

Temporal Integration and the Basis of Moral Equality

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Belief in universal moral equality—that all people have equal moral status—has wide cultural and political acceptance and holds favor with many philosophers. I argue against status-parity by offering a novel account of the temporal integration of persons. Some persons have much more robust temporally extended selves which are partially constituted by a special class of future-directed interests. In addition, empirical research indicates persons vary significantly in the degree of affective connection to their futures selves. While some persons have a cognitively complex and affectively strong connection to their future selves, other persons' future selves are analogous to strangers. Differences in temporal integration directly affect recognized morally relevant properties such as rationality, autonomy and moral agency and entail differing degrees of personhood. Crucially, some differences in degrees of personhood will also involve differences in kind. The paper then critically engages with attempts to provide a basis for moral equality.

Keywords: Moral equality; temporal integration; degrees of personhood; future-directed interests.

1. Preface and initial characterization

Morally relevant properties such as self-awareness, autonomy and rationality which afford persons a higher moral status than merely sentient beings vary considerably among persons. The challenge for advocates of moral status parity is to reconcile this variability with the claim that all persons have equal moral status. Providing such grounding, as anticipated by Nietzsche's 1882 "Parable of the Madman," requires finding some way to support the idea that all persons have equal moral worth in the absence of a justifying metaphysical story. Nietzsche writes, "This tremendous event is still on its way, still wander-

ing... This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves” (Nietzsche 1974: 181–182). Although we ourselves had killed god according to Nietzsche, the implications of that event have *still* not reached our ears. We retain certain moral values which now lack any clear metaphysical underpinning.¹

Peter Singer has taken the death of god seriously. His discussions of animal suffering and the value of different types of lives are based on secular interest utilitarianism. Despite Singer’s self-proclaimed attempt to construct a moral theory free from religious influence, it is a matter of dispute how successful he has been. Brian Leiter notes, “Parfit and Singer think of themselves as vanguards in this movement, a claim rich in irony for any student of Nietzsche” (Leiter 2019: 386). Leiter explains that Singer’s belief one ought to treat all equal interests equally is the kind of suspect egalitarianism Nietzsche challenged. Nonetheless, Singer’s utilitarianism leads to some very unequalitarian results.

Singer claims species membership does not afford *homo sapiens* special moral status. However, the lives of *persons* do have special moral status compared to the lives of non-persons. When it comes to killing, what matters, according to Singer, is not species membership but whether the being to be killed is a person: “No objective assessment can support the view that it is always worse to kill members of our species who are not persons than members of other species who are” (Singer 1993: 117). It is worse, in general, to kill persons than non-persons precisely because of the kinds of interests involved. Persons have future-directed interests while non-persons lack such interests: “For preference utilitarians, taking the life of a person will normally be worse than taking the life of some other being, since persons are highly future-oriented in their preferences...In contrast, beings who cannot see themselves as entities with a future cannot have any preferences about their own future existence” (Singer 1993: 95). While being a person is a threshold condition for having a life with greater moral significance, Singer does not provide any argument that it is equally wrong to kill persons.

Since some persons have more future-directed interests than others, killing one person can violate more future-directed interests than killing someone else. Given Singer’s framework, it can be worse to kill one person rather than another when more interests are violated. Admittedly, the concept of moral status has a derivative role—if it has any role at all—in consequentialist theories.² Singer equates the wrongness of killing with the degree of harm caused by the killing, and harm itself is defined in terms of violated interests. Singer abandons any robust

¹ See Husi (2017: 388): “If people were equally beloved by a supreme God ... we might have a vindication for status-parity without worrying about equalizing grounds.”

² Christiano (2015: 61) and Husi (2017: 385) both make a similar point.

foundational notion of moral status grounded in factual equality when he writes: “The plain fact is that humans differ, and the differences apply to so many characteristics that the search for a factual basis on which to erect the principle of equality seems hopeless” (Singer 1993: 18). Rather than talk of beings (e.g., humans or persons) having equal moral status, Singer adopts the normative principle that we should give equal consideration to equal interests.

