about the content of the good. Though all conceptions of prudence are temporally neutral, different conceptions result from different conceptions of the good. Sidgwick's own conception of the good is hedonistic. Alternatively, one might understand the good in preference-satisfaction terms, as consisting in the satisfaction of actual or suitably informed or idealized desire. Hedonism and preference-satisfaction views construe the good as consisting in or depending upon an individual's contingent and variable psychological states. By contrast, one might understand the good in more objective terms, either as consisting in the perfection of one's essential capacities (for example, one's rational or deliberative capacities) or as consisting in some list of disparate objective goods (for example, knowledge, beauty, achievement, friendship). The tension between prudence and authenticity turns on the commitment to temporal neutrality and so should arise on any conception of the good. However, the resources for addressing this tension may vary with different conceptions of the good.

Second, just as Sidgwick makes clear that temporal neutrality is not limited to hedonistic conceptions of prudence, so too we can notice that it is not limited to prudence. As Smith recognizes, temporal neutrality can be applied to concern for another, as well as oneself. So, for example, the two methods of ethics that form Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason—egoism and utilitarianism—are equally temporally neutral. I will focus on the tension between authenticity and prudence, but I will conclude with a more general discussion of the implications of temporal neutrality.

Third, Sidgwick is careful to claim that temporal neutrality insists only that the temporal location of goods and harms within a life has no *intrinsic* or *independent* significance. Prudence is intrinsically concerned with the magnitude of goods and harms, but not their temporal location. Temporal location can inherit significance when it is correlated with factors that do affect the magnitude of goods and harms. So if at some future point in time I will, for whatever reason, become a more efficient converter of resources into happiness or well-being, however that is conceived, then a neutral concern with all parts of my life will in one sense require giving greater weight to that part of my life. Perhaps, in the "prime of life" I have greater opportunities or capacities for happiness. If so, temporal neutrality will justify devoting greater resources

to the prime of life. However, this is not a pure time preference for that future period over, say, the present, precisely because the same resources yield goods of different magnitudes in the present and the future. The rationality of this sort of discounting is an application of, not a departure from, temporal neutrality.

Furthermore, we may be differentially epistemically situated with respect to different points in time, and this will affect what temporal neutrality requires. Relative to events in the near future, events in the further future depend on more intervening events and are typically harder to predict and less certain. The most obvious case of this sort is the certainty or predictability of my continued existence. It is less certain or predictable that we will exist the further into the future we project. The probability that I will exist in 2030 is lower than the probability that I will exist in 2010. Presumably, rational planning can and should take this kind of uncertainty into account by discounting the significance of a future good or harm by its improbability.⁶ But, again, this seems to be an application of, rather than a departure from, temporal neutrality. Insofar as near and distant goods and harms are equally certain, I should have equal concern for them.

Another way to make this point is in terms of the important distinction, which Sidgwick draws, between *objective* and *subjective* reasons.⁷ Claims of objective rationality are claims about what an agent has reason to do given the facts of the situation, whether he is aware of these facts or in a position to recognize the reasons that they support. Claims of subjective rationality are claims about what the agent has reason to do given his beliefs about his situation or what it would be reasonable for him to believe about his situation. Actions that are objectively rational can be subjectively irrational, and vice versa. Prudence can admit that the existence of my near future is more certain than the existence of my distant future and that this epistemic fact should affect what it is subjectively rational for me to do; it claims only that insofar as I have both present and future interests, they provide me with equally strong objective reasons for action.

This point reflects the fact that prudence is, at least in the first instance, a theory about an agent's objective reasons. This focus on objective reasons is worth elaborating. Subjective reasons are normatively important. In particular, it is common for those who make the distinction to think that we should tie praise and blame to subjective, rather than objective, reasons insofar as an agent's subjective reasons are accessible to her in a way that her objective reasons may not be.

Insofar as praise and blame are constrained by what is within the agent's power to recognize and do, we have reason to tie praise and blame to an agent's conformity with her subjective reasons. But we can and should still recognize objective reasons. Objective reasons are independent of subjective reasons, as is reflected in the perspective of second-person and third-person evaluators, who distinguish between what was reasonable to do *tout court* and what was reasonable to do from the agent's perspective. But objective reasons are also essential to first-person evaluation in two ways. Objective reasons are central to the retrospective evaluation of one's own conduct and to learning from past successes and failures, even when these successes and failures are not appropriate objects of praise or blame. Moreover, objective reasons appear to be the object of prospective evaluation and deliberation. In practical deliberation, one aims at forming one's best judgment about what it is objectively rational to do, even if praise and blame are best apportioned in accordance with one's subjective reasons.⁸ Indeed, objective reasons have a kind of explanatory primacy insofar as we identify an agent's subjective reasons with the actions that would be objectively rational if only her beliefs about her situation, or the beliefs about her situation that it would be reasonable for her to hold, were true. These considerations give objective reasons an independence and theoretical primacy in discussions of practical reason. Prudence is, in the first instance, a theory about objective reasons, and that will be our primary, but not exclusive, focus in assessing its commitment to temporal neutrality.

We have now seen two ways in which Sidgwick thinks that temporally neutral concern can justify differential treatment of different periods in one's life. There is another way in which prudence might justify temporal discriminations that might initially seem incompatible with temporal neutrality, but which Sidgwick does not anticipate. On some views, a life is an organic whole whose value cannot be reduced to the sum of the values of its parts, or, at least, cannot be reduced to the sum of the values of its nonrelational parts. It is possible to hold a version of this view that treats lives with certain narrative structure as being more valuable, all else being equal, than other lives. One could hold, for example, that it is intrinsically better for the value of one's life to display an upward trajectory, such that a life in which evils (for example, misfortunes, pain, and failure) preceded goods (for example, good luck, pleasure, and success) was, all else being equal, better than a life in which the goods came first. I do not want to defend this view, but it

is, I think, coherent. Such a view says, in effect, that the distribution of goods and harms within a life is itself a good, improving the quality of the person's life. Such a view would require assigning normative significance to the temporal location of goods and harms within a life. But this unequal *treatment* of different periods in one's life would be justified by an equal *concern* for all parts of one's life.⁹ Though such an agent is equally concerned about all parts of her life, she sees that by locating the goods later in life she actually makes a greater contribution to the value of her life overall. This sort of temporal bias does not assign normative significance to temporal location as such; it is compatible with and, indeed, required by temporal neutrality if and only if the temporal distribution of goods and harms within a life actually contributes to the value of that life.

