

## SPECIAL CONCERN AND PERSONAL IDENTITY<sup>1</sup>

A traditional philosophical narrative links personal identity and the sort of special concern each person has for herself, including her own future. Prudential concern for one's overall good is one expression of this kind of special concern. Despite their disagreements about the nature of personal identity, John Locke, Bishop Butler, and Thomas Reid embraced the forensic role of personal identity as essential to our understanding of both responsibility and special concern, especially prudence.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in his discussion of personal identity in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke comments on the *forensic* role of personhood and personal identity.

In this *personal Identity* is founded all the Right and Justice of Reward and Punishment; Happiness and Misery; being that, for which everyone is concerned for *himself*, not mattering what becomes of any Substance, not joined to, or affected with that consciousness [*Essay* II.xxvii.18].

Locke included the sort of special concern characteristic of prudence as part of this forensic role. So, he thought that special concern for my own future was predicated on personal identity. Locke was a psychological reductionist about personal identity and thought that his own conception of personal identity in terms of sameness of consciousness or memory explained this forensic role. In particular, he thought that I would and should extend special concern to any future person who would be memory connected with me now.

By contrast, Butler was a non-reductionist, who denied that any informative analysis of personal identity is possible. He too thought personal identity is tied to the forensic role of persons and special concern. But he rejected the Lockean conception of personal identity as committed to identity in only a "loose and popular" sense, rather than a "strict and philosophical" sense ("Dissertation," pp. 263-67). Butler concludes that Lockean reductionism about personal identity cannot support the forensic role of persons.

And from hence it must follow, that it is a fallacy upon ourselves, to charge our present selves with anything we did, or to imagine our present selves interested in anything which befell us yesterday, or that our present self will be interested in what will befall us to-morrow; since our present self is not, in reality, the same with the self of yesterday, but another like self or person coming in its room, and mistaken for it; to which another self will succeed to-morrow. ...[F]or if the self or person of to-day, and that of to-morrow, are not the same, but only like persons, the person of to-day is really no more interested in what will befall the person of to-morrow, than in what will befall any other person ["Dissertation," 267].

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<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book II, Chapter xxvii, §18, 26; Joseph Butler, "Dissertation on Personal Identity" in *The Whole Works of Joseph Butler*, ed. S. Halifax (London: William Tegg & Co., 1847), pp. 263-67; and Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. B. Brody (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969).

Here, Butler also assumes that special concern presupposes personal identity but denies that Lockean reductionism is an acceptable conception of numeric identity.

Locke, Butler, and Reid agree that a prudential form of special concern depends on personal identity. Prudence involves a special concern for the agent's own well-being or personal good that she does not have for others. But this should be a concern for the agent's overall good that is temporally neutral and involves an equal concern for all parts of her life. In this way, prudence involves a combination of *personal bias* but *temporal neutrality*. This asymmetrical treatment of matters of interpersonal and intertemporal distribution might seem arbitrary. Henry Sidgwick raised this worry, and Thomas Nagel and Derek Parfit have endorsed it as reflecting the instability of prudence and related doctrines such as egoism and the self-interest theory.<sup>3</sup> However, Sidgwick thought that the worry was unanswerable only for skeptics about personal identity, such as David Hume. Sidgwick thought that one could defend prudence by appeal to an ecumenical form of realism about personal identity. In this way, Sidgwick develops an idea common to Locke, Butler, and Reid that prudence presupposes personal identity. In particular, realism about personal identity and a compensation principle, which Sidgwick also discussed, jointly rationalize prudence's combination of agent bias and temporal neutrality. While there is no automatic interpersonal compensation for sacrifice, diachronic intrapersonal compensation is automatic.<sup>4</sup>

However, another interpretation of the relationship between personal identity and special concern appears to invert this traditional conception of the relationship. Jennifer Whiting has argued that the psychological reductionist about personal identity should recognize that special concern is an important ingredient in both interpersonal and intrapersonal unity.<sup>5</sup> If we develop this argument, it seems that we should conclude that personal identity presupposes special concern.

Though each interpretation of the relation between special concern and personal identity might seem attractive, it seems problematic to combine them, because this seems to affirm that special concern presupposes personal identity and that personal identity presupposes special concern. To avoid circularity, it seems we have to reject at least one of these conflicting narratives. However, I want to try to reconcile these narratives. Two philosophical concepts cannot both be explanatorily fundamental with respect to each other in the same respect. Nonetheless, we can treat them as equally fundamental, especially if we treat them as explanatorily fundamental with respect to each other in *different respects*. On this reading, with some qualifications, we might claim that personal identity is *normatively prior* to special concern but that special concern is *metaphysically prior* to personal identity.

In what follows, I will first explain the demands of special concern and prudence (§1) and then explore a puzzling structural asymmetry within prudence that Sidgwick, Nagel, and Parfit have noticed (§2). Next, I will examine Sidgwick's resolution of this puzzle, which appeals to realism about personal identity and compensation (§3). Then I will explore just how metaphysically ecumenical Sidgwick's rationale for prudence is and whether it is compatible with the truth of a psychological reductionist conception of personal identity (§4). This allows us to clarify Sidgwick's claim that prudence depends on personal identity; personal identity is prior to prudence, because personal identity and compensation justify prudence and temporal neutrality (§5). Next, I will explore and defend Whiting's suggestion that the psychological reductionist should claim that special concern is in a way prior to personal identity, because it helps constitute intrapersonal unity (§6). While special concern helps constitute personal identity, it need not take a temporally neutral form to do so (§7). Having explained

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 1907), esp. pp. 418-19; Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), esp. pp. 16, 19, 99-100; and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), esp. pp. 137-44).

