**The Painful Implications of Four-dimensionalism.**

According to four-dimensionalism, everyday objects, including human persons, are

composed of temporal as well as spatial parts. Objects persist through time by

having different temporal parts (or ‘person-stages’) located at different times.

Just as you have a head and two arms, you also have a first half and a second half.

Furthermore, since temporal parts are as finally grained as time itself, you will have

continuum many momentary person-stages. Within the life of each person there will

be many overlapping person-stages, each with its own precise spatiotemporal

boundaries. Thus, where we previously thought that that objects (and persons) were

synchronically and diachronically unified individuals, according to the four-

dimensionalist they are typically complexes of many such overlapping individuals.

They are fusions, or sums, of appropriately related stages. This picture of the

metaphysics of objects and of persons has won many adherents, not least for its

facility in resolving the puzzles of material constitution and its compatibility with

contemporary relativistic accounts of time. What has been largely overlooked in

discussions about four-dimensionalism are the revisionary ethical and practical

implications of the view.[[1]](#footnote-1) The present discussion addresses this oversight.[[2]](#footnote-2) I do so

by focusing on the four-dimensionalist’s treatment of various ethical and practical

issues involving pain. Since pain plays an important role in both hedonist, and non-

hedonist theories of harm, well-being, rationality, and punishment, the present

chapter (bad pun intended) should thus be of interest to anyone working on these

issues in ethics.

1. **Hedonism**

It is perhaps a commonplace that hedonism encompasses a pair of theses relating to human conduct: psychological hedonism and ethical hedonism. *Psychological hedonism* is a causal thesis that says all of human action is motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, while *ethical hedonism* is a normative thesis that says that pleasure the only thing that has (non-instrumental) value, and pain is the only thing that has disvalue, and as such pleasure and the avoidance of pain *ought to be* the goals of human action. For the hedonist then, pleasure and pain provide both the psychological motivation for all human action and the moral teleology of all human action. A Jeremy Bentham says in a famous passage: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we *ought* to do, as well as to determine what we *shall* do.[[3]](#footnote-3) We ought to do what it is pleasurable and avoid doing what is painful. This also supplies the hedonist with a theory of *prudence*. Traditionally, prudence is characterized as the ability to choose the good and avoid the bad. In hedonistic terms, this becomes the ability to choose the pleasurable and avoid the painful.

As Wayne Sumner (1996, p. 83-84 ) notes, there is conceptual space for a third hedonistic thesis. This third thesis is what I will call *welfare hedonism*. It seems plausible to suppose that what makes my life go well for me is tied in to what makes my life seem to go well to me, namely the degree and frequency of the pleasures it presents to me, and the lack of pains. As a theory of welfare, then, hedonism claims that welfare consists in a life containing a balance of pleasures over pains.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For the hedonist ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ refer to psychological states of an individual.[[5]](#footnote-5) There is some disagreement amongst welfare hedonists over precisely what psychological states these terms refer to however. Classical hedonists such Epicurus, Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick, hold to the view that pain and pleasure are qualitative sensory states of mind, while Feldman argues that they re attitudes toward sensory states rather than the states themselves (hence the expressions ‘taking pleasure in” or “taking pain in” something). Feldman rejects the idea that the sensory states themselves can be non-instrumentally valuable, in part because we can take pleasure in all sorts of non-valuable or even bad states of affairs (e.g. taking pleasure in periods of complete inactivity, or taking pleasure in the pains on others or ourselves). In the discussion below, I am going to going to set Feldman’s view aside for ease of exposition. But let me make to comments about first: (i) since Feldman’s preferred form of hedonism is committed to pleasure consisting in some mental state, I think the argument(s) I make in this chapter will be readily applicable *mutatis mutandis* to his view, and (ii) since I think that Heathwood (2004) is correct in his assertion that Feldman’s Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism is the same as his own Subjective Desire Satisfaction theory, I think not only will the argument(s) of this chapter apply to Feldman, but the argument(s) of Chapter 3 will apply as well.

1. **Persons and their pain(s): two conceptions**

My argument begins with an introduction of two ways of conceiving the manner in

which persons exemplify their pains. I refer to these conceptions as the “Naïve

View” and the “Four-dimensionalist View” respectively. According to the

Naïve View, persons are atomic, synchronically, and diachronically unified,

entities that directly intrinsically exemplify their mental properties (including pains).

The Naïve View is, importantly, not to be conflated with Cartesian Dualism. The

latter makes explicit metaphysical claims that the former in no way relies upon. The

two views are thus logically compatible, but logically distinct. It could turn out to be

the case that Cartesian Dualism is false, but this would give us no reason to reject the

Naïve View. In this sense the Naïve View is intended to be ontologically innocent.