This means that temporal neutrality should be understood to claim that the temporal location of goods and harms within a life has no normative significance except insofar as it contributes to the value of that life. We might say that on this view temporal location has no *independent* significance. The prudent person, concerned to advance his overall good, will be temporally neutral, assigning no independent significance to the temporal location of goods and harms within his life. There will often be diachronic intrapersonal conflicts of value in which what one does affects both the magnitude of goods and harms in one's life and also their temporal distribution. Temporal neutrality requires sacrificing a nearer good for a later, greater good. Call this *now-for-then sacrifice*. This aspect of temporal neutrality, Sidgwick thinks, is a central aspect of our concept of rationality.¹⁰

However, this conception of temporal neutrality contrasts with a narrower conception that is suggested by some of Sidgwick's remarks. As he sometimes conceives the demand of temporal neutrality, all that the principle affirms is that the mere difference of priority and posteriority in time should not affect the normative significance of goods and harms.¹¹ This may suggest that the principle is limited in its application to intrapersonal conflicts in which the only variable is temporal location. But that would be far too restrictive. In particular, that conception of temporal neutrality would limit its application to intrapersonal conflicts between goods of the same kind—for instance, smaller pleasure now versus greater pleasure later. The principle would not apply to conflicts in which different kinds of goods are at stake. Sidgwick's focus on conflicts among homogeneous goods is, of course, reinforced by his sympathy for hedonism, which is a monistic theory of the good.

Though he contemplates other conceptions of prudence, informed by nonhedonistic theories of the good, Sidgwick does not explore them in much detail, and he may assume that all significant rivals to hedonism would also be monistic. But there is no reason for us to make this assumption or to restrict the application of temporal neutrality to conflicts of homogeneous goods. We avoid this problem if we allow temporal neutrality to apply to conflicts with multiple variables insisting only that it prohibits assigning value to temporal location except insofar as this affects the value of the whole. If so, temporal neutrality can apply to conflicts of heterogeneous goods of the sort that would be recognized by suitably pluralistic theories of the good. Prudence will demand now-for-then sacrifice even when the goods at stake are of different kinds, provided only that the plurality of goods is not an obstacle to commensurability.

Prudence requires temporal neutrality, which, in turn, requires now-for-then sacrifice. But authenticity seems to require conforming to principles that one accepts at the time of action. If so, prudence and authenticity appear to make incompatible demands in situations involving diachronic intrapersonal conflicts of value. To focus on the conflict between prudence and authenticity we must focus on a special kind of intrapersonal conflict of value.

Talk about an agent's values, like talk about her interests, can be ambiguous. An agent's interests can refer to what is in her interest or what benefits her, or it can refer to what she takes an interest in or cares about. But not everything that interests an agent is in her interest. Similarly, an agent's values can refer to what is good for her or to what she cares about. But not everything that an agent cares about is good for her. It will be helpful, for purposes of discussion, to distinguish between the agent's *prudential* and *nonprudential values*. We can identify our concerns with another's well-being with what we care about insofar as we are concerned with him for his own sake. Similarly, we may think of an agent's prudential values as picking out what he cares about insofar as he is concerned with his own sake and his nonprudential values as picking out what cares about independently of its contribution to his own sake. We can make this distinction without making any assumptions about what a person's well-being consists in. In particular, we can allow that successful pursuit of other-directed projects and plans contributes to an agent's own good. We can also allow that pursuit of such projects and plans involves pursuit of prudential values, provided that their pursuit is regulated by the agent's belief that these projects and

plans make a causal or constitutive contribution to the value of his life. To focus on the conflict between prudence and authenticity, we must focus on intrapersonal conflicts of prudential value. Indeed, unless I indicate otherwise, the only sort of intrapersonal conflict that will concern me is this sort of conflict between different conceptions the agent holds at different times about what makes his life go well. But because the demand of temporal neutrality has application outside of prudence, I will conclude by examining and assessing the demands of temporal neutrality in cases of intrapersonal conflicts of nonprudential value as well.

2. Intrapersonal Balancing and Compensation

If prudence requires temporal neutrality, and temporal neutrality requires now-for-then sacrifice, we might wonder if it is so reasonable to be prudent. Why sacrifice some periods in one's life for the sake of others? Why accept intrapersonal balancing?

The natural answer appeals to *compensation*. Now-for-then sacrifice is one of our paradigms of rational planning. When we engage in now-for-then sacrifice we undertake actions and commitments to which we would otherwise be indifferent or that we would otherwise regard as downright burdensome for the sake of some later, greater good. Agents who deliberate and possess reasons for action are temporally extended entities. As a result, now-for-then sacrifice is compensated, because the agent, who is temporally extended, is both benefactor and beneficiary. This seems to meet the worry that prudence requires intrapersonal sacrifices.

Or does it? We might consider a familiar comparison between intrapersonal and interpersonal neutrality. Prudence is temporally neutral and assigns no independent significance to *when* a benefit or burden occurs in a person's life. Utilitarianism is interpersonally neutral; it assigns no independent significance to *whom* a benefit or burden befalls. Just as temporal neutrality requires intrapersonal balancing, so too person neutrality requires interpersonal balancing. It requires that benefits to some be balanced against harms to others, if necessary, to produce the best interpersonal outcome overall. Utilitarianism's person neutrality thus effects a kind of interpersonal balancing akin to the intrapersonal balancing that prudence's temporal neutrality requires. But many think that this sort of interpersonal balancing is unacceptable because it ignores the *separateness of persons*. Whereas balancing

benefits and harms may be acceptable *within* a life, balancing benefits and harms *across* lives may appear unacceptable. In the intrapersonal case, benefactor and beneficiary are the same person, so compensation is automatic. In the interpersonal case, benefactor and beneficiary are different people; unless the beneficiary reciprocates in some way, the benefactor's sacrifice will not be compensated. The lack of interpersonal compensation leads some critics of person neutrality to insist that distributions of benefits and harms across lives be such that they are acceptable, in a way that needs to be specified, to *each* affected party.¹³

This appeal to compensation challenges utilitarianism's interpersonal balancing without drawing into question the intrapersonal balancing that prudence demands. But we might wonder whether the doubts about interpersonal balancing couldn't be extended to intrapersonal balancing. If the separateness of persons defeats interpersonal balancing, why doesn't the separateness of different periods in an individual's life defeat intrapersonal balancing? After all, me-now and me-later are distinct parts of me.¹⁴ But then it may seem hard to see how me-now is any more compensated for its sacrifices on behalf of me-later than I am compensated by my sacrifices to you. Just as doubts about interpersonal balancing lead to a distributed concern, requiring further articulation, with each person, perhaps doubts about intrapersonal balancing support a distributed concern, requiring further articulation, with each part of an individual's life.

But it is significant that different periods within an individual's life are parts of a larger organic whole, whereas different lives, as such, do not seem to be proper parts of any larger organic whole. Parts of an organic whole have their nature determined in part by their role in the whole of which they are parts. The nature of an agent at any point in time is largely conditioned by her being a temporally extended being. So, for example, she will possess various desires and intentions to be a certain sort of person and to engage in certain vocations and avocations, all of which are future-directed, referring to future stages of herself. This means that in order to characterize her at particular times we need to see these as parts of a larger whole. So person-stages are necessarily parts of persons. By contrast, groups of people, as such, do not form wholes that are as strongly organic. Individuals can form desires and intentions that do not essentially refer to other individuals or the set of individuals that they together form.