<sup>4</sup> In doing so, I will be adapting arguments from David O. Brink, "Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons" in *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and David O. Brink, "The Prospects for Temporal Neutrality" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Time*, ed. C. Callender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Whiting, "Friends and Future Selves" *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 547-80.

each of these two narratives about the relative priority of special concern and personal identity, I will address the apparent tension between them, arguing that the tension can be resolved by distinguishing metaphysical and normative priority (§8).

### 1. SPECIAL CONCERN, PRUDENCE, AND EGOISM

Special concern, as it figures in the tradition of thinking about personal identity, involves a kind or degree of concern for oneself that one does not have for others. This is a concern for one's overall good and essentially involves a concern for one's own further future. One common expression of this sort of special concern is prudence and its temporally neutral concern with the agent's own good. Both special concern and prudence are sometimes connected with rational egoism.

Rational egoism is a theory about practical reason that claims that one has reason to do something just insofar as that would promote the agent's overall interest or personal good. As such, egoism treats intertemporal and interpersonal distribution differently. A conception is *neutral* with respect to persons or time if it assigns no intrinsic significance to how goods and bads are distributed among persons or over time, except insofar as this affects the quality of one's life as a whole. By contrast, we might say, a conception is *biased* or *relative* if it does assign intrinsic significance to issues about whom a benefit or burden falls upon or when it does, independently of affecting the value of the life in which it occurs. Rational egoism is *interpersonally biased or relative*, but *intertemporally neutral*.

In principle, a conception of practical reason might be interpersonally biased or relative in any number of ways. For instance, it might assign special normative significance to benefits and harms that accrue to those to whom the agent stands in special relationships.<sup>6</sup> But rational egoism is biased in a special way insofar as it insists that goods and bads must accrue to the agent in some way to be of rational significance to her. Egoism itself does not specify the forms that this kind of accrual might take. For instance, I might benefit by benefiting another if the other will reciprocate my cooperation and assistance. In such cases, the egoist has instrumental reasons to be concerned about and benefit others. However, it's possible that the egoist might have constitutive reason to be concerned about and benefit others if she stands in the right sort of relationship to them such that their good is a part of hers. We sometimes adopt this way of looking at one's relationship to intimates — parents and their children, spouses, and close friends — when we view the good of another as part of one's own good. We can say that the egoist recognizes nonderivative reason for concern only for herself and derivative reason to be concerned for others. But this derivative concern for others might be more or less robust depending on whether that concern is purely instrumental or also constitutive. Interesting as these issues about the shape of egoist derivative concern for others are, I propose to ignore them as much as possible for present purposes.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the egoist is interpersonally biased, she is temporally neutral. She assigns no intrinsic significance to the temporal location of goods and bads within her life, except insofar as it contributes to the value of her life.<sup>8</sup> She should be concerned with her own overall good and be equally concerned about all parts of her life. This means that she should reject various kinds of temporal bias, including bias toward the near. Temporal neutrality requires sacrificing a nearer good for a later, greater good.

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<sup>6</sup> One such theory is Broad's self-referential altruism. See C.D. Broad, "Self and Others" reprinted in *Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. D. Cheney (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> I discuss these issues at greater length in David O. Brink, "Self-love and Altruism" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 14 (1997): 122-57.

<sup>8</sup> Two qualifications. (a) As Sidgwick notes (*ME* 381), I may adopt an unequal concern for different periods in my life if I am a more efficient converter of resources into utility at certain points in my life. (b) If lives with certain kinds of narrative structure (e.g. an upward trajectory) are more valuable than others, then one might accept intrapersonal distributional principles and attach more normative significance to some periods in a person's life than others. See David Velleman, "Well-Being and Time" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 48-77. However, both of these ways of attaching special significance to certain periods in one's life are fully compatible with temporal neutrality, understood as insisting that the temporal location of goods and bads within one's life has no normative significance except insofar as it contributes to the value of that life.

Call this *now-for-later sacrifice*. This sort of sacrifice provides us with some of our most compelling paradigms of rationality. It seems a mark of rationality to undertake actions, projects, and commitments to which one 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-later 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-later 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.

In this way, rational egoism combines agent bias and temporal neutrality. As I conceive of prudence, it is the egoist dimension of practical reason. Like egoism, prudence involves a special concern for one's overall good that is agent biased and temporally neutral. Rational egoism says that this is all there is to practical reason. By contrast, as I conceive it, prudence does not preclude other kinds of demands of practical reason, for instance, demands for more impartial regard. Prudence might be just one form of practical reasonableness among others.

My focus here is on special concern and prudence. For present purposes, I hope to remain agnostic about whether prudence should be part of a more pluralistic conception of practical reason or whether it is all there is to practical reason, focusing on the prospects of prudence, rather than rational egoism.

## 2. PRUDENCE AND ASYMMETRICAL DISTRIBUTION

Prudence combines interpersonal bias and intertemporal neutrality. As such, it provides an asymmetrical treatment of two distinct distributional dimensions. It says that it makes all the difference *to whom* benefits and burdens accrue and none whatsoever *when* they occur. On reflection, this may seem arbitrary. Why not treat these two distributional dimensions the same way? Sidgwick recognized this issue in *The Methods of Ethics* in the context of his discussion of the proof of utilitarianism.

I do not see why the axiom of Prudence should not be questioned, when it conflicts with present inclination, on a ground similar to that on which Egoists refuse to admit the axiom of Rational Benevolence. If the Utilitarian has to answer the question, 'Why should I sacrifice my own happiness for the greater happiness of another?' it must surely be admissible to ask the Egoist, 'Why should I sacrifice a present pleasure for a greater one in the future? Why should I concern myself about my own future feelings any more than about the feelings of other persons?' [ME 418]

The egoist asks the utilitarian: Why should I sacrifice my own good for the good of another? The egoist doubts that concern for others is non-derivatively rational. But one can ask the egoist on behalf of one's present self: Why should I sacrifice a present good for myself for the sake of a future good for myself? Here, one might doubt that concern for one's future is non-derivatively rational. These doubts may seem parallel. We must decide where among lives and when within lives to locate goods and harms. Because both are matters of position or location, we may think that they should be treated the same.