This view is to be contrasted with the Four-Dimensionalist View. According

to the Four-Dimensionalist View, persons have temporal parts, or stages, and it is in

virtue of their parts that they exemplify their mental properties (including pains). As

we shall see, there is more than one way to construe the Four-Dimensionalist View

depending on their understanding of the metaphysical nature of person-stages. More

on this below, but for now it will suffice that one who accepts the Four-

Dimensionalist View accepts the existence of temporal parts and thus they must

reject the Naïve View, since they must reject the claim that persons directly

exemplify their mental properties.

1. **The Naïve View**

According to one widely accepted view, persons directly exemplify their mental properties (including pains). Cartesian Dualists will explain this by appealing to the presence of a Cartesian Ego that serves as the subject of all of one’s thoughts and persists over time having various experiences. But nothing here hinges on the acceptance of dualism. All that matters for our purposes is that there is a broadly Cartesian way of conceiving of conscious individuals such that it is these individuals that exemplify certain mental properties and that they do so directly and intrinsically.

That mental properties, especially those with narrow content (such *being in pain*), are intrinsic properties of their bearers is a position with a long history.[[6]](#footnote-6) A rough way of characterizing intrinsic properties is that a property of an individual is intrinsic if its exemplification does not depend on the individual standing in any relation to any other object(s) in the world. Thus the Cartesian Ego is conceived of as being an entity that necessarily has its mental properties intrinsically, since it is possible that it stands in no relations to the external world whatsoever. Leibniz also appears to hold such a view in the *Monadology*, for he conceives of all matter as being made up of essentially mentally disposed perceiving and apperceiving simple substances that do not directly interact with other substances, let alone share mental properties with them. Philosophers who accept the existence of qualia typically accept that qualia are subjective mental states intrinsic to the individuals that exemplify them. The adherents of panpsychism hold that the intrinsic nature of all matter is essentially mental, and thus mental properties are intrinsic properties of individuals. More pervasive in the philosophy of mind these days is the view which says that every token mental event supervenes on one physical event or another. For instance, one might hold that a mental event always supervenes on some event in the brain. Even on this sort of physicalist view, it is still plausible to hold that mental properties, with whatever supervenience bases they might have, are intrinsic properties of individuals, so long as the underlying physical states might plausibly be intrinsic to the individual. A simple thought experiment will also show that pains are intrinsic mental properties. Suppose that an individual S has a neurological condition that causes her to experience at regular intervals (roughly every hour) ten minutes of intense pain. Now suppose that S last experienced an episode fifty five minutes ago. Finally suppose that as the hour runs out, all the objects in the world around S begin to disappear from the world, until finally, with only moments left S is left floating in the void. Intuitively in this case it appears correct to assert that S will soon experience another episode of intense pain, though S will no longer stand in any relations to any other things.[[7]](#footnote-7) If this is correct, it suggests that S’s having a pain is matter of her intrinsic properties and therefore it is non-relational.

Additional support for the intrinsicality of mental properties comes from their exclusivity to third parties. Mental properties are often picked out by their being ‘privileged’ or private properties of individuals. They cannot be introspected by others (hence the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness), and the individual that has them is generally thought to be incorrigible in believing that she has them. Swinburne (2013) defines mental properties in precisely this fashion:

I define a mental property as one to whose instantiation in it a substance necessarily has privileged access on all occasions of its instantiation…someone has privileged access to whether a property P is instantiated in him in the sense that whatever ways others have of finding this out, it is logically possible that he can use, but he has a further way (by experiencing it) which it is not logically possible that others can use.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It is the very fact that mental properties are exclusive that gives rise to the problem of other minds in the philosophy of mind. If mental properties were not exclusive, if other individuals to could access the reader’s mental properties, then the problem would be unmotivated. But as it is, even if we think ourselves well-justified in believing in that others have minds, we nevertheless cannot dismiss the problem of other minds with impunity. We must take it seriously precisely because the apparent exclusivity of mental properties leaves us with a lacuna when it comes to the minds of others.

The Naïve View of persons accepts both the intrinsicality and exclusivity of a person’s mental properties. It treats the person as an atomic, unified being, capable of exemplifying its mental properties in a direct, non-derivative, fashion. All of the experiences and thoughts that individual has belong to that individual simpliciter. As I will argue below, the Naïve View coheres well with our commonsense conception of the moral landscape. Rejecting the Naïve View requires us to take onboard metaphysical principles that call for serious revision of many of our commonsense moral beliefs.

1. **The Four-dimensionalist View**

According to four-dimesionalism, persons are not the only entities that exemplify pains. Four-dimensionalists believe that in addition to persons, the temporal parts of persons, or their ‘person-stages’ also exemplify pains. It is important to note that four-dimensionalists do not hold that there is more pain in the world than is ordinarily supposed, the view simply implies that whatever pains there are, these will be exemplified by more individuals than is ordinarily supposed. Why might the four-dimensionalist believe that this is the case? Here are two reasons: the first has to do with the nature and constitution of person-stages, and the second has to do with the role that these temporal parts of persons are typically thought to play in the four-dimensionalist ontology.