Moreover, agents (or the lives of agents) are essentially temporally extended. To be an agent is to be a being that is distinct from particular

appetites and emotions, who can distinguish between the intensity and authority of her appetites and emotions, deliberate about the appropriate objects of her appetites and emotions, and regulate her conduct in accordance with these deliberations. This makes an agent a temporally dispersed creature. But whereas agents span times, they do not normally span persons. There are exceptions. We can make sense of groups of people bound by associational ties who engage in joint deliberations and decision making qualifying as corporate agents. But collections of individuals do not, as such, form corporate agents.¹⁵

Insofar as agents are discrete, temporally extended individuals, we can see how diachronic, intrapersonal compensation is automatic in a way that interpersonal compensation is not. This allows us to defend the intrapersonal balancing that prudence demands without committing ourselves to unrestricted interpersonal balancing.¹⁶ In particular, the appeal to compensation allows us to defend temporal neutrality and its commitment to now-for-then sacrifice.

It is no accident, therefore, that prudence's temporal neutrality seems to be a requirement of practical reason and temporal bias appears as a paradigmatic form of irrationality. We engage in the intrapersonal balancing required by temporal neutrality whenever we engage in now-for-then sacrifice. This we do whenever we undertake actions, projects, and commitments to which we would otherwise be indifferent or averse for the sake of some later, greater good. This kind of rational planning is ubiquitous. We may not notice its more mundane applications, such as when we stand in line in order to get tickets to a movie, when we stop to refuel our cars, or when we go to the dentist for routine preventive dental care. We are more likely to recognize now-for-then sacrifice when the sacrifice is more significant. For instance, I engage in such sacrifice when I undergo a medical procedure that involves an extended and painful recovery in order to regain full range of motion and the ability to participate in a fuller range of physical activities than would otherwise be possible. The training required for success in many vocations and avocations often requires various non-negligible physical, financial, and personal sacrifices. Provided the later benefits genuinely do outweigh the near-term costs, the sacrifices seem rational, and failure to persevere, if understandable, nevertheless seems to be a form of weakness. Indeed, the evolution of the ability to recognize the rationality of now-for-then sacrifice and to regulate one's appetites, emotions, and actions in accordance with this recognition is arguably a significant part of the process of normative

development that marks the progress from adolescence to responsibility and maturity.¹⁷

3. Temporal Neutrality and Authenticity

However, it is perhaps significant that the sort of unproblematic applications of temporal neutrality that we have so far considered all involve continuity of the agent's projects, interests, and ideals. I was assuming that my interest in seeing a particular movie persists through the wait in line to buy tickets. There is a certain fixity of interests if my interest in full range of motion in my shoulder, derived from my passion to play various sports, motivates my decision to have rotator cuff surgery and is rewarded by successful surgery, physical therapy, and rehabilitation. And when I endure financial and personal hardship to train for a successful professional career, it seems significant that my professional aspirations, for which I undertake the sacrifices, persist long enough to be realized. It is less clear that temporal neutrality is desirable or even possible when diachronic fixity of interests, projects, and ideals does not obtain. Doubts about temporal neutrality can seem especially compelling in cases of diachronic intrapersonal conflicts of values or ideals.

In *The Possibility of Altruism* Thomas Nagel claims that temporal neutrality is unproblematic when any "preference changes" are "regarded with indifference". However, he sees a problem when neutrality is applied to intrapersonal conflicts of ideals.

It may happen that a person believes at one time that he will at some future time accept general evaluative principles—principles about what things *constitute* reasons for action—which he now finds pernicious. Moreover, he may believe that in the future he will find his present values pernicious. What does prudence require of him in that case? Prudence requires that he take measures which promote the realization of that for which there *will* be reason. Do his beliefs at the earlier time give him any grounds for judging what he will have reason to do at the later [time]? It is not clear to me that they do, and if not, then the requirement of prudence or timeless reasons may not be applicable.¹⁸

In a footnote, Nagel qualifies these doubts about temporal neutrality.

On the other hand, he *may* have a clear view about the matter. Suppose for example that he now believes that in twenty years he will value security, status, wealth, and tranquility, whereas he now values sex, spontaneity, frequent risks, and strong emotions. A decisive response to this situation could take either of two forms. The individual may be strongly enough convinced of the worthlessness of his inevitable future values sim-

PRUDENCE AND AUTHENTICITY

ply to refuse them any claim on his present concerns. We would then regard his present values as valid for the future also, and no prudential reasons would derive from his expected future views. On the other hand he may treat both his present and future values like preferences, regarding them each as a source of reasons under a higher principle: 'Live in the life-style of your choice.' That would demand of him a certain prudence about keeping open the paths to eventual respectability. In either case, his position would be formulable in timeless reasons.¹⁹

The ways that Nagel qualifies his initial doubts about temporal neutrality are suggestive. But these claims, understood as applying to an agent's objective reasons, make the defense of temporal neutrality too dependent on what the agent thinks about her present and future reasons for action. Now regarding my future ideals as worthless does not make them worthless, any more than my later regarding my current ideals as worthless makes them worthless. If not, then privileging my current ideals cannot be so easily squared with temporal neutrality. Nor is it clear that we should try to defend temporal neutrality by treating our conflicting ideals like conflicting preferences. It is comparatively easy to view changes in mere preferences with equanimity; it is harder to view changes in ideals that way.²⁰

In *Reasons and Persons* Derek Parfit is more emphatic than Nagel that such intrapersonal conflicts of value undermine temporal neutrality and prudence (or the self-interest theory, as he calls it). Writing of Nagel's example, Parfit claims that, according to temporal neutrality

this young man must give the same weight to his present and predicted future values and ideals. This would be giving the same weight to what he now believes to be justified and what he now believes to be worthless or contemptible. This is clearly irrational. It may even be logically impossible.²¹

Parfit reasons that temporal neutrality requires neutrality between one's current and future ideals. This sort of neutrality, he thinks, is at least irrational and perhaps incoherent. Why exactly?

Such neutrality would be irrational if we assume that an agent ought to act on those value judgments she sincerely accepts or would accept on reflection at the time of acting. An authentic agent would seem to be one who acts in a principled way and in accordance with the principles she avows. But then an agent who fails to act on ideals she accepts at the time of action would seem to display bad faith or lack of authenticity, and this might seem to constitute a kind of irrationality.

To see why this sort of inauthenticity might be irrational, consider a parallel issue. Suppose that an agent (for example, a doctor) has to

decide what to believe about some non-evaluative matter (for example, the cause of a patient's symptoms) in order to decide what to do (for example, how best to treat the patient medically). There may be conflicting evidence and hypotheses about the cause of the patient's symptoms that the doctor is obligated to assess in an open-minded way. But she must form some belief about the cause of the agent's symptoms and prescribe treatment on the basis of her best judgment at the time. Prescribing any treatment at variance with what she then judges to be the best treatment for the malady she believes the patient has would seem to display bad faith or a lack of authenticity. Moreover, such a disconnect between the doctor's judgments and her actions seems to invite the charge of irrationality. But if the doctor would be irrational to act inconsistently with her best medical deliberations at the time, then it seems plausible that an agent who acted inconsistently with her best practical deliberations at the time would also be irrational.