Egalitarians find this result unacceptable because they endeavor to show that all persons have certain rights equally, such as the right to life. Regardless of the degree of harm death causes, many egalitarians would argue it is equally wrong to kill persons because they have equal moral status or are worthy of equal respect.³ While some egalitarians have assumed the equal moral status of persons, others have recognized the need to ground status equality in morally relevant properties or through “relation-first” and “practice-based” approaches to equality.⁴

I offer a novel account of temporal integration based on an empirical-informed examination of future-directed interests. I argue the way interests constitute persons threatens foundational property-based accounts of moral status. An elaboration of the concept of future-directed interests is essential to capturing the ontological distinctness of persons. This elaboration will follow two tracks. The first is a philosophical analysis of variations in the content of future-directed interests. I distinguish between self-shaping future-directed interests (SSFIs) and non-self-shaping future-directed interests (NSFIs). I argue SSFIs have much greater weight than NSFIs. SSFIs have greater weight because they constitute our identity as individuals and involve a uniquely personal kind of autonomy.

The second track, relying on empirical research, shows the affective intensity with which persons have various interests about their future selves, or whether they have certain future-directed interests at all, varies with the perceived degree of continuity they have with their future selves. This perceived degree of temporal connectedness affects the rationality of choices persons make about their futures. The person-constituting role of some future-directed interests, especially when informed by empirical research, suggests that the inegalitarian results of Singer’s consequentialist approach generalize and undermine attempts at grounding status parity on morally relevant properties.

Future-directed interests are intimately connected to the rationality, autonomy, self-awareness and temporal unity of persons. These commonly recognized morally relevant properties must be understood in relation to future-directed interest as holistically constituting the be-

³ See McMahan (2002: 235–245) for one example, especially his rejection of the Time-Relative Interest account.

⁴ See for example McMahan 2002; Carter 2011, 2018; Christiano 2015; Miklosi 2022 and Lipshitz 2024. Sangiovanni 2015 offers a relation-first approach which is critiqued by Floris 2019, 2020. See Rozebloom 2018 for a practice-based account of moral equality.

ing of persons. These properties are morally relevant precisely because of the kind of being they constitute. A proper ontological understanding of persons justifies awarding them a higher moral status than non-persons in part because persons are a *different order of being*. Because there are degrees of personhood, it also provides strong reasons against the claim that all persons have equal moral status. Crucially, some differences in degrees of personhood will also be differences in *kind*.

2. *Self-shaping future-directed interests (SSFIs)*

Among the properties associated with personhood, awareness of a temporally extended self is arguably the most central property. Non-human primates and very young humans lack the robust sense of self typical of adult humans. Developmental psychologists maintain the sense of self emerges over time and is enhanced by language acquisition. A toddler's understanding of itself as a temporal entity is much more limited than an adult's understanding. Beings are not considered persons if they lack a sense of self. A person's life transcends the biological and becomes autobiographical.

The philosophical tradition recognizes the importance of self-awareness. Locke claims a person "... can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places" (Locke 1979). Singer (1993) writes approvingly of Joseph Fletcher's criteria for personhood which include self-awareness, a sense of past and a sense of future. DeGrazia lists "self-awareness over time" and "complex forms of consciousness" in addition to other essential properties such as "autonomy, moral agency, rationality and capacity for intentional action" (DeGrazia 2007: 319-320). Self-awareness is necessary for autonomy and moral agency. Rationality is understood partially in terms of self-interest, and self-interest requires having self-awareness. We have good grounds for believing a temporally extended self—the organism's awareness of its specific identity over time—is a necessary condition for personhood and *grounds* others features such as rationality, autonomy and moral agency.

Singer writes, "Very often, it [killing] will make nonsense of everything that the victim has been trying to do in the past days, months, or even years" (Singer 1993: 95). Singer provides examples of the kinds of interests he has in mind: "For example, a professor of philosophy may hope to write a book demonstrating the objective nature of ethics; a student may look forward to graduating; a child may want to go for a ride in an aeroplane" (Singer 1993: 90). The concept of future-directed interests is left largely unanalyzed by Singer. In the examples Singer provides, some future-directed interests appear to be intimately connected to one's current and future identity as a person (e.g., a professor finishing a book or a student graduating college), while other future-directed interests are unlikely constitutive of our current and future identity (e.g., the child wanting a plane ride). We can, therefore, distin-

guish between self-shaping future-directed interests (SSFIs) and non-self-shaping future-directed interests (NSFIs).