One reason to think that person-stages exemplify pains is that person-stages have all of the physical and psychological features that we ordinarily associate with beings capable of exemplifying pain. They have brains, and nervous systems, they exemplify psychological states, and they are physically indistinguishable from the person at whatever time at which they exist. Thus, as we saw in Chapter 2, David Lewis (1983) describes his person-stage as follows:

*It does many of same things that a person does: it talks and walks and thinks, it has beliefs and desires*, it has a size and shape and location. It even has a temporal duration. But only a brief one, for it does not last long…it begins to exist abruptly, and it abruptly ceases to exist soon after. Hence a stage cannot do everything that a person can do, for it cannot do those things that a person does over a longish interval.[[9]](#footnote-9) [[10]](#footnote-10)

For Lewis person-stages are neither set-theoretic constructs, nor historical events, nor parts of lives, but rather flesh and blood beings. If what Lewis says about person-stages is true, it stands to reason that they can feel pleasure and pain as well. Unlike (non-sentient) merely spatial parts of persons (e.g. your left foot), person-stages also answer to the Lockean conception of a person as a “thinking, intelligent, being capable of reason and reflection.” As previously mentioned, Olson (2010) argues that we ought to consider entities such as Lewis’ person-stages as having at least some moral status, because of their similarity to the person. He suggests that we endorse as a moral principle the following:

Any being psychologically and behaviorally indistinguishable at some time from a being with moral status ought to have moral status itself.[[11]](#footnote-11)

You and your present person-stage differ only with regard to your spatiotemporal boundaries. These boundaries matter with regard to your experience of pain. But merely having differing spatiotemporal boundaries is not sufficient to deny that one or the other being is in pain.[[12]](#footnote-12) Person-stage may have different properties than the person of whom they are parts—they may not exist long enough to experience lengthy bouts of pain —but they can experience pain nonetheless.

Further support for the claim that temporal parts exemplify pains can be found by reflecting on the role that stages are typically thought to play in the ontology of four-dimensionalism. Put simply, stages of objects (including persons) play the role of serving as the primary bearer of the properties of the object or person at the time at which the stage exists.

Lewis argues that we can account for the change in your intrinsic properties by postulating the existence of person-stages that bear those properties. Regardless of whether we find Lewis’ solution the problem of TI convincing, the upshot of his solution is that the four-dimensionalist resolves the problem of temporary intrinsics by appeal to the fact that the different temporary intrinsic properties are had by the different temporal parts, or person-stages. And if mental states are temporary intrinsic properties, as I will argue, we ought to hold, then (P\*) follows, and mental states are had by person-stages. If this is true then the four-dimensionalist has reason to conclude that person-stages exemplify pains, since it is to them that pains directly belong.

Thus on the Four-dimensionalist View, both persons and person-stages exemplify pains. Person-stages exemplify pains directly, while persons exemplify pains derivatively in virtue having those pain-exemplifying stages as temporal parts.

Why is this problematic? Perhaps it will help us to begin by thinking about an easier case. So, setting four-dimensionalism aside for the moment, consider a person, Bruce, who has a bruise on his arm and a bruise on his leg. In this case, the Naïve View tells us, the only being who has *both* instances of bruising is Bruce. Bruce has a pair of bruises. While the arm and the leg are parts of Bruce, and while each has a bruise, neither has both the bruise on the arm and the bruise on the leg. Only Bruce has both. He is the only being that can have both bruises, since he is the only being that has both the arm and the leg as parts. The four-dimensionalist will undoubtedly agree the Naïve View in this case. Now switch to a diachronic case. Suppose Bruce gets a bruise on his arm today, and several weeks later, after the bruise on his arm is gone, Bruce gets a bruise on his leg. Once again, in this case, the Naïve View will tell us that the only being who suffer both instances of bruising is Bruce. He is the only being that persists during each instance of bruising. Now bring four-dimensionalism back in. On the four-dimensionalist account, if Bruce has a bruise on his arm today, and another on his leg several weeks later, then there will be in addition to Bruce another being, call him GappyBruce, consisting in the gappy temporal parts of Bruce that exist at those times at which he has the bruise on his and on his leg, and GappyBruce, like Bruce, will have both bruises. Not only this, but collection of temporal parts of Bruce that includes GappyBruce as part (or member), will likewise have both bruises. Thus the Four-dimensionalist View and the Naïve View differ with respect to the number of beings that are involved in the exemplification of a property.