We might express this concern about prudence in terms of its *hybrid structure*, involving the asymmetrical treatment of interpersonal and intertemporal distribution. If we distinguish neutral and biased treatment and focus on biased treatment in favor of the agent or the present, we can contrast the hybrid structure of prudence with two purebred rivals.

		Time	
		Neutrality	Bias
Persons	Neutrality	Neutralism or Rational Benevolence	Benevolence of the Present Moment
	Bias	Egoism or Prudence	Egoism of the Present Moment

These are *structural* conceptions of practical reason that make claims about the distribution of goods and bads across persons and times. They are agnostic about what the good consists in, as between hedonism, desire-satisfaction, perfectionism, or objective list views. In principle, there are two purebreds — rational benevolence or neutralism and egoism of the present moment — and two hybrids — prudence or egoism and benevolence of the present moment. Benevolence of the present moment has had no champions (of whom I am aware) and holds little appeal, so I shall ignore it going forward, focusing on the contrast between the hybrid structure of prudence and the two purebreds.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter 7 of *Reasons and Persons* Parfit endorses Sidgwick's worry about the hybrid structure of prudence or egoism, which he applies to what he calls the Self-interest Theory (S).

As a hybrid S can be attacked from both directions. And what S claims against one rival may be turned against it by the other. In rejecting Neutralism, a Self-interest Theorist must claim that a reason may have force only for the agent. But the grounds for this claim support a further claim. If a reason can have force only for the agent, it can have force for the agent only at the time of acting. The Self-interest theorist must reject this claim. He must attack the notion of a time-relative reason. But arguments to show that reasons must be temporally neutral, thus refuting the Present-aim Theory, may also show that reasons must be neutral between different people, thus refuting the Self-interest Theory [RP 140].

If present sacrifice for future benefit is rational, why isn't sacrifice of one person's good for the sake of another's? In this way, the appeal to parity may support rational benevolence. This is roughly the view Thomas Nagel adopts in *The Possibility of Altruism*. His primary aim is to argue against egoism's agent bias and in favor of impartiality or altruism, and he relies on the parity of intertemporal and interpersonal distribution to do so. Just as the interests of an agent's future self provide him with reasons for action now, so too, Nagel argues, the interests of others can provide him with reason for action. Failure to recognize temporal neutrality involves temporal dissociation — failure to see the present as just one time among others — and failure to recognize impartiality or altruism involves personal dissociation — failure to recognize oneself as just one person among others (PA 16, 19, 99-100).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It's not clear that benevolence of the present moment has a plausible rationale. The rationale I will reconstruct for the hybrid character of prudence (§3) does not extend to this other hybrid conception.

<sup>10</sup> (a) I have often thought that the real value of Nagel's discussion lies in its adequacy as a description of developmental psychology. It seems to me that the process of turning children into mature and responsible adults is in significant part the process of overcoming temporal and personal solipsism. (b) Nagel's remarks about the "combinatorial problem" (134-42) show that he is skeptical of an impersonal interpretation of impartiality. Nonetheless his appeal to parity seems to require neutralism and not just impartiality. He appeals

Alternatively, we might treat time and person as parallel and argue from the agent bias that egoism concedes to temporal bias, in particular, present bias. If my sacrifice for another is not rationally required, it may seem that we cannot demand a sacrifice of my current interests for the sake of distant future ones. If so, we will think that it is only the present interests of the agent that provide her with non-derivative reason for action. Though Parfit mentions Nagel's fully neutral response to parity, it is the fully biased response that he develops and thinks Sidgwick anticipated (*RP* 137-44).<sup>11</sup>

### 3. RATIONALIZING THE ASYMMETRY

Whereas Parfit thinks that one cannot defend the hybrid character of prudence, Sidgwick thinks that this challenge to prudence is unanswerable only if we accept Humean skepticism about personal identity over time. After stating the challenge to the hybrid character of egoism (quoted above), Sidgwick continues this way.

It undoubtedly seems to Common Sense paradoxical to ask for a reason why one should seek one's own happiness on the whole; but I do not see how the demand can be repudiated as absurd by those who adopt the views of the extreme empirical school of psychologists ... Grant that the Ego is merely a system of coherent phenomena, that the permanent identical 'I' is not a fact but a fiction, as Hume and his followers maintain; why, then, should one part of the series of feelings into which the Ego is resolved be concerned with another part of the same series, any more than with any other series? [*ME* 418-19].

Sidgwick thinks that prudence is defensible provided we recognize the separateness of persons.

It would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently "I" am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals: and this being so, I do not see how it can be proved that this distinction is not to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual [*ME* 498].

What exactly is this appeal to the separateness of persons, and how does it rationalize the hybrid structure of prudence?

Sidgwick's rationale appeals to two claims: a compensation principle and realism about personal identity. His request for a justification of sacrifice (418) suggests a concern with compensation. Prudence rejects the sort of extreme temporal bias characteristic of egoism of the present moment. Now-for-later sacrifice is rational, because the agent is compensated later for her earlier sacrifice.