Indeed, as Parfit suggests, temporal neutrality may seem to ask the impossible. It is common to view an agent's intentional action as the product of his representational states, such as his beliefs, and his conative states, such as his desires, at the time of action. And, of course, his desires may be shaped by his evaluative beliefs about what sorts of projects and activities are worthwhile. On such a view, an agent can fail to act on his current ideals through weakness of will if he is moved by good-independent desires. But he cannot act on ideals that he does not have at the time of acting any more than he can act on someone else's ideals. Of course, he can adopt now ideals that he knows he will have later, just as he can adopt someone else's ideals. But in either case, adoption of hitherto alien ideals internalizes them and so confirms, rather than violates, the requirement that an agent can act only on ideals he accepts at the time of action. If so, temporal neutrality may seem to run afoul of a kind of temporal bias that is built into the very idea of intentional action.²²

4. Temporal Neutrality and Personal Identity

Elsewhere, Parfit suggests that these doubts about the implications of prudence's temporal neutrality for intrapersonal conflicts of value are reinforced by adoption of what he calls a psychological reductionist conception of personal identity that analyzes personal identity into relations of psychological connectedness and continuity. Roughly, two persons are psychologically connected insofar as the intentional states

and actions of one influence the intentional states and actions of the other. Examples of intrapersonal psychological connections include A's earlier decision to vote Democratic and her subsequent casting of her ballot for the Democratic candidate, A's later memories of a disturbing childhood incident and her earlier childhood experiences, and A's later career change and her earlier re-evaluation of her priorities concerning work and family. Two persons are psychologically continuous insofar as they are links in a chain or series of people in which contiguous links in the chain are psychologically connected. Both connectedness and continuity can be matters of degree. According to the psychological reductionist, personal identity consists in maximal (non-branching) psychological continuity.²³

Such a conception of personal identity may put intertemporal conflicts of ideals in a new perspective. Parfit describes the case of a nineteenth-century Russian nobleman.

In several years, a young Russian will inherit vast estates. Because he has socialist ideals, he intends, now, to give the land to the peasants. But he knows that in time his ideals may fade. To guard against this possibility, he does two things. He first signs a legal document, which will automatically give away the land, and which can be revoked only with his wife's consent. He then says to his wife, 'Promise me that, if I ever change my mind, and ask you to revoke this document, you will not consent.' He adds, 'I regard my ideals as essential to me. If I lose these ideals, I want you to think that I cease to exist. I want you to regard your husband then, not as me, the man who asks you for this promise, but only as his corrupted later self. Promise me that you would not do what he asks.'²⁴

Parfit uses the Russian nobleman example to argue that adoption of a reductionist view of personal identity should lead us to revise our views about promissory fidelity, especially in cases involving intertemporal conflicts of ideals.²⁵ But we can also use it to raise further questions about temporal neutrality.

Parfit seems to think that psychological reductionism justifies the Russian nobleman's claim that loss of his socialist ideals represents a substantial change, one that he does not survive. He claims that this explains why the nobleman's bourgeois successor cannot revoke the nobleman's commitment, and why the nobleman's wife would be justified in carrying out the promise, despite the successor's attempts to revoke it. Presumably, Parfit believes that psychological reductionism implies that a change in fundamental ideals severs psychological continuity and connectedness and so constitutes a substantial change. If so, this would appear to pose a problem for prudence's demand of tem-

poral neutrality as well. To the extent that intertemporal conflicts of ideals disrupt psychological continuity, they make what otherwise appear to be intrapersonal conflicts resemble interpersonal conflicts. But then intertemporal neutrality will be no more plausible than interpersonal neutrality. Just as we might reject interpersonal balancing on the ground that such sacrifices are uncompensated, so too we might reject demands of temporal neutrality that we balance the interests of the nobleman and his bourgeois successor. If we view cases of what we initially called intrapersonal conflicts of value on the interpersonal model, then temporal neutrality seems a problematic demand.

5. Identity and Neutrality without Fixity of Character

This last doubt about temporal neutrality threatens to turn an issue about intrapersonal distribution into an issue about interpersonal distribution. Let us deal with it first. It turns out to involve several distinguishable issues.

First, there is a question whether Parfit's conclusion, which rejects neutrality between current and future ideals, is even inconsistent with temporal neutrality. For Parfit's defense of a bias toward current ideals depends upon psychological changes that diminish continuity and connectedness and threaten a substantial change. But then the bias is not a pure time preference, giving significance to a mere difference in temporal location. Temporal location has normative significance, on this view, only insofar as it is correlated with diminished continuity and connectedness.

Sidgwick, who sometimes conceives of temporal neutrality as denying only that mere differences in temporal location can have rational significance, might be content with this reply to Parfit. But we resisted that conception of temporal neutrality as too narrow. Temporal neutrality should apply to heterogeneous conflicts of value as well. More generally, we might think of temporal neutrality as denying that temporal location of goods and harms can have normative significance without in some way affecting the actual or expected value of the life in which they occur. But while Parfit does think that the change of ideals affects continuity and connectedness within a life, he does not claim that it affects the magnitude of the goods or harms at stake for the socialist or his bourgeois successor. So if diminished continuity and connectedness support a bias for the present, this is a bias that does seem inconsistent with our broader understanding of temporal neutrality.

PRUDENCE AND AUTHENTICITY

Of course, if a change of ideals constitutes a substantial change, in which the socialist and his bourgeois successor are literally different people, then there is a straightforward way to reconcile a bias toward current ideals with prudence. For prudence requires neutrality, when it does, between one's own current and future ideals, not neutrality between one's own current ideals and the future ideals of another. If the socialist and the bourgeois are literally different people with different interests, then prudence won't automatically ask the socialist to concern himself with the interests of his bourgeois successor.

But perhaps changes of ideals can affect continuity and connectedness without literally producing substantial change. Here we need to ask whether reductionism makes constancy of character and ideals an ingredient in either continuity and connectedness or identity.

A psychological reductionist account of personal identity may presuppose fixity of character if it grounds identity in connectedness and treats similarity as an ingredient in connectedness. Successive selves that are connected are usually quite similar psychologically. Wholesale and instantaneous psychological change is extremely rare and might qualify as a substantial change. If similarity is essential to connectedness and connectedness is essential to identity, then change of ideals may well produce substantial change.

We might agree that psychological connectedness does presuppose similarity and resist the idea that change of ideals induces substantial change by pointing to the range of psychological similarities that typically persist despite change of ideals. Call the stages of a temporally dispersed person with different ideals Before and After. Even if Before and After have different ideals and other differences consequent upon those different ideals, they are likely to have many other psychological traits in common. They are likely to share many factual beliefs (about non-evaluative and some evaluative matters), (quasi-) memories, and intellectual and practical skills (for example, linguistic, mathematical, and athletic abilities), and may share other personal and avocational interests in common. Where this is true, After's states will be causally dependent on Before's states, which will make After substantially connected to Before.

However, this is not the best way to defend temporal neutrality. If the defense of the intrapersonal model of character change depends on psychological similarity, then it may be helped by significant forms of similarity but it must also be weakened by significant forms of dissimilarity.

A better defense of the intrapersonal model of character change challenges the assumption that psychological reductionism requires similarity. For, as psychological connectedness is usually understood, it does not presuppose similarity. Two people are psychologically connected insofar as there is the right sort of psychological interaction and influence between them. But these are causal relations that do not presuppose similar relata. A can influence B even if A and B are quite different.