The four-dimensionalist might object here, that even though her view differs with respect to the number of beings exemplifying the property in this case, it is not troublesome since all of the additional being involved are parts of Bruce, and therefore the bruises are intrinsic to Bruce just as the Naïve View says. But now switch from bruises to pains. Suppose that Patty has a migraine today, and another migraine next week. The Naïve view will tell us that there is only one being that has both instances of pain, namely Patty. But the Four-dimensionalist View will tell us that there is another being GappyPatty, who also has both pains. As does every one of continuum-many beings that have GappyPatty as a temporal part. Again, here the four-dimensionalist might argue that this is not problematic since GappyPatty is a part of Patty and so its pain is still intrinsic to Patty. But, whether the pain is intrinsic to Patty or not, there is something unsettling about the proposition that Patty’s experience of pain is being shared by continuum-many beings. Suppose that Patty has a neurological condition that she knows will result in intermittent migraines if left unmedicated. And suppose that because she values advancement in her career she refuses medication, being willing to suffer some of these migraines in trade-off for the clear-headedness that she finds profitable in her career. Patty might be, therefore, inclined to think that she hurting none but herself in order to advance her career. And if the Naïve View is true then Patty is correct in thinking this. But if four-dimensionalism is true, then what Patty thinks is false. Strictly speaking, there are other individuals who will share her pain. These other individuals will be parts of Patty, but this fact does little to ameliorate moral sifficulty of causing these beings to suffer in order to procure a benefit (career advancement) that they are structurally incapable of sharing.

The difficulty for the four-dimensionalist in cases like this has do with accounting for the differing interests of the person and the person-stages. On the assumption that the (objective) interests of sentient individuals are tied into their persistence conditions, it follows that the person and their temporal parts will not have the same (objective) interests. For example my eleven year old temporal part will not have the same interests as me. What might have been pleasant for him during his existence might not have contributed to me having a more pleasant life overall. This leads to ethical problems, if we take temporal parts to be proper objects of moral status.

On the Naïve View, this problem never arises. On this view, persons are the beings whose interests must be taken into consideration when acting. There are no no temporal parts, and thus no person-stages whose interests must be accounted for. The Four-dimensionalist View cannot be squared with the Naïve View, precisely because it requires us to postulate the existence of thinkers whose interests are not those of the person. Whether we the additional thinking beings postulated by the four-dimensionalist are parts of the person or not is then irrelevant to the difficulty their postulation presents. What matters is that they (or groups of them) have the relevant properties for moral consideration, and unlike the non-conscious parts of the body, they have capacity to exemplify interests, which in turn will differ from the interests of the person.

Having contrasted the Naïve View with the Four-dimensionalist View, in the remaining discussion, we will turn to a consideration of the ethical implications of Four-dimensionalist View. It will be argued that accepting this requires us to revise some of our commonsense moral beliefs. To the extent that we are convinced of the truth of these moral beliefs, this will give us some reason to favor the Naïve View (and some metaphysical theory consistent with it) over the Four-dimensionalist View.

1. **The Painful Implications of the Four-dimensionalist View.**

We turn now to a discussion of the ethical implications of the Four-dimensionalist View of persons and their exemplification of pain. Let me begin by pointing out that, logically, there is more than one way for the four-dimensionalist to analyze how persons and their stages exemplify pains. As we saw above, David Lewis appears to hold that mental properties are intrinsic to person-stages. Lewis certainly conceived of person-stages as having sufficient to duration to instantiate mental properties such thought and belief. It appears that he thought of person stages, we might say, as Cartesian Egos-in-miniature. That is to say, he conceived of them as thoughtful, sentient, and sufficiently unified beings only shorter-lived than the persons in whom they are embedded. I will refer to this sort of view (whether or not Lewis would have agreed to it) as Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism. (I call this theory Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism in order to distinguish it from both the Four-Dimensionalist View and from perdurantism. I don’t think that the Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalist accepts Cartesian dualism, in fact I think they would flatly deny it. I also want to distinguish the view from David Lewis’s view, as it would not be fair to attribute the view to him on the basis of a brief passage. The view is Lewis-inspired, but not Lewis’ own.) Another possible analysis available to the four-dimensionalist would be to deny the intrinsicality of mental properties. On this view, mental properties will be exemplified not by individual temporal parts, but rather by collections of appropriately related stages. The view that mental properties are not intrinsic to individual temporal parts has been advanced by Ted Sider (2003). On this view, (i) objects (including persons) are instantaneous entities, and their mental states (which are diachronically instantiated) are necessarily extrinsic to them and relational, and whether or not an individual person exemplifies a mental property will depend on whether they are appropriately related to some other individual(s). I will call this view Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism.[[13]](#footnote-13) It will be argued below that both versions of the Four-dimensionalist View have undesirable, revisionary, ethical implications. Thus the Naïve View is preferable to both.