To see how this rationale works, it will help to consider a familiar interpersonal/intrapersonal analogy. Whereas prudence is temporally neutral, utilitarianism is person-neutral. Prudence is temporally neutral and assigns no intrinsic significance to *when* a benefit or burden occurs in a person's life. It says that we should balance benefits and harms, where necessary, among different stages in a person's life and pursue the action or policy that promotes the agent's overall good best. Utilitarianism is interpersonally neutral; it assigns no intrinsic significance to *whom* a benefit or burden befalls. Just as temporal neutrality requires intrapersonal balancing, so too person neutrality

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to parity to argue from egoism's temporal neutrality to non-derivative concern for others. But if intertemporal and interpersonal distribution must be isomorphic, and we accept a temporally neutral interpretation of intertemporal impartiality, then we seem forced to accept a person neutral interpretation of interpersonal impartiality.

<sup>11</sup> Here, I ignore differences between Parfit's fully relative Present-aim Theory (P) and egoism of the present moment, which actually obscure the structural issues I want to focus on.

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*. For instance, John Rawls famously makes this claim in *A Theory of Justice*.

This view of social cooperation [utilitarianism's] is the consequence of extending to society the principle of choice for one man [i.e. prudence], and then, to make this extension work, conflating all persons into one .... Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons.<sup>12</sup>

Nagel agrees, as do Robert Nozick and Bernard Williams.<sup>13</sup> They all accept prudence's intrapersonal balancing, at least for the sake of argument, but reject utilitarianism's interpersonal balancing.

We can see how to deny the parity of intrapersonal and interpersonal cases and provide a rationale for the temporal neutrality of prudence by highlighting the role of compensation in the separateness of persons objection. Nozick's discussion is especially instructive here.

Individually, we each sometimes choose to undergo some pain or sacrifice for a greater benefit or to avoid a greater harm. ... Why not, *similarly*, hold that some persons have to bear some costs that benefit other persons more? But there is no *social entity* with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. ... To use a person in this way does not sufficiently respect and take account of the fact that he is a separate person, that his is the only life he has. *He* does not get some overbalancing good from his sacrifice, and no one is entitled to force this upon him ... [ASU 32-33].

Like the others, Nozick is invoking claims about compensation to explain the asymmetric treatment of intrapersonal and interpersonal balancing. Whereas balancing benefits and harms is acceptable *within* a life, balancing benefits and harms *across* lives appears 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. Whereas intrapersonal compensation is automatic, interpersonal compensation is not. This fact about compensation appears to rationalize intrapersonal neutrality without rationalizing interpersonal neutrality.

1. Realism about personal identity is true.
2. Sacrifice is rational iff compensated.
3. Hence, intrapersonal temporal neutrality is required by the sufficiency of compensation for sacrifice; because beneficiary and benefactor are the same in the intrapersonal case, sacrifice is automatically compensated.
4. Hence, the necessity of compensation for sacrifice blocks interpersonal neutrality; because benefactor and beneficiary are distinct in the interpersonal case, sacrifices are not automatically compensated.
5. Hence, we have a rationale for the hybrid character of prudence.

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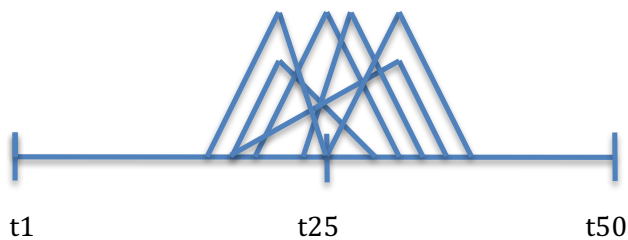
<sup>12</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, pp. 134, 138-42; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 31-34; and Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality" reprinted in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.

The necessity of compensation for sacrifice rationalizes agent bias, whereas the sufficiency of sacrifice rationalizes temporal neutrality. The necessity of compensation for sacrifice is a controversial claim, because it would imply that it is irrational for one person to make a very small sacrifice for the sake of an enormous benefit to another, as in a case of easy rescue in which I can save the life of another at little or no risk to myself. But if we remain agnostic about whether prudence exhausts practical reason, as the rational egoist claims, we may be less invested in defending the necessity of compensation for sacrifice and agent bias. By contrast, the sufficiency of sacrifice is a more plausible requirement and seems sufficient to justify intrapersonal temporal neutrality.

Or does it? Couldn't doubts about interpersonal balancing be extended to intrapersonal balancing? If the separateness of persons defeats interpersonal balancing, why doesn't the separateness of different periods within a person's life defeat intrapersonal balancing? After all, me-now and me-later are distinct parts of me.<sup>14</sup> But then it is 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 for you. Just as doubts about interpersonal balancing lead to a distributed concern with each person, perhaps doubts about intrapersonal balancing should support a distributed concern with each part of a person's life. There are different interpretations of what this distributed concern requires in the interpersonal context, such as equal distribution and maximin. Perhaps we need to explore comparable interpretations of distributed concern in the intrapersonal context.<sup>15</sup>

However, this challenge to temporal neutrality requires thinking that we can and should adopt a sub-personal perspective when reckoning compensation. But there are problems with this idea. Once we go sub-personal and appeal to full relativity, there seems no reason to stop until we reach the sub-personal limit — a momentary time slice of the person. But notions of compensation have no application to person slices, which do not persist long enough to act or receive the benefits of earlier actions. Moreover, many of the goods in life, especially the pursuit and achievement of worthwhile projects, seem to be realized only by temporally extended beings. But if we stop short of momentary time slices and appeal to larger sub-personal entities, call these person segments, other problems arise. One question is just where to stop. If we don't fully relativize, why relativize partially? Moreover, if we do relativize partially, we introduce indeterminacy. This is because the careers of person segments overlap, with the result that any one point in time is part of the career of indefinitely many different segments.