Such a conception of psychological connectedness fits with the main rationale for psychological reductionism. John Locke, who conceives of personal identity in terms of memory connectedness, provides intellectual inspiration for many in the psychological reductionist tradition.²⁶ In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke distinguishes between persons and men (or, as we might prefer to say, human beings) and claims that the concept of a person and that of the same person over time are “forensic” concepts.²⁷ Part of what Locke means is that only persons are accountable in law and morality, because only persons are responsible for their actions. Non-responsible agents act on their strongest desires; if they deliberate, it is only about the instrumental means to the satisfaction of their desires. By contrast, responsible agents must be able to distinguish between the intensity and authority of their desires, deliberate about the value or authority of their desires, and regulate their actions in accordance with their deliberations. Only agents who are responsible in this way are persons. Locke also thinks that ascriptions of responsibility presuppose identity inasmuch as he thinks it makes sense to punish A for B’s crime only if A and B are the same. Whether or not we agree with Locke that responsibility presupposes identity, we can agree with him about the forensic rationale for psychological reductionism. But this rationale gives us reason to focus on those psychological connections that exhibit *deliberative control*.²⁸ That is, of special importance for the psychological reductionist ought to be those connections that hold among actions, intentions, and prior deliberations in the reasoned maintenance and modification of intentional states and in the performance of actions that reflect these prior deliberations.

But if we understand deliberative control as a key ingredient in psychological connectedness, then we have further reason for denying that character change, as such, disrupts psychological connectedness. For, on this view, there is deliberative control and, hence, psychological connectedness between Before and After when the agent intention-

ally modifies her beliefs, desires, values, and plans, as well as when she retains them unchanged. So long as the person plays a suitable role in generating and shaping her change of ideals, character change is no obstacle to connectedness.²⁹

Moreover, it is significant that psychological reductionism is formulated in terms of continuity, rather than connectedness. As Thomas Reid suggested in his criticism of Locke's account of personal identity in terms of memory connectedness, identity is, but psychological connectedness is not, a transitive relation.³⁰ If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then $A = C$. But even if A is connected to B and B is connected to C , A need not be connected to C . Not so with continuity, which is defined as a chain the links of which are connected.³¹ Provided A is connected to B , and B is connected to C , A and C will be continuous, even if they are not connected. But then even if, contrary to fact, the psychological differences between Before and After prevented them from being connected, this fact would not prevent them from being continuous. Even if successive selves had to be somewhat similar to each other and wholesale instantaneous character change did count as substantial change, this would be compatible with the poles in a series of continuous selves being radically different.

So, at least in normal cases of character change, in which the process is suitably endogenous, there is no reason to treat the change as a substantial change. This means that such intertemporal conflicts of value are intrapersonal conflicts of value. That makes compensation possible and so allows room for the justification of temporal neutrality to work. Psychological reductionism provides no distinctive perspective on intrapersonal conflicts of value.

6. The Coherence of Temporal Neutrality

Even if intertemporal conflicts of ideals are best seen as intrapersonal distribution problems, the demands of temporal neutrality may not make sense if temporal bias is built into the very idea of good-dependent choice. When I act on the basis of ideals, I can act only on ideals I now have. I can no more act on ideals that I do not have now, but will have later, than I can act on someone else's ideals.

However, this apparent conceptual obstacle to temporal neutrality is spurious. Understood one way, temporal bias is unavoidable but is no threat to temporal neutrality. Understood another way, temporal bias is a threat to temporal neutrality but has no necessity to it. Temporal

bias does seem unavoidable in the sense that my good-dependent choice can only reflect judgments that I accept at the time of action. I cannot act on merely future judgments any more than I can act directly on the judgments of another. We might say that this kind of unavoidable temporal bias reflects a fact about the *ownership* and *timing* of judgments, where that involves not just whose judgments they are but when they are held. But these truisms about the ownership and timing of judgments imply nothing about their *content*. Though I can act only on my judgments, I can adopt the judgments of another person and make them my own. Similarly, I can modify my current judgments in light of judgments I know or expect to have later. If I am initially inclined to judge ϕ , but I realize that you have judged χ or that I myself will later judge χ , then I may want to revisit my reasons for judging ϕ . This will be so especially if I have reason to think that your judgments or my own later judgments have been formed by processes at least as reliable as those that initially led me to judge ϕ . In revisiting my initial judgments, I may modify them. In the case of plans or projects, I can abandon them or modify them in a way that will allow me to pursue other plans later. In this way, temporal neutrality can affect the content of my current judgments and ideals. If I have to act now on the basis of my judgments, I will have to act on those judgments and ideals I now accept, but the content of these can incorporate the demands of temporal neutrality.³² So in the sense in which temporal bias is unavoidable (ownership and timing), this is compatible with temporal neutrality (content). In the sense in which temporal bias is incompatible with temporal neutrality (content), temporal bias is not unavoidable and may well be irrational.³³

7. Defending Prudence

But to say that prudence's temporal neutrality makes a coherent demand is not to say that it makes a plausible demand. Even if temporal neutrality can be defended by appeal to compensation, that defense need not be decisive. Perhaps in cases of intrapersonal prudential conflict, it is not unreasonable for an agent to refuse to sacrifice his current ideals, even if he, a temporally extended agent, is compensated for such sacrifice. Perhaps the demands of temporal neutrality require, as Parfit claims, that the agent view her ideals as mere preferences, like preferences in ice cream. It seems acceptable to indulge your current preference for Rocky Road, but only in ways that leave you free to sat-

isfy your later preference for Neapolitan. That kind of equanimity about expected changes in mere preferences is hard to apply to expected changes in ideals. It is hard to imagine the Russian nobleman acquiescing in his anticipated change of ideals. If we are unwilling to view changes in ideals like changes in mere preferences, then perhaps we should reject prudence and its demand of temporal neutrality.³⁴

In assessing this concern, we should first notice something a little odd about the way intrapersonal conflicts of value are typically represented. Imagine that Before is at a crucial fork in the road of life and his prudential ideals speak in favor of route A, but he knows that he will later become After, whose prudential ideals will be served only if he now chooses route B. Should Before be true to his own ideals and choose route A, should he empathize with After and choose route B, or should he try to forge some third route C that compromises between A and B? This way of posing the problem assumes that there is a fact of the matter about the content of one's future character and ideals independently of the crucial choices one makes now. But often, perhaps typically, this is false. One's future character and ideals are very much influenced by crucial practical decisions one makes on the road of life. It is quite unlikely that a radical young socialist will turn into a complacent bourgeois regardless of the decisions he now makes. Who one becomes depends in part upon what one does now.³⁵ But then it may be possible to avoid many intertemporal conflicts of value by making choices now that preserve, rather than compromise, one's present ideals. Provided one's present ideals are worthwhile (about which more below), one can honor temporal neutrality by acting in accord with one's present ideals and thereby avoiding intertemporal conflict.