There are three types of future-directed interests: (1) interests with content that refers to the future, but the content is non-self-referential or non-autobiographical; (2) interests with content that refers to the future and which either explicitly requires the person's continued existence or entails it; and (3) interests with content that refers to the future, entails the person's continued existence, and is about becoming a particular kind of self. The interests in this last category have content through which a person aims at actualizing some potentiality of their current self. I will refer to them as "self-shaping future-directed interests" or SSFIs.

Type-1 future-directed interests refer to the future, but their content does not require or entail the person's future existence. I could desire that my great grandchildren have good lives, but that future-directed interest does not involve *my own* continued existence. Killing a person does not violate type-1 future-directed interests since the person's continued existence is not necessary for satisfying the interest.

Type-2 interests require the person's continued existence. A person might desire to retire to a nice tropical location, and that future-directed interest does entail the person's continued existence. Thus, killing a person will violate type-2 future-directed interests. Singer's (1993) discussion of the chimp Figan exemplifies type-2 future-directed interests. Figan, noticing a banana, does not want the dominant chimp Goliath to take it. Figan intentionally avoids looking at or trying to obtain the banana until Goliath has left the area. Satisfying that type-2 future-directed interest requires Figan's continued existence. Young children have many type-2 interests such as Singer's example of the child wanting to ride in a plane.

Type-3 future-directed interests introduce an element unlikely to be found in very young children and non-human primates. These interests are connected to our self-creation by selecting possibilities and attempting to actualize them. Singer's examples of a professor wanting to finish writing a book and a college student wanting to graduate are type-3 interests. These future-directed interests not only require the possessor's continued existence, but they involve possessors taking a stand on their own identity. The person I am now depends, in part, on the kinds of activities into which I project myself. Type-3 future-directed interests play a special role in the temporal unification of the person because they allow the person to gather up large temporal expanses of their lives. Type-3 future-directed interests allow persons to exercise a uniquely personal form of autonomy: self-creation. This class of future-directed interests is also essential to moral reasoning and being a moral personality. Determining what sort of person someone wants to be in a moral sense, and contemplating the consequences of a possible action for the agent's own moral standing, involve type-3 future-directed interests.

3. Personal identity

Personal identity theories provide criteria for the diachronic identity of persons. They do not tell us *to what degree* those beings are persons. The same criteria may apply to both borderline persons and paradigmatic persons, but how those criteria are realized will differ significantly. Moreover, there are reasons for thinking the diachronic identity of a person is distinct from the temporal unity of that person's self. Having a self is a property shared by all persons, but the degree to which persons have selves varies, and this will affect the degree to which something is a *particular person*.

There are at least three aspects of persons that admit of degrees: (1) following Parfit, there are degrees to which person at t_1 is the same person at t_{n+1} ; (2) there are degrees to which something is a person at all (e.g., toddlers and some non-human primates); and (3) the degree to which something is a particular person. Person A is more of a particular person than person B when person A has a richer and more complex set of individuating psychological states. For example, Figan who is less *generally* person-ish than a typical human adult is also less of a *particular* person because Figan has fewer and less complex psychological states that constitute his particular identity. He has a less robust sense of self. Thus, the degree of general personhood limits the degree to which something is a particular person.

Psychological theories of personal identity distinguish between *psychological connectedness* and *psychological continuity*. Consider Parfit's description of the Psychological Criterion:

- (1) There is psychological continuity if and only if there are overlapping chains of strong connectedness. X today is one and the same person as Y at some point in the past if and only if (2) X is psychologically continuous with Y, (3) this continuity has the right kind of cause, and (4) it has not taken a branching form. (5) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) to (4). (Parfit 1984: 207)

Humans can have many direct psychological connections without being a person to the degree of a typical adult. The development from non-person to person is a gradual one. When a sense of self emerges between 2.5 and 3.5 years of age, toddlers do not have the same complex sense of self as adults. It is likely non-human primates who might be persons also lack the complex sense of self of adult humans. Yet, toddlers and non-human primates have enough of the right kinds of psychological states and capacities to be considered borderline persons.