Assume that the time is  $t_{25}$ . Normally, we would ask what the person has reason to do at this time. But there are continuum-many possible overlapping segments present at  $t_{25}$ , of which the diagram

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup> For some useful discussion of intrapersonal distributional principles, see Dennis McKerlie, "Equality and Time" *Ethics* 99 (1989): 475-91.



depicts just six. We can determine whether compensation has occurred and determine the person's reasons for action at t25 if our unit of agency is the person, but if we adopt the sub-personal conception of the units of agency as person segments, we seem to lack a determinate agent.

Of course, persons are just maximal segments. They also seem to be the most salient segments. Many of the things we value and that structure our pursuits are certain sorts of lives. We aim to be certain sorts of people. Insofar as these ideals structure our beliefs, desires, and intentions, the correct perspective from which to assess success would seem to be the perspective of a whole life. Even when persons have more parochial aims and ambitions, the successful pursuit of these aims and ambitions requires interaction and cooperation among segments, much as persons must often cooperate with others to achieve individual, as well as collective, aims. They do interact and cooperate, much as distinct individuals interact and cooperate in groups, in order to plan and execute long-term projects and goals. They must interact and cooperate if only because they have to share a body and its capacities in order to execute their individual and collective goals, much in the way that individuals must sometimes interact and cooperate if they are to use scarce resources to mutual advantage.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, both the ease and necessity of interaction among person-segments will be greater than that among persons, because the physical constraints and the reliability of fellow cooperators are greater in the intrapersonal case. But this means that person segments will overlap with each other; they will stand to each other and the person much as strands of a rope stand to each other and the rope.<sup>17</sup> Though we can recognize the overlapping strands as entities, the most salient entity is the rope itself. So too, the most salient entity is the person, even if we can recognize the overlapping person segments that make up the person. But then if we appeal to realism about personal identity and compensation, we can rationalize the hybrid character of prudence.

#### 4. PRUDENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REDUCTIONISM

This is one way to vindicate Sidgwick's claim that the hybrid character of prudence is problematic only if we deny the separateness of persons. As we have seen, Sidgwick says that this rationale for the prudential commitment to temporal neutrality would be undermined by Humean skepticism about personal identity. But he suggests that all prudence requires is the separateness and persistence of persons, not any particular analysis of what personal identity consists in. If so, then the rationale for prudence that appeals to personal identity appears metaphysically ecumenical.

Is it? In Chapter 14 of *Reasons and Persons* Parfit argues that psychological reductionism about personal identity further undermines the hybrid character of prudence. His focus is on temporal neutrality, but reductionism raises interesting questions about both temporal neutrality and agent bias. To assess these claims, we need a working understanding of psychological reductionism. Psychological reductionism requires two concepts.

*Psychological Connectedness.* Any persons  $P_x$  and  $P_y$  are psychologically *connected* if and only if and insofar as (iffi) the mental states and actions of  $P_y$  are counterfactually dependent in the appropriate way on the mental states and actions of  $P_x$ .

Connectedness takes many forms — experiential memory, retention of skills and traits, persistent beliefs and desires, actions that reflect the influence of prior deliberations and intentions, and reasoned modification of one's beliefs, values, and goals. We can then define psychological continuity in terms of psychological connectedness.

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<sup>16</sup> See Christine Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 101-32.

<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein employs the rope metaphor but does not apply it to personal identity or agency. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 87.

*Psychological Continuity.* Any Persons Px and Pz are psychologically *continuous* iff Px and Pz are elements in a series of persons such that (e.g. temporally) contiguous pairs of persons are psychologically connected.

Psychological continuity is the ancestral relation to psychological connectedness. Psychological reductionism should be formulated in terms of psychological continuity, because, as Reid pointed out, identity is a transitive relation, as continuity is and connectedness is not.<sup>18</sup>

*Psychological Reductionism I:* P1 and P2 are identical iff they are (sufficiently) psychologically continuous.

Parfit offers several arguments for thinking that psychological reductionism undermines temporal neutrality. His most interesting argument claims that psychological reductionism justifies an intertemporal discount rate of concern, because psychological connectedness normally diminishes over time.<sup>19</sup>

My concern for my future may correspond to the degree of connectedness between me now and myself in the future. Connectedness is one of the two relations that give me reasons to be specially concerned about my own future. It can be rational to care less, when one of the grounds for caring will hold to a lesser degree. Since connectedness is nearly always weaker over long periods, I can rationally care less about my further future [313].

Parfit's defense of an intertemporal discount rate seems to have the following structure.

1. The psychological reductionist's relation R involves continuity and connectedness.
2. Connectedness normally diminishes over time: P3 is typically less connected to P1 than P2 is.
3. Hence, one is normally justified in caring less about one's further future than one's nearer future.
4. Hence, temporal neutrality is false.

Indeed, the natural conclusion of this argument would seem to be that temporal discounting is normally rationally required and not merely rationally permissible.

But there are several problems with this argument. First, we should reject (1). Psychological reductionism should be formulated in terms of continuity, rather connectedness, because only continuity meets Reid's transitivity worry. Whereas connectedness may depreciate over time, continuity does not. Second, (2) is questionable. It's not clear that connectedness does depreciate over time. Parfit seems to think that psychological connectedness requires psychological similarity and that psychological similarity normally diminishes over time. But psychological connectedness requires counterfactual dependence of later actions and intentional states on earlier ones, not psychological similarity or fixity of character. Finally, (3) does not follow from (1) and (2). Even if relation R consisted in connectedness and connectedness diminished over time, this argument would require the assumption that the normatively relevant unit of agency is sub-personal. For we can see how a person segment might be more connected with an immediate successor than a distal successor. But we have argued that whole lives are the normatively relevant unit of agency, and earlier and later segments of a life are equally parts of that life. This confirms Sidgwick's belief that the justification of temporal neutrality is metaphysically ecumenical.

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<sup>18</sup> This is the standard moral drawn by reductionists from Reid's worry that Locke's memory criterion is not a transitive relation. See Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, 357.