Of course, suicide may be the only way of avoiding intertemporal conflict with complete certainty. So the critic of prudence could always stipulate that there will be an intertemporal conflict regardless of (non-suicidal) choices the agent now makes. And there may be some cases where this stipulation is not unrealistic, as when one's current ideals conflict with a wide range of possible future ideals. For instance, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there will be or will likely be a conflict between one's present penchant for reckless daredevilry and one's future penchants, whatever they might be (including reckless daredevilry) or that there will be or will likely be a conflict between one's present ideal of an extravagant lifestyle and one's future ideals, whatever they might be.³⁶ But, as such examples suggest, in cases of unavoidable intertemporal conflict, neutrality's demand for modera-

tion and compromise is often fairly plausible. Indeed, liability in an ideal to generating unavoidable intertemporal conflicts of values is itself a vice in an ideal. Other things being equal, an ideal that avoids intertemporal conflict is better than one that does not.

In focusing on unavoidable conflicts, we need to ask about the status or credentials of the conflicting ideals. Ideals involve value judgments. Much depends upon whether we think that value judgments can be true, justified, or otherwise reasonable. If we do not, perhaps because we regard value judgments as mere expressions of noncognitive attitudes, then conflicts of value will be very much like conflicts of mere preferences. Just as the important thing with a mere preference is not the content of the preference but its satisfaction, so too the important thing with noncognitive attitudes is not their object but their successful expression. Neutrality does not seem problematic as applied to mere preferences, and it should be no more problematic as applied to (other) noncognitive attitudes. The situation is more complicated if one believes, as I do, that value judgments are fallible and can be more or less justified. For present purposes, we can be quite ecumenical about the relevant forms of fallibility and justification.³⁷ Provided that we think that ideals can be more and less reasonable, then, in understanding and ultimately assessing the demands of neutrality, we must concern ourselves with the merits of the conflicting ideals.³⁸ In doing so, we need to consider and distinguish cases. We will see, among other things, that temporal neutrality does not require neutrality between current and future ideals independently of the merits of those ideals.

It will help to divide unavoidable conflicts into *symmetrical* ones—those in which the merits of conflicting ideals are comparable—and *asymmetrical* ones—those in which the merits of conflicting ideals are very different.

The asymmetrical conflicts are perhaps more straightforward. There are two such cases. In the case of *Corruption*, Before's ideals are valuable, whereas After's are not. By contrast, in the case of *Improvement*, Before's ideals are worthless, whereas After's ideals are valuable. In cases of *Corruption* and *Improvement*, the demands of temporal neutrality are clear—act on the worthwhile ideal when you have it, not the worthless one. This is a claim about one's objective reasons, the reasons one has in virtue of the facts about the situation whether one is in a position to recognize them or not. In these cases, temporal neutrality does not require neutrality between current and future ideals.

It is fairly easy to see how the agent can and will act on these reasons in the case of Corruption, for this just requires acting on his current ideals. Here, acting on one's current, rather than future, ideals is also what temporal neutrality demands.

However, matters are more complicated in the case of Improvement. Temporal neutrality's claim about one's objective reasons remains plausible. One has objective reason to act later on those valuable ideals that one will hold, rather than the worthless ideals that one now embraces. But can one act on this verdict if it is the worthless, rather than the valuable, ideal that one now embraces? Can temporal neutrality make plausible claims about subjective rationality? Could it be subjectively rational to act on valuable ideals that one does not now hold? The answer is Yes, provided that we understand subjective reasons as the reasons one has, not in virtue of what one now judges, but in virtue of what it would be reasonable for one to judge now if one gave the matter due attention. It is part of a theory of subjective rationality, which I will not pursue further here, to specify more precisely what kind of idealization of the agent's epistemic situation is appropriate in determining her subjective reasons. As long as the worthlessness of Before's ideals and the merit of After's ideals do not transcend reasonable idealizations of the agent's epistemic situation, whatever those are, the comparative merits of earlier and later ideals will be ascertainable in the relevant way. If the comparative value of her current and future ideals is available to her in this way, we can ascribe to her a subjective reason to favor her future ideals. However, in cases of Improvement in which the comparative values of current and future ideals is a transcendent fact (transcending the relevant idealization), then the demands of objective and subjective rationality appear to diverge. The friend of prudence can and should defend temporal neutrality as a claim about the agent's objective reasons. Whether she is in a position to recognize it or not, she has no reason to act on her current ideals and will have reason to act on her future ideals. This can be a case where it may not be subjectively rational to do what is in fact objectively rational.

What about unavoidable conflicts whose merits are symmetrical? The *Minus-Minus* situation occurs when the conflicting ideals are similarly worthless. Here it seems right to agree with neutrality's claim that there is objective reason not to act on either ideal but to find, adopt, and act on some third ideal that has merit. Provided that the comparative merits of the meretricious and genuinely valuable ideals are rea-

sonably ascertainable and are not (in the relevant sense) transcendent facts, this also yields a plausible claim about the agent's subjective reasons. The agent should act on neither meretricious ideal but adopt and act on the new valuable ideal.

Perhaps the most interesting case of unavoidable conflict is the symmetrical case in which the conflicting ideals are both valuable and comparably so. One example might be a conflict between excelling as a professional athlete early in life, which may require forgoing extended educational and professional training and may impose significant health costs later in life, and various forms of professional and personal success later in life. Another example might be familiar conflicts between success in professional and family life.³⁹ We might call any such case a *Plus-Plus* case. By hypothesis, the conflict is unavoidable, so that After's ideals conflict with Before's no matter what the agent now does, and each ideal is valuable. Here, temporal neutrality recognizes a conflict of objective reasons and counsels a kind of neutrality among the competing ideals. On reflection, this seems right. If the agent can pursue Before's ideals unreservedly only by completely frustrating After's ideals (and vice versa), then there seems something objectively wrong with the unreserved pursuit of present ideals. Ideally, one would try to find a way to achieve substantial success in one's ideals both now and later, even if it required some moderation in or restrictions on the pursuit of one's ideals now or later. Neutrality's counsel of moderate or restricted pursuit of current ideals is an instance of the familiar adage "Not to burn one's bridges." Where such compromise and accommodation are possible, neutrality makes good normative sense. Call these cases of *Accommodation*. But accommodation may not always be possible. In cases of *Genuine Dilemma* there is no prospect of substantially accommodating both ideals. Here, neutrality seems compatible with two possibilities. On the one hand, one might achieve some less-than-substantial success along both ideals—neither a stellar success nor an abject failure at any time. Alternatively, one might engage in the unreserved and successful pursuit of ideals either now or later (but, by hypothesis, not both), provided that the process of selecting the favored ideal gave equal chances of success to both ideals (as in a coin flip). Neither alternative is attractive, but that seems to be a consequence of the situation's being dilemmatic.⁴⁰ One consolation is that unavoidable conflicts are somewhat rare, and Genuine Dilemmas are even more exotic. Neutrality's claims about our objective reasons in such cases seem plausible enough. And, as before, provided the merits

of the conflicting ideals are not transcendent facts, these claims about the agent's objective reasons apply to her subjective reasons as well.