The psychological connections that comprise the continuity of toddlers and non-human primates will include type-2 future-directed interests (e.g., Figan wanting the banana or the child wanting a plane ride). The psychological connections of some paradigmatic persons will include not only type-2 future-directed interests, but the more complex and self-aware type-3 future-directed interests. Both the toddler and Figan have a diachronic identity as minimal persons, while persons

with elaborate type-3 interests will be *individuals* to a greater degree. This distinction is similar to Peter Unger's concepts of "core psychology" and "distinctive psychology". Distinctive psychological states are those which are not shared by all persons and which are instead unique to us as individuals or only shared with a few other persons (Unger 1990). This interest-based distinction is also similar to Christian Perring's (1997) distinction between general personhood and particular personhood.

Think of Relation R more broadly in terms of content and the connections between the content of individual mental states. There are varying degrees of unification or what we might call "integration." What makes a psychological connection over time strong? Parfit states, "Connectedness can hold to any degree... Since connectedness is a matter of degree, we cannot plausibly define precisely what counts as enough" (Parfit 1984: 206). Parfit explains degrees of connectedness in terms of the *number* of direct connections: "But we can claim that there is enough connectedness if the number of connections, over any day, is at least half the number that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person" (Parfit 1984: 206). The connections are treated as psychological events independent of their specific content. We have reasons to modify Parfit's account of psychological connectedness. There are forms of temporal connectedness which are distinct from the number of overlapping psychological connections. Some persons will have richer and more complex forms of psychological continuity compared to other persons even when the number of overlapping connections is the same, and these persons will have selves with greater diachronic unity.

We can consider Kierkegaard's view of the self to help us understand how persons' selves can vary in their degree of temporal unity. Kierkegaard's aesthete might have many hedonistic future-directed interests in his attempt to avoid boredom from moment to moment. The aesthete might have *more* direct psychological connections than the person striving to live an ethical or religious life. For Kierkegaard, what gives unity to the person is the nature of what one pursues or that into which persons project themselves. Temporal unity increases as a person progresses from the aesthetic life, to an ethical life, and ultimately a religious life. Kierkegaard describes what is "most inward and holy" in humans as the "unifying power of the personality" (Kierkegaard 2005: 13). Kierkegaard maintains that the unity of the individual is an achievement closely connected with the way one lives:

The choice itself is decisive for the content of the personality, through the choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen, and when it does not choose it withers away in consumption... That which has to be chosen stands in the deepest relationship to the chooser.... (Kierkegaard 2005: 13)

We can develop Kierkegaard's insight as an addition to Parfit's numerical account of strong connectedness. There are at least two important factors that temporally unify the self: (1) the extent to which the

future-directed interests relate to the person's identity as a particular individual, and (2) the extent to which the contents of the person's future-directed interests are related to each other.⁵ The professor's interest to complete a book is intimately connected with his identity and his other interests to be promoted, to be invited to speaking engagements, etc. Thus, the professor's future-directed interest to complete the book exemplifies a strong degree of connectedness because it is integrated and self-referential. The college student desiring to graduate, much like the professor, has future-directed interests which are self-shaping. The college student's interest to graduate is closely connected to many other current and future-directed interests such as passing exams and earning high course grades. In both cases, there is also the unification of large temporal expanses. The child who desires a plane ride scores much lower, as would someone desiring to play video games to avoid boredom. These isolated interests are not linked in any significant way to other interests. They are not strongly connected to the person's identity as a temporally extended self, and the temporal range is much shorter. Much like borderline persons only strive to *get* things and not to *become* something, some persons have impoverished future-directed interests which primarily aim at acquiring things rather than developing into a particular self.

The degree of unity over time is not solely a matter of the number of direct psychological connections as Parfit argues; rather, the unity over time which constitutes a person is a product of the content of various psychological states including future-directed interests. Some people have more or greater SSFIs than others, so they have selves with greater unity over time and instantiate a greater degree of personhood. SSFIs have objectively greater weight than NSFIs because they are what constitute us as specific persons. Preventing the professor from finishing the book or the student from graduating would be a greater wrong than preventing the child's plane ride or preventing someone from playing video games. The interest to develop oneself into a particular person and to shape one's life accordingly is the highest expressions of personhood.