1. **Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism**

We begin with Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism. On this view person-stages are characterized, as I have suggested, as Cartesian Egos-in-miniature. They have the same sorts of intrinsic mental states that we ordinarily attribute to persons, only they are shorter-lived. The person overlaps them. It thinks everything they think, and it feels everything they feel, but it thinks and feels more than any of its stages. The Thoughtful Four-dimensionalist ought to accept that, as Olson suggests, person-stages ought to be considered appropriate subjects of moral consideration. They are, after all, sentient—capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. However, if we owe person-stages ethical consideration then this would require us to revise our commonsense ethical evaluation of certain categories of actions. For one thing, it would make many cases of voluntarily chosen pains seem worse than we previously thought, for while the person might be willing to trade pain in the short term for pleasure in the long run, since their choice consigns their immediate stages to pain, but does not offset that pain with the eventual pleasure the person will enjoy, this might be seen as ethically objectionable. For example, consider a person who faces the decision of whether they ought to undergo chemotherapy now, or put it off until after a previously planned vacation. Suppose that the person has been diagnosed early and assured that waiting a few days to begin the therapy will make no difference to their long term prognosis. If the person in this situation chooses to enjoy the vacation before committing to therapy, then their immediate stages will enjoy an existence of relative relaxation and freedom from pain. If on the other hand the person chooses to undergo chemotherapy immediately, then their immediate stages will be subject to pain and depression. The person will also experience pain and depression. But whereas the person will survive the therapy and with luck go on to enjoy a period of pleasurable remission, the stage will experience no such eventual offsetting good. What’s worse, the stage thinks that it is the person, and that the person’s interests are its own interests. Thus it cannot autonomously opt out of the painful episode. Hud Hudson (2001) argues that we can discount the suffering of the person-stage since whatever we do the part, we do to the person. He contends that so long as we are directly concerned for the person, we will be indirectly showing concern for the part. But this is false. Assume that freedom from pain is at least in part constitutive of an individual’s well-being, and that the interests of the person-stage can diverge from the interests of the person.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the present case, something is being done to the part that is not being done to the person: the person is in effect requiring that the stage sacrifice its own well-being for the well-being of the person, while the person is not being asked to sacrifice her well-being for another.

At any rate, a decision that would, on the Naïve View, be evaluated as morally permissible, and rational, is on this view morally questionable and perhaps immoral. Since many of the pains that persons endure bear this voluntary structure, it follows that our moral evaluation of many actions will have to be altered if we accept Thoughtful Four-dimesionalism.

Another worry for the Thoughtful Four-dimensionalist involves the *prima facie* duty of non-maleficence. According to Ross (1930), moral agents have a prima facie duty not cause unnecessary harm to others. On the assumptions (i) that person-stages are the kind of beings that can be harmed, and (ii) that for any interval of time during which a person persists there will be continuum-many person-stages roughly located there, with each stage being individuated by its slightly different spatio-temporal boundaries, it will follow that any instance of harming a person will involve harming continuum-many partially overlapping individuals. As we said above, the Four-dimensionalist View need not entail that there is more pain in the world than is previously supposed, for pains are not individuated by their bearers. But harms, which are conceived as being relative to the interests of individuals, are therefore subject-relative. Thus while the amount of pain in the world would not be increased on the Four-dimensionalist View, if Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism is the case, then are more harms. As a result an action which would ordinarily be judged to harm to only a single individual will, on the Thoughtful Four-dimensionalist account, necessarily harm continuum-many individuals. If it is plausible that an action that harms many individuals is morally worse than an action that harms a single individual, this will have the effect of making all cases of harm morally worse than previously believed. Furthermore, if actions are to be chosen, at least in part, according to which actions will minimize the quantity of harm, choosing actions which harm few over those which harm many, then Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism will have the undesirable effect of making all harms equal in extent, all harms will harm continue-many individuals.

Finally, it is often argued that pain can play a positive pedagogical or redemptive role in which it leads the individual who suffers it to some offsetting benefit. Parents use (or allow) modest pains in order to teach their children lessons that are presumably necessary for the child to achieve well-being and productive social integration with other persons. Christian theists argue that God is justified in causing us to suffer pain because it is the only way for our souls to achieve union with God, which is the highest possible good.[[15]](#footnote-15) Arguments like these rely upon the truth of the Naïve View. What is essential to these sorts of valuable pains is that the individual suffering the pain is identical with the individual who later enjoys the benefit of the suffering. If Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism is true, then it follows that, while it is still the case that the person who suffers the pain is identical with the individual who later receives the benefit of the redemptive or pedagogical suffering, as would be the case on the Naïve View, there will also be continuum-many additional individuals, the suffering person-stages, who suffer the same pain as the person but who, presumably, do not enjoy the eventual benefit of the suffering since they do not exist long enough.[[16]](#footnote-16) Likewise with pedagogical pains. While they may be instructive and ultimately beneficial for the person, there will be continuum-many person-stages who share the experience of the pedagogical pain, but for whom the pain has no value, since they will not exist long enough to realize the benefit. Thus Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism entails that inflicting even modest pains on individuals, even when it is done in order to teach them valuable lessons or redeem them, will involve us in the pointless harming of continuum-many individuals. Whereas on the Naïve View such actions are ethically permissible or even praiseworthy, on the Four-dimensional Cartesian account, they are less ethically justified and possibly even immoral.