8. Reconciling Temporal Neutrality and Authenticity

The temporal neutrality characteristic of prudence can be defended by appeals to compensation. We might wonder whether the implications of temporal neutrality, which seem otherwise acceptable, are plausible in cases involving intertemporal conflicts of value. Is neutrality in such cases desirable or even possible? I have tried to suggest that when the nature of such conflicts is clarified, temporal neutrality is not only possible but plausible.

But if we accept this defense of prudence, must we sacrifice authenticity? Authenticity seems to involve being true to oneself, to one's ideals and principles, and acting in conformity with one's commitments. Insofar as temporal neutrality requires in some cases of unavoidable conflict of ideals that the agent act in a way that alienates her from the ideals she then holds, isn't prudence purchased at the price of authenticity?

We can reconcile the demands of prudence and authenticity if we remember that the agent is a person who is temporally extended. Her past, present, and future are equally parts of her and her life, and her near and distant futures are equally parts of her. To be true to herself, since she is a temporally extended person, she must be true to all of her reasonable ideals and cannot be selectively attentive to her current ideals. She must weigh her future reasonable ideals, where these are fixed, against her current reasonable ideals, where this is necessary, in order to conform her behavior to all of her reasonable commitments. This sort of concern for one's whole life does not require forsaking one's current prudential ideals. But it does require conditioning their pursuit on recognition of the legitimate claims that one's reasonable future prudential ideals make on one.

This defense of prudence has focused on the demands of temporal neutrality in intrapersonal conflicts of prudential value. But temporal neutrality has wider application to other sorts of intertemporal conflicts of value.⁴¹ Concerns about authenticity can arise in any context where the agent is asked to attach normative significance to ideals he does not otherwise endorse at the time of action. We have seen how this can occur when there is a conflict between the agent's current and

future prudential ideals. It can also occur between the agent's current and future nonprudential ideals.

Though it is not always easy to distinguish between prudential and nonprudential ideals, precisely because our views about what matters from a moral or religious point of view often transform our views about what makes our own lives worth living, we can imagine that someone might have moral or religious ideals for which he is willing to sacrifice his prudential ideals. But if his moral or religious commitments change in relevant ways over time, he may have an intrapersonal conflict of nonprudential value. Perhaps the Russian nobleman example involves a conflict of nonprudential ideals, though it is an open question whether that conflict of social ideals is unavoidable and whether the competing ideals are comparably reasonable. If the agent can anticipate this conflict, he can frame the question of whether he should be neutral as between his current and future ideals.

Here there is no question of defending neutrality by appeal to diachronic intrapersonal compensation. Because the ideals are nonprudential, neither ideal is undertaken for the agent's own good and there is no prospect of compensation. But there is still the question whether he should in any way moderate pursuit of his current nonprudential ideals in light of his future ones. The demands of neutrality are equally coherent and plausible when applied to this context. Temporal neutrality does not always require neutrality among conflicting ideals, and, when it does, this demand is defensible. Where possible, agents should embrace ideals that do not give rise to conflicts or to conflicts among reasonable ideals. Where conflict among nonprudential ideals is unavoidable, we need to consider cases. In asymmetrical cases in which one ideal is meritorious and the other is meretricious, the agent has objective reason to act on the valuable ideal and lacks objective reason to act on the meretricious ideal. In symmetrical cases of meretricious ideals an agent has objective reason to act on neither ideal but to adopt and conform to a new ideal that has value. In symmetrical cases of valuable ideals, the agent should recognize a conflict of objective reasons. Where accommodation is possible, neutrality's demand not to burn one's bridges seems to be the objectively reasonable course of action. Where the situation is genuinely dilemmatic, the agent has objective reason to act on either ideal, it doesn't matter which, provided the process of selecting the favored ideal gives equal chances of success to both ideals. All these claims about the agent's objective reasons apply to his subjective reasons as well, provided only that the comparative merits of

the conflicting ideals are reasonably ascertainable in the relevant way. Insofar as the conflicting but reasonable ideals are equally commitments that the agent undertakes, even if they are undertaken at different times, faithfulness to himself and his ideals requires conditioning his pursuit of present ideals on recognition of the normative significance of his future ideals.

Agents are persons who persist through time and whose temporal parts are equally real (or whose life has phases that are equally real). When authenticity is understood in terms of faithfulness to oneself and one's principles, we can see that it is temporal bias, not temporal neutrality, that threatens authenticity. Indeed, properly understood, authenticity requires the commitment to temporal neutrality.

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Notes

This material was first presented as an invited symposium at the APA Central Division Meetings in Chicago in 2002 and later at Ohio and Yale universities. I would like to thank audiences on those occasions, especially Stephen Darwall, my commentator at the APA meetings, for extremely helpful commentary and discussion. I would also like to thank the editors of the *Philosophical Review* for valuable comments on an earlier version of this essay. Work on this material was supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

¹ See, for example, Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 203, and Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) sects. 36–37, 142, and “Aristippus Against Happiness,” *Monist* 74 (1991): 55–82.

² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th ed. [originally published 1790], ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1976), 6.1.11.

³ Temporal bias plays an important role in Socratic and Aristotelian discussions of weakness of will. Compare Plato's *Protagoras* (356a–357e) and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2–10. The significance of temporal bias or discounting is explored in George Ainslie, *Picoeconomics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Breakdown of Will* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), 124 n.; cf. 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁶ Perhaps it is this differential epistemic relation that we bear to the present and future that explains why Smith says that the impartial spectator will weigh present and future goods in *nearly* the same manner.

⁷ *Methods*, 207–8, 394–95.

⁸ I believe, but cannot argue properly here, that this is true even of Stoic

and Kantian traditions of practical deliberation that offer accounts of virtue that emphasize voluntary control and indifference to the actual consequences of the agent's attempts to perform his duty. For such traditions do allow beliefs about the consequences of actions to help determine which actions the agent should attempt to perform, even if success in performing the actions or producing the consequences for which he aims is, on these views, a matter of moral indifference.

⁹ In interpersonal contexts, we sometimes distinguish between equal *concern* and equal *treatment*. Cf. Ronald Dworkin, "Reverse Discrimination" in *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 227. For instance, treating my two children, one of whom has a significant physical disability, as equals may require treating them unequally in terms of medical and other resources. We need to make the same distinction in the intrapersonal context. Prudence and temporal neutrality require equal concern, rather than equal treatment per se, for all parts of an agent's life.

¹⁰ Others, besides Smith and Sidgwick, have also defended temporal neutrality. Ramsey describes temporal bias as "ethically indefensible"; see Frank Ramsey, "A Mathematical Theory of Saving," reprinted in Frank Ramsey, *Foundations* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 261. Rawls endorses Sidgwick's account of temporal neutrality and describes the commitment to temporal neutrality as "a feature of being rational"; see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 293–94.

¹¹ *Methods*, 381.

¹² See Stephen Darwall, "Self-Interest and Self-Concern," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997):158–78. This is one worry about desire-satisfaction conceptions of a person's good that place no restrictions on the content of the person's desires.

¹³ Cf. Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1970), 138, 142; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 23–24, 26–27, 29, 187–88, 191; and Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 31–34.