This result is consistent with the intuition shared by some people that the death of a person pursuing a promising future is more of a tragedy than the death of someone indifferent to his future self, e.g., a hedonist only interested in the next pleasurable experience through drugs, food or sex to avoid boredom. Similarly, the death of Figan the chimp is less of a tragedy than the death of a student pursuing a college degree. Compare the death of Figan to historical discrimination against women and minorities. Figan's death thwarts all his type-2 interests. Discrimination against women and minorities prevents the satisfac-

⁵ See McMahan (2002: 75). McMahan identifies three factors which comprise psychological unity, but importantly, McMahan does not include mental content about one's own identity as relevant to unity over time.

tion of many type-3 future-directed interests. Women and minorities were prevented historically from creating themselves as they saw fit. Slavery would be one of the most compelling examples. The inhibition of self-creation is a greater violation of autonomy than the inhibition of type-2 interests. The intuition that thwarting type-3 interests is worse than thwarting type-2 is explained by recognizing that type-3 interests involve a different *kind* of autonomy than type-2 interests, not merely a difference in degree, and the former has greater worth than the latter.

4. *The empirical research*

Psychologists and cognitive scientists are generating a growing body of research exploring our relationships to our future selves and the real-world implications of varying degrees of connectedness. The research shows connectedness to our future selves plays a role in our health, financial decisions, ethical behavior, academic success, and relationships. Empirical investigations about connectedness to our future selves offer additional ways of conceptualizing degrees of temporal unification.

Empirical research focuses on three factors which contribute to our degree of temporal connectedness: similarity, vividness and positivity. Hershfield (2011) reviews research showing these three factors affect the number and intensity of connections to persons' future selves:

Critically, then, the degree to which an individual feels disconnected from his or her future self should correlate with the degree to which that individual discounts future rewards. The more continuity a person shares with his future self—that is, the more that future self feels like a direct extension of who he is now—the more motivated he will be to act in ways that will benefit himself in the future. Conversely, the more the future self feels like a stranger—that is, the more disconnected a person is from his future self—the less motivated he will be to plan for the future. (Hershfield 2011: 34)

Psychometric tasks have been developed to assess *future self-similarity*. These tasks determine the degree of similarity persons feel to their future selves. Differences in degree of future self-similarity have a variety of behavioral and attitudinal consequences. There is a correlation between degree of similarity and temporal discounting. For example, persons who perceive their future selves as less similar will discount the value of saving for retirement: “In line with our prediction, we found a significant positive correlation between perceived similarity to the future self and the number of assets that had been accumulated over time” (Hershfield 2011: 36).

Some individuals relate to their future selves as strangers. Phenomenological differences in degree of connectedness are exhibited at a neurological level. For some individuals, thinking of their future selves elicits neural activity identical to thinking about strangers while for others such future-directed thoughts elicit neural activity similar to thinking about their current selves. These neurological differences—

whether the brain treats the future self as more like a stranger or more like the current self—affect temporal discounting:

As expected, there was individual variability in these neural differences: for some participants, thinking about the future self elicited neural activation patterns that were almost exactly like patterns that were associated with thinking about another person; for other participants, thinking about the future self elicited neural activation patterns that were more or less in line with patterns associated with thinking about the current self. In line with our prediction, participants who showed the biggest difference between activation elicited by the current self and activation elicited by the future self also discounted future rewards most steeply. (Hershfield 2011: 37)

Individuals who view their future selves more like strangers are generally less interested in preparing for the future, and when they do have such interests those interests are less important. Such persons are less likely to make choices today to benefit themselves in the future. A student, for example, will be less inclined to study to increase his future chances of success and might opt instead to spend time having fun.