1. **Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism**

Considerations such as these will give us reason to find Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism objectionable. But the ethically serious four-dimensionalist need not disagree with our evaluation of Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism, for she might prefer Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism. Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism is the view that (i) objects (including persons) are instantaneous stages, and (ii) that their mental states (which are diachronically instantiated) are not intrinsic properties of individuals, but rather they are extrinsic.[[17]](#footnote-17) On this view, person-stages are not to be conceived of as Cartesian Egos-in-miniature. Instead, the mental properties ordinarily attributed to persons are taken to belong to collections of appropriately causally related stages. Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism is a simplified version of the “stage theory” version of four-dimensionalism favored by Sider (1997, 2001), Hawley (2001) and Balashov (2007). Stage theorists reject Lewis’ characterization of person-stages as individuals capable of thinking. On the stage theory, objects are *strictly speaking* momentary or instantaneous entities. They exist only for whatever the smallest increment of time happens to be. Nevertheless they persist. How do they accomplish this? According to the stage theorist they do this by ‘exduring’, that is by having counterparts located at earlier and/or later times and having historical properties of the right sort. Thus, even though I, the person, am only an instantaneous individual, it remains true to say that I existed in 1985 and that I will exist next week (assuming I survive that long). If the stage theory is true, then it follows that Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism is true, since pain is a diachronically instantiated property and no instantaneous individual will exist long enough to have a pain. Pains must therefore be extrinsic to persons.

Unfortunately for the four-dimensionalist, Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism also results in unwelcome revisions for our commonsense ethical beliefs. The first and perhaps most striking revision required by Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism is that persons do not experience pains. At least not pains in the atomic sense required by the Naïve View. On that view, my pain is an atomic mental property intrinsic to some me, the person. But the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist denies this. They take pains to be, like all mental properties, non-atomic, exemplified by appropriately related collections of instantaneous stages. So on this view a pain will involve multiple persons existing at different times. The Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist will downplay this consequence by arguing that while pains are not exemplified by persons *strictly speaking*, they are nonetheless exemplified by persons\*. A person\* is an aggregate of appropriately related instantaneous persons. According to the stage theory version of four-dimensionalism, the person\* is object of our linguistic conventions regarding persons. When we talk about persons we are actually talking about persons\*. What we believe is true of persons is thus actually true of persons\*. In this way they seek to downplay the revisionary consequences of their view. But this linguistic revisionism does little to ameliorate the peculiarity of Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism. On the Naïve View, we take ourselves to be individuals that exist over long periods of time, exemplifying a multitude of mental states, having various pains and pleasures and other experiences; on the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist account this turns out to be false. Thus accepting stage Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist requires to deny that we *strictly speaking* experience pain at all.

Another revisionary consequence of Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism has to do with our commonsense views on retributive punishment and the compensation of individuals victimized by pain. Ordinarily we think that it is morally justifiable to inflict pain on individuals when it is done to punish those individuals for their past wrongdoing. But if Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism is true, then it follows that we never in fact punish the individuals directly responsible for committing past moral transgressions. This is because the individuals do not exist long enough, strictly speaking, to be punished. Instead we punish individuals who are counterparts of the earlier individuals that committed the transgression. This raises the possibility that the painful punishment we inflict on these counterparts might be not be deserved, for they are strictly speaking not directly responsible for the earlier actions of the person. On the Naïve View, however, we are plausibly justified in punishing people for their past transgressions since the person we punish is the same person who committed the transgression. A similar concern involves our efforts to compensate the victims of unjust pain for their suffering. On the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist view, since persons will not exist long enough, it will impossible to compensate the victims of unjust pains for their suffering. We can only compensate some numerically distinct appropriately related counterparts of the person(s) who actually suffered. Thus on the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist view all punishment and compensation ends up being punishment-by-proxy and compensation-by-proxy. It is not clear to author at least that punishment or compensation-by-proxy is genuine punishment or compensation. And it will not help to claim that punishment or compensation-by-proxy is simply what we are talking about when we talk about punishing or compensating individuals. Our interest in punishment and compensation seems, on the contrary, to be driven by a desire to repay the wrongdoer, or restore the victim to some degree of well-being, and in the absence of an argument to the contrary it does not seem that punishment or compensation by proxy have the desired punitive or restorative outcome.

Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism also fails to accommodate our concern for our future and past selves. It is a commonplace that the difference between the person who acts rationally and the mere brute who acts on impulse has to do with the capacity of the former to give equal normative weight to her actions and decisions regardless of the time at which they happen, a capacity the brute fails to realize. The idea that it is preferable to give equal weight to the well-being of our past, present, and future selves is referred to as temporal neutrality.[[18]](#footnote-18) Sidgwick gives us a clear exposition of the view:

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): since Prudence is generally exercised in restraining a present desire (the object or satisfaction of which we commonly regard as *pro tanto* `a good'), on account of the remoter consequences of gratifying it. 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.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Two features of Sigwick’s discussion of temporal neutrality are worth mentioning. The first is that for Sidwick, prudence itself is an expression of temporal neutrality. To be prudent is to properly value the goods of life regardless of whether those goods are proximate or remote. At an earlier point in the *Methods*, he criticizes Bentham’s assignment of greater normative significance to proximate pleasure and pains. The second feature of importance is Sidgwick’s conception of well-being or ‘one’s own good’ as a mathematical whole. It is clear that Sidgwick conceives of the life of a person being unified and atomic, in a way that is compatible with the Naïve View (if not precisely an expression of it).

But Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism undermines the rationality of temporal neutrality (and thus of prudence). For it tells us that persons are not strictly speaking persisting beings, but rather they are only momentary stages. They have counterparts at other times, but why have the same concern for the flourishing of a counterpart as for oneself? Perhaps the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist ought to try and maximize immediate pleasures at every instance rather than foregoing immediate pleasures for the sake of greater pleasures later. It won’t help here to appeal to the psychological continuity or immanent causal relations that hold between stages. For even if my counterpart stages are strongly psychologically connected with me, the fact remains, that we are not identical in the strict sense and that I will not exist when my counterpart does. At the very least, Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism makes temporal neutrality less immediately rational than it seems to be on the Naïve View.

Finally, it is also a problem for Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism that it is unable to accommodate our intuitions about well-being. If we assume that well-being consists, either in part or entirely (as the welfare hedonists maintain), in the achievement of a balance of pleasure over pain, and that pleasure and pain are mental properties, and that as Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism tells us mental properties are extrinsic to the persons, then it will follow that well-being must be an extrinsic to persons as well. But well-being cannot be an extrinsic property for a person. One’s level of well-being is typically presented as an essentially intrinsic property of that person. Well-being is that which is good-for the person as opposed to being good absolutely. Of course the four-dimensionalist will say that well-being has always really been a relational property. Let “well-being\*” refer to this relational analysis, and let “well-being” refer to commonsense notion. The Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist will argue that our commitment to the Naïve View has lead us to mistake a false conception of well-being for the real property: well-being\*. Thus, their insistence upon well-being\* should not come as a surprise.

The difficulty with this analysis, however, is that it is susceptible to following sort of *reductio*: suppose the well-being\* is the proper analysis of welfare. Now let S1 name a stage, or collection of stages, of the person S that exists at time t1, and let S2 name a later stage, or collection of stages, of S that exists at t2, and let S3 name even later stage, or collection of stages, of S that exists at t3. According to Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism whether or not S2 exemplifies well-being will depend on S2’s relations to S1 and ­S3.  Now, suppose we seek to know whether or not S2 exemplifies well-being\* (or well-being). On the Naïve View, if we were welfare hedonists, we’d simply look to see whether the individual was exemplifying a balance of pleasure over pain. If so, then she would have well-being. But the Thoughtless Four-dimensionalist cannot do this. She must take into account the relations that S2 stands in to the other counterparts when determining well-being\*. So let’s assume that S1 is exemplifying high degree of pleasure, and S3 is exemplifying a high degree of pain, while S2 is exemplifying neither pleasure nor pain.[[20]](#footnote-20) Then it will be the case that relative to her relation with S1,S2 exemplifies positive well-being\*, while relative to her relation to S3,S2 exemplifies a negative of well-being\*. But one individual cannot at the same time exemplify both positive well-being and negative well-being. So well-being\* cannot be the real property underlying our commonsense conception of well-being. Thus, Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism requires us to replace our commonsense, non-relational, concept of well-being with that of well-being\* and this appears equivalent to there being no well-being at all. Those who think well-being is a useful, well-understood, and real phenomenon ought, then, to have a reason to prefer the Naïve View—since it affirms the usefulness and the existence of well-being.

1. **Conclusion**

The results of the foregoing discussion are that accepting the Four-Dimensionalist View—whether one accepts Thoughtful Four-Dimensionalism (as Lewis seemed to) or Thoughtless Four-Dimensionalism, requires a revision of many commonsense ethical beliefs. On the other hand, the Naïve View accommodates these beliefs without requiring such revision. Thus, to the extent that one is committed to conserving what she believes the commonsense ethical picture gets right, she has reason to reject the Four-Dimensionalist View.

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1. With the exception of Hudson (1999, 2001) the advocates of four-dimensionalism have been virtually silent on the ethical implications of their preferred metaphysics. While only a handful of critics, namely Olson (2006, 2010), Taylor (2013), Hershenov (2011) have examined these implications. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One reason why practical considerations should be included in the weighing of reasons in favor of and against a metaphysical theory is that if there are moral truths then they must be consistent with metaphysical truths. If one adopts a metaphysics in which thinking beings overlap then (as the present argument will show) one must reject certain seemingly obvious moral truths, and it is plausible that such considerations should tilt the scales against that metaphysics rather than show