<sup>19</sup> For a fuller discussion of Parfit's arguments, see Brink, "Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons."

However, prudence combines temporal neutrality and agent bias, and psychological reductionism might seem to undermine agent bias. We saw that Locke, Butler, and Reid believe that prudential special concern presupposes personal identity in the sense that P1 can have prudential concern for P2 iff P1 = P2. But the psychological reductionist analysis of fission cases, in which there is symmetrically branching continuity, appears to undermine this claim. Consider a case of fission in which Tom's mental life is split symmetrically between two persons Dick and Harry. The psychological reductionist believes that non-branching psychological continuity constitutes identity. What happens in fission? There seem to be four principal possibilities.

1. Tom survives as Dick and as Harry.
2. Tom survives as Dick, rather than Harry.
3. Tom survives as Harry, rather than Dick.
4. Tom survives as neither Dick nor Harry.

If Tom survives in a non-branching case, it might seem he should survive as Dick and as Harry in the fission case. But this would violate the transitivity of identity. If Tom is identical to Dick and Tom is identical to Harry, then by the transitivity of identity Dick must be identical to Harry. But that is plainly not the case. They are distinct persons with different spatio-temporal locations. If I pinch Dick, Harry does not feel it, and vice versa. By Leibniz's Law, they are not identical. But a psychological reductionist has no reason to accept (2) or (3), as Dick and Harry have precisely symmetrical claims to being Tom. That leaves (4), which is initially hard to believe, because if non-branching continuity is a success in terms of Tom's survival, how can a double success be a failure? However, (4) is the consensus description of fission for psychological reductionists. If we are psychological reductionists, we should deny Tom survives as Dick or as Harry, because of the transitivity of identity, and conclude that fission is a case of interpersonal psychological continuity. Whereas fission preserves psychological continuity, which can be one-many, it cannot preserve identity, which must be one-one. For psychological continuity to constitute personal identity, it must take a *nonbranching* form.

*Psychological Reductionism II:* P2 is identical with P1 iff P2 is (sufficiently) psychologically continuous with P1 and there is no other continuer of P1 that is as continuous with P1.

But fission also teaches us that special concern tracks continuity, rather than identity. Tom should have special concern for the lives of Dick and Harry as he would normally have for his own future self. But this suggests that special concern does not presuppose personal identity. P1 can have special concern for P2 even if P1 ≠ P2. In this way, fission challenges the agent bias of prudence and egoism.

Prudence can accommodate fission and other cases of interpersonal psychological continuity if psychological continuity extends a person's interest. In non-branching cases, psychological continuity extends Tom's life and thereby extends his interests. In fission, continuity cannot extend Tom's life, because of the logic of identity. But it can extend his interests. We can see Tom's interests preserved in the lives of Dick and Harry. On this view, Tom has posthumous interests in the lives of Dick and Harry. I find this kind of extended self-interest and prudence plausible.<sup>20</sup> But I realize that it is controversial.

Alternatively, we might agree that prudence presupposes personal identity and that fission shows that special concern does not presuppose personal identity but introduce a *quasi-egocentric* form of prudence that presupposes psychological continuity, rather than personal identity. Here, we could take a page from the reductionist reply to Butler's worry about the circularity of Locke's memory criterion ("Dissertation," 264). The standard reductionist reply, first clearly articulated by Sydney Shoemaker, is to appeal not to memory but *quasi-memory*, which is otherwise like memory except that

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<sup>20</sup> I discuss these issues at greater length in Brink, "Self-love and Altruism."

it presupposes continuity, rather than identity.<sup>21</sup> In a similar way, *quasi-prudence* might presuppose psychological continuity, rather than personal identity. *Quasi-prudence* would be agent-relative, because it makes special concern depend on the psychological relationship between benefactor and beneficiary, but it would not be strictly egoistic.

#### 5. HOW SPECIAL CONCERN DEPENDS ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

So perhaps we should demur about whether prudential special concern presupposes personal identity, inasmuch fission suggests that we could have special concern without personal identity. We shouldn't overstate this result. We may be able to reconcile fission with prudence if we claim that psychological continuity extends a person's interests, even when it doesn't extend her life. And even if we don't accept this extended sense of self-interest, we can reconcile fission with a quasi-egocentric commitment to quasi-prudence. But we should allow that there are some cases in which special concern does not presuppose personal identity.

Nonetheless, we have seen that personal identity helps provide a rationale for a prudential form of special concern. Specifically, an ecumenical form of realism about personal identity and the claim that compensation is sufficient for sacrifice are sufficient to justify the intrapersonal temporal neutrality characteristic of prudence. In this way, personal identity is prior to special concern, in general, and prudence, in particular.

#### 6. HOW PERSONAL IDENTITY DEPENDS ON SPECIAL CONCERN

In this way, Sidgwick's rationale for prudence fits within a larger tradition that claims that personal identity is prior to special concern and prudence. But the psychological reductionist might want to invert this claim, asserting that there is a sense in which special concern is prior to personal identity.

To see this let's return to interpersonal psychological continuity. We described fission as a case of interpersonal psychological continuity in which there is just as much continuity as in the normal intrapersonal case. What makes fission an interpersonal case is that continuity takes a one-many form, whereas the logic of identity is one-one. At least for now, fission is an exotic, hypothetical case. But interpersonal psychological continuity is quite common and found in many forms of interpersonal association — between spouses and domestic partners, family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors, etc. In these cases, the mental states and intentional actions of each person depend on those of her associates in various ways. Associates share experiences and influence each other through discussion, argument, and example. They care about each other and share each other's sorrows and joys. Psychological continuity makes for interpersonal unity. Associations differ in how tight their bonds are and how much interpersonal interaction and influence they involve. Indeed, we might take a page from the Stoic Hierocles and think of our relations to others in terms of a set of concentric circles, with ourselves in the innermost circle, those near and dear to us in intermediate circles, and weaker relations in outer circles.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the psychological reductionist about personal identity can and should say that what distinguishes intrapersonal and interpersonal unity in normal circumstances (not involving fission or other forms of duplication) is the *degree* of psychological continuity.