How vividly the future self is perceived is the second factor which determines the degree of connectedness. When individuals have vivid and realistic representations of their future selves, they are more likely to save for the future. In one experiment, students are shown a virtual reality version of their future selves while another group of students is shown a virtual reality version of their current selves. “As hypothesized, those participants who were exposed to their future selves were subsequently more likely to allocate money toward a hypothetical retirement savings account than were control participants” (Hershfield 2011: 38). Vividness is also an important factor in predicting delinquency. According to Jean-Louis van Gelder, et al (2013), individuals unable to contemplate their future self with a sufficient degree of vividness are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior:

The tendency to live in the here and now, and the failure to think through the delayed consequences of behavior, is one of the strongest individual-level correlates of delinquency. We tested the hypothesis that this correlation results from a limited ability to imagine one’s self in the future, which leads to opting for immediate gratification. Strengthening the vividness of the future self should therefore reduce involvement in delinquency. We tested and found support for this hypothesis in two studies. (van Gelder 2013: 974)

Positivity is the third factor affecting the degree of connectedness to the future self. Individuals who feel more positive about their future selves also show a greater degree of connection to those future selves. As with the previous two capacities, positivity correlates with rational behavior which benefits one’s future self.

Recall morally relevant properties such as temporal self-awareness, rationality, autonomy and moral personality. The capacity to have vivid future self-representations about which one can feel a high degree of similarity and positivity is clearly a very rich form of self-awareness.

The empirical research shows the greater the degree of similarity, vividness and positivity, the more individuals exhibit rational self-interest and autonomy about the future. Parfit characterizes rational self-interest in the following way: “A rational agent should both have, and ultimately be governed by, a *temporally neutral* [my emphasis] bias in his own favor. It is irrational for anyone to do what he believes will be worse for himself” (Parfit 1984: 307). Given this account of rational self-interest, individuals who score higher in similarity, vividness and positivity are more rational than those who exhibit those capacities to a lower degree.

When the future self is perceived as a stranger the person has less interest now in making decisions to benefit the future self. When the future self is perceived as a direct extension of the current self, the person has a much stronger interest in benefiting the future self. Similarly, persons positively inclined toward their future selves have greater interests in benefiting their future selves. Consider DeGrazia noting the chicken’s lack of “temporal self-awareness” (DeGrazia 2007: 317) or Singer’s discussion of persons having “preferences about their own future existence” (Singer 1993: 95). The chicken and other non-persons lack any conception of a future self. They don’t have a temporally extended self about which they could be aware. Borderline persons may have some minimal, short-term sense of a future self, but such a self is conceptually thin compared to most paradigmatic persons. Based on empirical research, some persons have an impoverished sense of their own future existence. In DeGrazia’s terms, they have a limited form of “temporal self-awareness” compared to those who perceive a high degree of similarity with their future selves. For some persons, the concept of *my own* future existence is much more robust. Those persons who perceive their future selves as strangers cannot conceptualize their future as belonging to *them* in the same way those who see their future selves as a direct continuation of their current selves.

5. *Against equal status*

We’ve seen the temporal unity of persons varies because of the kinds of future-directed interests (e.g. type-2 vs. type-3) and the degree of affective connections to their future selves. Moreover, the kind of future-directed interests and the degree of affective connectedness bear significantly on degrees of autonomy, rationality and moral personality, all of which are morally relevant properties. These considerations provide a morally relevant basis for a distinction between higher-type and lower-type persons. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes, “What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock or painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman” (Nietzsche 1961: 42). We find similar themes in the same work where man is described as “...a rope, tied between animal and Superman...” (Nietzsche 1961: 43). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche claims, “In man *creature and created*

are united...” (Nietzsche 1966: 154). We can develop these Nietzschean insights in a morally relevant way.

Non-persons cannot endeavor to create themselves. They are merely created beings because they lack type-3 future-directed interests. For Nietzsche, human beings are created animals and have some capacity for self-creation, but that capacity and its actualization vary significantly. Based on my earlier analysis, there are two kinds of higher-type persons: (1) those persons that have a higher degree of general personhood, and (2) those persons who are *individuals* to a greater degree (i.e., more of a particular person). Among persons who are equal in terms of general personhood, some have mental states and behavioral patterns shared by many, say largely dictated by social media rather than by autonomous, rational choice, while others possess greater numbers of genuinely differentiating psychological traits.⁶ This latter group of persons will be *individuals* to a higher degree. Among persons with a higher degree of general personhood, some persons will be self-creators while others will be passively created by cultural factors.