   such core moral principles to be false. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bentham (1996), chapter 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For the rest of the chapter I use ‘hedonism’ to refer to ‘welfare hedonism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I will use ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ to denote states of mind with their usual phenomenological connotations. But I recognize that philosophers are far from reaching consensus as to the precise nature of these phenomenological states. The recent literature on the nature of pain, for example, is extensive. Among the views on offer are the *indirect realist* view (e.g., Moore 1903, 1939; Russell 1912; Price 1950) , according to which pains and other phenomenological states are not directly known by the mind, but rather we are directly aware of experiential intermediaries; the *perceptual* view alternatively holds that pains are instances of ‘exteroception’ or perception of extrapsychological states of affairs, just like ordinary perception (see Armstrong (1962; 1968) and Pitcher (1970; 1971)); while *representational* views (Harman 1990, Dretske 1995, 1999, 2003, Tye 1996, 1997, 2006) see pains as phenomenal states that represent states of affairs to the mind, and view the phenomenal aspects of pain as identical with its representational aspects. For the purposes of this argument it does not matter which if any of these views is correct for they all share the conviction that pain is a mental state that is intrinsic to the person who was the pain. The literature on pleasure is also diverse. The problem there lies in deriving a plausible feature that unites all forms of pleasure. At the very least, however, it should be granted that pleasure is a mental state of some sort whether it be a qualitative state of ‘feeling’ pleased or as Feldman suggests some sort of propositional attitude (or perhaps even another form of complex cognition such recognition). For the sake of the present argument all that is required is that pleasure, whatever its underlying structure, is a mental state intrinsic to an individual. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. There are philosophers such as Daniel Dennett (1998) who have sought to eliminate pain on philosophical grounds, because they see pain as arch-examples of qualia and seek to deny that qualia exist (this is because they see the existence of qualia such as pain as a barrier to a fully naturalized account of consciousness). But even these people, one suspects, would be hard pressed to deny that they at times have felt stings, throbs, aches, and discomfort of the sort we ordinarily associate with pain. Perhaps they are like Hume in this regard; he argues that the notion of causation is not supported by our empirical evidence, but that analyzing events in causal terms is so much a part of our understanding of the world that it is impossible to eliminate talk of causation altogether. Similarly the pain-eliminativist might think that our customary way of talking—as though pain existed—while strictly speaking false, is nevertheless so useful that it cannot be wholly done away with.

   For our present purposes however, skeptical arguments such these can be set aside. Anyone who believes in the psychological, and moral, importance of pain must grant that pain exists. Since my argument is intended to appeal to those who believe in pain, we need not present a defense of its existence here. If you doubt that there is any such thing as pain, then my argument will have no chance of persuading you of its conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Perhaps the reader will object that S will stand in one relation, his relation to the void. However, the void is characterized has having no properties, and thus having no dispositions, for the void is by definition nothing. As such it is difficult to see how S’s relation to the void could be the source of her pain. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Swinburne (2014), p. 67-8. Note that Swinburne also expresses the view that mental properties are intrinsic to their subjects when he characterizes them as being instantiated insome substance or other. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lewis (1983), p. 76. Note that Lewis is not here describing an instantaneous or momentary temporal part of person, but rather a temporal part that is made of a collection of such temporal parts over brief but more than momentary interval. He accepts the existence of instantaneous temporal parts, but finds them of little interest sine they do not last long enough to exemplify many interesting properties. In this discussion I, unless otherwise explicitly stated, use both ‘temporal part’ and ‘person-stage to refer to these more than momentary parts. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It bears noting that Lewis appears to consider thought to be an intrinsic property of person-stages. The four-dimensionalist need not agree with Lewis on this point, she might instead take mental properties to be extrinsic/relational. This suggestion will be taken up in more detail below. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Olson (2010, p. 262) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Boundaries may sometimes be relevant, for instance, an instantaneous person-stage might not exist long enough to exemplify any mental properties. But for larger (or longer-lived) person-stages the boundaries are less relevant. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Alternatively, the four-dimensionalist could deny that temporal parts think at all, perhaps because they lack the appropriate persistence conditions to allow for thought. But I will not address this position for two reasons: first, because to date no four-dimensionalist has defended it though some (such as Hawley 2001) have argued against it, and second, because for the reasons given above in section 3 it seems that the physical indistinguishability of person-stages and persons at a given time suggest that we ought to think that if the person thinks at some time, then so does the person-stage, and also recall that person-stages can be temporally thick fusions of groups of momentary stages and thus many of them will persist long enough to have thought(s). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Presumably, the (objective) interests of the person-stage and those of the person will be divergent because of the different persistence conditions of each individual. The person will have long term interests that the person-stage will lack, even though, subjectively, their interests might appear to them to be the same at any given time. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This argument was part of Aquinas’ theodicy. For a modern defense of this view see Stump (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Perhaps theists can reply that God somehow compensates the person-stages, perhaps there is a heaven of person stages. But even if the suffering of person-stages for redemptive reasons can be justified, the problem of pedagogical pains will remain. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Hawley (2001, p. 65), and Sider (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Brink (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Sidgwick (1981), p. 381. Emphasis mine [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This will presumably be due to further facts about the relations that these person-stages bear to still person-stages. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)