In "Friends and Future Selves" Whiting wants to make an analogy between intrapersonal and interpersonal psychological continuity, drawing lessons for personal identity from claims about friendship. She claims that special concern for one's friend is an important ingredient in friendship. Part of what she has in mind is the sort of *positive affective regard* that is normal among friends.

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<sup>21</sup> Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): 269-85.

<sup>22</sup> See *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, trs. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 349. For discussion of this Stoic claim, see David O. Brink, "Eudaimonism and Cosmopolitan Concern" in *Virtue, Happiness, and Knowledge: Themes from the Work of Gail Fine and Terence Irwin*, ed. D. Brink, S. Meyer, and C. Shields (Oxford: Clarendon Press, forthcoming).

Friends are fond of each other and wish each other well. But presumably one might also understand special concern for one's friend to include *behavioral dispositions* to help them when in need, to invest in the relationship, and sacrifice one's interests for the sake of the friend. One such manifestation of interpersonal special concern is *trust*. Friends rely on each other for information, advice, constructive criticism, support, and help.

To be sure, there are forms of interaction that are part of friendship — spending time together, keeping in touch, and sharing experiences — that can be characterized without mentioning special concern. And we may not maintain this sort of care and concern for our friends at every moment in our friendships. There are moments within friendships when good will and mutual concern lapse. But it seems hard to imagine friendships persisting that did not generally exhibit this sort of special concern among friends.

Just as special concern is partly constitutive of interpersonal psychological continuity, Whiting argues, special concern for one's future self is partly constitutive of intrapersonal psychological continuity. Presumably, again, she has in mind both positive affective regard for one's own future — concern for one's future — and behavioral dispositions to plan ahead, invest in one's future, and make sacrifices for the sake of one's future. Here too, one manifestation of such intrapersonal special concern involves *trusting oneself*. Intrapersonal trust is an important element of psychological continuity. Though we can reassess our earlier deliberations, beliefs, and intentions, it is important that we not do so continuously, or we would never make new inquiries or execute plans. It is essential that our later selves be disposed to trust the theoretical and practical deliberations of our earlier selves unless there is some good reason to think that we made some mistake earlier or significantly new evidence or options have become available in the meantime. Indeed, any temporally extended piece of reasoning or planning involves this sort of tacit reliance on one's earlier self. And the formation of plans and intentions proceeds involves trusting that one's later self will act on one's current deliberations, unless something significant occurs to rebut that presumption.

As in the interpersonal case, intrapersonal continuity would be anchored by psychological continuity that does not involve special concern — remembering past experiences, acting on earlier intentions, the persistence of skills, beliefs, and tastes, and the reasoned modification of beliefs, values, and plans. Nonetheless, in normal intrapersonal cases caring about and planning for one's future are essential aspects of intrapersonal continuity. Of course, this sort of self-directed good will and concern can lapse for periods of time in cases of depression or self-loathing. But if these lapses persist and become the norm, we might take this to impair intrapersonal unity.<sup>23</sup> Whiting claims that this stands Sidgwick's claim about special concern depending on personal identity on its head, claiming that personal identity depends on special concern.

Whiting's thesis about the priority of special concern to personal identity requires two important qualifications.

First, special concern does not exhaust continuity. Presumably, friendship also consists in various kinds of shared experiences and history that might be prior to and independent of special concern and that might, indeed, make special concern reasonable. Perhaps some friendships begin with special concern, as in love at first sight. But in many, if not most, cases, special concern is anchored in and emerges out of other forms of interpersonal continuity, such as shared experiences, cooperation, and familiarity. Nonetheless, we might agree that special concern plays a constitutive role in normal, healthy forms of friendship. Similarly, there are forms of intrapersonal psychological continuity that might be prior to and independent of self-concern. There are memories of earlier experiences, and various skills, knowledge, preferences, and ideals are retained or modified over time. These forms of intrapersonal psychological continuity do not seem to depend on self-concern and can,

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<sup>23</sup> One might even think that that there is a sense in which self-loathing actually displays special concern inasmuch as it seems to reflect a form of disappointment in oneself that is out of proportion to the sort of disappointment one might have in a stranger. These issues merit more reflection and attention than I can give them here.

indeed, make self-concern possible. Nonetheless, self-concern seems to play a constitutive role in intrapersonal unity.

Second, in the intrapersonal case special concern takes the form of self-concern. But self-concern seems to presuppose personal identity, inasmuch as one can only have self-concern for one's own future. But then it seems that special concern could not constitute personal identity without circularity. We can answer this circularity charge by again taking a page from the Lockean reply to Butler's circularity worry, appealing to the concept of *quasi-self-concern*, which presupposes psychological continuity, rather than identity. Quasi-self-concern is special concern for another with whom one is psychologically continuous. It presupposes other forms of intrapersonal psychological continuity, but then further contributes to intrapersonal psychological continuity.

## 7. DOES PERSONAL IDENTITY DEPEND ON PRUDENCE?

We've now explored the plausibility of thinking that special concern is an important ingredient in personal identity. Must this metaphysical role for special concern take a specifically prudential form? Does intrapersonal unity require agent bias and temporal neutrality? That seems unlikely.