¹⁴ I intend talk about temporal parts of a person or person's life to be metaphysically ecumenical in two ways. First, it is convenient to talk about persons and their temporal parts whether persons are four-dimensional entities that literally have temporal parts (as three-dimensional entities have spatial parts) or whether they are three-dimensional entities that have no temporal parts but do have lives, histories, or careers that have temporal parts or stages. Talk about a person's temporal parts can refer to temporal parts of persons or to parts of lives or careers of persons. Second, my talk of temporal parts is neutral in the debate among those who treat persons as four-dimensional entities having temporal parts about whether persons or their temporal parts are prior in order of explanation.

¹⁵ I do not address here the sort of strong social organicism contained in the absolute idealist tradition, for example, in the work of T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley. For discussion of one strand in this tradition, see my *Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes in T. H. Green* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 2003), sects. 18–20.

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of these issues, see my “Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons,” in *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

¹⁷ In *The Possibility of Altruism* Nagel defends temporal neutrality and interpersonal neutrality or altruism. Prudence insists that an agent’s future interests provide her with reason for action now, and altruism insists that the interests of others provide her (now) with reason for action for their sake. Nagel argues that failure to recognize prudence involves temporal solipsism—failure to see the present as one time among others, equally real—and that failure to recognize altruism involves interpersonal solipsism—failure to see oneself as one person among others, equally real. I have often thought that the real value of Nagel’s thesis lies in its adequacy as a description of developmental psychology. For it seems to me that the process of turning children into mature and responsible adults (a process that in some cases is never completed) is in significant part the process of overcoming temporal and personal solipsism.

¹⁸ *The Possibility of Altruism*, 74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Nagel’s claims are more adequate as applied to subjective reasons. But even here things are more complicated. As I will argue, subjective reasons are better relativized, not to the agent’s actual evaluations, but to the evaluations it would be reasonable for her to make. Also, as we will see, an agent is not limited to treating her future ideals as worthless or treating all her ideals as mere preferences.

²¹ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1984), 155.

²² This might be one way of pursuing Williams’s insistence that the “correct perspective on one’s life is *from now*.” Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality,” reprinted in Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 13.

²³ Two qualifications: (1) If we are to define identity in terms of relations of psychological continuity, these relations cannot themselves presuppose identity. Relations such as remembering one’s earlier experiences and fulfilling one’s prior intentions, which do presuppose identity, will have to be replaced by more general quasi-relations that are otherwise similar but presuppose causal dependence without presupposing identity. See Sydney Shoemaker, “Persons and Their Pasts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): 269–85 and Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 220–21. (2) If we are to define identity, which is a one-one relation, in terms of psychological continuity, which can take a one-many form, we must define it in terms of *nonbranching* psychological continuity. But the reasoning that leads us to this conclusion may also lead us to the conclusion that it is continuity (a potentially one-many relation), rather than identity per se, that is what has primary normative significance. Parfit discusses these issues in *Reasons and Persons*, chap. 12; I discuss them in “Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons” and “Self-love and Altruism,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997):122–57.

²⁴ *Reasons and Persons*, 327.

²⁵The Russian nobleman example always reminds me of the scene in Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* in which the young Frankenstein (Gene Wilder) is about to enter a dungeon to calm the monster (Peter Boyle) and makes his assistant (Teri Garr) and Igor (Marty Feldman) promise not to open the dungeon door under any circumstances. Needless to say, he regrets these instructions, which his assistants rigidly enforce.

²⁶See Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, part 3, and Sydney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) and "Personal Identity: A Materialist's Account," in Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

²⁷John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [first published 1690], ed. P. H. Niddich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1979), 2.27.8, 15, 17–21, 23, 26.

²⁸If we decide that it is psychological continuity, rather than identity per se, that matters, or even that the former has significant independent normative significance, we may conclude that ascriptions of responsibility presuppose psychological continuity, and especially deliberative control, rather than identity per se. This will allow us to make sense of shared responsibility and corporate agency.

²⁹There is some similarity, I am not sure how much, between these claims about the role of deliberative control in intrapersonal unity and Korsgaard's Kantian claims about the unity of agency. See Christine Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 101–32.

³⁰Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* [first published 1785], ed. B. Brody (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 3.357–58.

³¹My present concern is with the conditions of substantial change and so with identity. Requiring that identity be defined in terms of continuity, rather than connectedness, is compatible, I think, with leaving it an open question whether it is continuity, connectedness, or both that has or have normative significance.

³²I think that we could make essentially the same point by distinguishing between first-order and second-order judgments. My current first-order judgment might be ϕ , but I might also (currently) accept the second-order judgment that I should act only on first-order judgments that are diachronically stable. Provided that rationality requires that agents regulate their behavior in accordance with such second-order judgments, the fact that agents can act only on such second-order judgments when they hold them is perfectly consistent with temporal neutrality.

³³There is a clear similarity between this response to the alleged impossibility of temporal neutrality and a familiar response to the alleged impossibility of altruistic action that diagnoses the apparent necessity of selfish motivation as resting on a confusion between the *ownership* and *content* of desires (whereas an agent always acts so as to satisfy her own desires, the content of her desires need not refer to herself).

³⁴The idea of an ideal that is something more than a mere preference may be related to Williams's ideas about categorical desires and ground projects

PRUDENCE AND AUTHENTICITY

(“Persons, Character, and Morality,” 11–14), though he tends to prescind, as I would not, from talk about the merits or value of such desires and projects. But I won’t pursue the potential connection with Williams’s discussion any further.

³⁵Lurking somewhere here is a relative of Parfit’s Non-Identity Problem. That problem makes it hard to assess the moral consequences of alternative actions in certain familiar ways (for example, person-affecting ways) inasmuch as many alternatives affect not just how benefits and harms are distributed among a given set of people but also who exists to be benefited or harmed (*Reasons and Persons*, chap. 16). In the intrapersonal case, alternatives often determine which ideals exist to be promoted or hindered. Parfit takes the non-identity problem to support a form of interpersonal neutrality. I am unclear whether the corresponding intrapersonal problem about plasticity of ideals supports temporal neutrality. How far the parallels extend and what they show about the intrapersonal case deserve further consideration.

³⁶It is a sign of just how hard it is to identify genuinely unavoidable conflicts that a present ideal of an extravagant lifestyle is not in fact incompatible with all possible future ideals. For instance, it would be compatible with a future ideal of an ascetic lifestyle.

³⁷So the following discussion need not presuppose realism or any other comparably sectarian metaethical view.

³⁸In *Reasons and Persons* Parfit complains that prudence must treat ideals as mere preferences (154). But Parfit foists this sort of radical subjectivism about value on friends of prudence without any justification. The demands of prudence can and should reflect the comparative merits of an agent’s ideals.

³⁹I think that it is less clear that this conflict is inevitable or unavoidable, and it is as much a synchronic conflict as it is a diachronic conflict.

⁴⁰These claims about intrapersonal dilemmas parallel claims we might make about moral dilemmas. See David O. Brink, “Moral Conflict and Its Structure” *Philosophical Review* 103 (1994): 215–47.

⁴¹I do not address intertemporal conflicts between one person’s current ideals (prudential or otherwise) and the future ideals of another person (prudential or otherwise).