Special concern does not require agent bias. It seems essential to special concern that one have concern for one's future that is different in kind or degree from one's interest in strangers. But this needn't preclude non-derivative concern for others. Moreover, we've seen that special concern can extend to friends and others with whom one is continuous. Could there be persons who display no special concern for themselves whatsoever? Even if most of us display special concern for ourselves and our associates, isn't it possible to be guided by a completely impartial interest in humanity in the manner of Mother Teresa or some idealized effective altruist, whose overriding goal is to do the most good in the world? Sometimes I wonder if a concern for maximizing total good makes sense without the assumption that each person has some special concern for herself. For if there is no personal good, independent of the good of others, it seems that there is nothing to ground beneficent impulses. Perhaps this only requires that not everyone be an effective altruist. In any case, it seems that the effective altruist does not some forms of special concern, even if this is only derivatively justified. For the effective altruist must focus on her own life as an expression of altruistic commitments and as a means of effectuating the most good. She will be invested in her own contributions to maximizing the good in a way in which she is not invested in others, if only because she has more control over her own activities than those of others. This will require the forms of intrapersonal trust, planning, and sacrifice that we have discussed above. But if she is a true effective altruist, this self-concern will be regulated by her ultimate aim in which her own good is just one among many, with no privileged position.

Most of us are not effective altruists. We display non-derivative forms of special concern for our own futures, which is part of what makes us diachronically unified persons. But must this special concern take a temporally neutral form? Temporal discounting occurs when an agent invests proximate benefits and harms with significance that is out of proportion to their actual magnitude and discounts the value of distal benefits and harms out of proportion to their actual magnitude. Even if temporal discounting is irrational, it is a common part of lives that seem sufficiently unified so as to count as persisting persons. So even if special concern for one's own future is an ingredient in personal identity, it seems unlikely that temporally neutral concern is necessary for personal identity. Friends of temporal neutrality can and should defend it as a normative claim, noting that it can be understood as an idealization of the sort of intertemporal special concern that is partly constitutive of personal identity. Temporal neutrality is arguably a regulative ideal present in actual planning and investment, and so we might say that lives are more fully unified insofar as they display forms of planning and investment that are temporally neutral.

## 8. SPECIAL CONCERN, PERSONAL IDENTITY, AND EXPLANATORY PRIORITY

Special concern and, in particular, prudence have seemed intimately connected with personal identity to many philosophers. How should we understand this relationship? On the one hand, as

Locke, Butler, and Reid claim, it seems that we have special reason to be concerned about our own future selves. Sidgwick defends a version of this claim by arguing that an ecumenical version of realism about personal identity and the sufficiency of compensation for the rationality of sacrifice justify temporally neutral special concern characteristic of prudence. On the other hand, according to some plausible forms of psychological reductionism, special concern for one's own future or at least for selves with whom one is psychologically continuous is partly constitutive of diachronic personal identity. On this view, special concern contributes to personal identity.

But can we accept this symmetrical account of the relation between special concern and personal identity? It seems that that it cannot be true *both* that special concern presupposes personal identity and that personal identity presupposes special concern. That would be circular. It might seem that at most one of these claims could be true. This might seem to be the lesson of the *Euthyphro* problem — that when two concepts are biconditionally related, we need to determine which concept is explanatorily prior. Suppose that X and Y are biconditionally related.

X iff Y

In principle, the relationship between X and Y could be further specified in any of three ways.

1. X is prior to and explains Y.
2. Y is prior to and explains X.
3. X and Y are equally explanatorily fundamental in relation to each other; neither is prior to the other.

It's not possible for both (1) and (2) to be true, at least if each is prior to the other *in the same respect*. That would apparently involve a viciously small circle. But neither might be prior to the other if each is equally fundamental in relation to each other. This is the No Priority thesis in (3) and sometimes seems like a plausible analysis of concepts that are biconditionally related.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, No Priority can even endorse the explanatory priority of both X and Y, provided that each is explanatorily prior in a *different respect*. Special concern and personal identity might be said, on this analysis, to be prior to each other in different ways.

On the one hand, special concern is *metaphysically prior* to personal identity, because special concern helps constitute personal identity. In the case of positive affective regard, special concern is one ingredient among others in intrapersonal psychological continuity. This sort of occurrent concern does not exhaust intrapersonal unity, because there are other attitude-independent forms of psychological continuity, and it may not even be necessary for personal identity. But it is a normal consequent of these attitude-independent forms of continuity and further contributes to intrapersonal unity. If we extend the notion of special concern to include dispositional concern of the sort manifested in relations of trust, cooperation, planning and investment, then special concern is arguably necessary for the kind of intrapersonal psychological continuity that makes for personal identity. At least, that kind of special concern is a major factor in intrapersonal psychological continuity, without which our lives would be substantially different and less unified. Special concern of this sort need not take a temporally neutral form in order to unify a life.

On the other hand, personal identity is *normatively prior* to special concern and prudence, because the normative justification or rationalization of special concern and prudence rests on realism about personal identity and the compensation principle. In particular, realism about personal identity

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<sup>24</sup> This may be the way to interpret the methodological assumptions that Wiggins makes when he endorses a non-reductive biconditional relationship between being good and being such as to produce approval in the *appropriate* sort of appraiser, eschewing analysis and aspiring only to provide philosophical "commentary" or "elucidation." See David Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" in his *Needs, Values, and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), esp. pp. 188-89.

and the sufficiency of compensation for sacrifice rationalize special concern for one's future. It is not just any form of special concern that is rationalized in this way; personal identity and compensation justify the temporal neutrality characteristic of prudence, because in the intrapersonal case there is automatic compensation for sacrifice.

But if special concern and personal identity are each prior to the other in different ways, then there need be no incoherence or circularity in this kind of symmetrical dependence. Indeed, if each is prior to the other in different respects, then we can conclude that neither is prior to the other simpliciter. This is the No Priority thesis.