Being a true individual involves more than having distinctive psychological traits; it requires self-creation through genuinely autonomous choices. Self-creators exhibit a different and higher kind of autonomy and rationality than non-self-creators. The autonomy of authentic self-creation is a different kind of autonomy than Figan’s behavioral autonomy or the average person’s choice of television show. Autonomous self-creation requires intellectual autonomy which is again different in kind than the simpler kinds of behavioral autonomy. Thus, the higher degree of particular personhood instantiated by self-creators involves differences in *kind*.⁷

Nietzsche stressed the integrative quality of higher-type individuals and its connection to rationality. Rationality allows persons to control their impulses, unify them in self-creation, and affords persons the freedom of self-mastery (i.e., greater autonomy). Kaufmann explains this point: “Reason is the ‘highest’ manifestation of the will to power.... because these skills enable it to develop foresight and to give consideration to all the impulses, to organize their chaos, to integrate them into a harmony....” (Kaufmann 2013: 230). Nietzsche’s notion of integration parallels the results of section 2 and section 3 of this paper. The highest type persons are self-creators who are richly integrated, complex, and strongly temporally unified via the kinds of future-directed interests

⁶ Consider Perring: “Gradually increasing psychological properties might separate an individual in one species from individuals in other species (general personhood) while doing little to separate her from other particular persons. The development of a distinct personality does increase the particular personhood of an individual” (Perring 1997: 183).

⁷ The point here is relevant to Sangiovanni’s claim: “our rights against being treated as an inferior—and hence to equal moral status in my terms—vary along with our capacities to develop and maintain an integral sense of self” (2014: 104). On my view, self-creators have a significantly greater capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self.

they have and the interrelation among those interests. Nietzsche refers to these persons as “sovereign individuals” (Nietzsche 1967: 59).

The account of temporal integration offered here is richer than Carter’s (2018) adaption of Parfit’s account. Carter focuses on the temporal continuity of volitional capacities related to human agency. Carter, like Parfit, correctly believes diachronic integration is scalar, and he maintains the number of connections varies as well as the temporal range (e.g., short-term or long-term). Following his earlier (2011) work, Carter argues we should ignore variations in diachronic integration as a matter of opacity respect “...by refraining from taking into account her degree of diachronic integration beyond the minimum threshold...” (Carter 2018: 835). Carter’s argument for equality despite variations in diachronic integration depends on both his use of range properties and opacity respect. I return to both ideas shortly.

Christiano (2015) presents the grounding of moral status problem as a trilemma: “One, the status of persons is grounded in the extent to which they have certain distinctive traits. Two, persons have the status conferring traits to relevantly different degrees. Three, persons have equal status” (Christiano 2015: 55). Egalitarians respond to this apparently inconsistent triad by arguing that either claim one or claim two is false in the hope of preserving claim three.

One response to the trilemma claims the threshold of rationality matters, but changes above the threshold do not matter because “... a change from below the threshold to above the threshold involves some kind of substantial transformation of the nature of the being involved while changes above the threshold do not involve such substantial transformation” (Christiano 2015: 73). Christiano offers the example of giving a chimpanzee the level of rationality typical of most humans and claims this would “transform the being into a new kind of being” (Christiano 2015: 73).

This response has intuitive appeal. Certain properties like rationality can transform an organism into a new kind of being. Becoming a person transforms a human being’s life from merely biological to autobiographical. However, Christiano notes a significant worry: “...it does invoke a difficult metaphysics of essences that may prove intractable” (Christiano 2015: 73). Because persons are *individuals* and not merely individuated, the metaphysical problem is especially challenging.

Consider that the essential properties of some kinds are scalar. The genetic properties constitutive of chimpanzees are not normally scalar, while the properties which constitute persons are scalar. All chimps are equally chimpanzees, but being a person is a matter of degree in two senses: general and particular. The variation in degrees of personhood poses a metaphysical difficulty that does not have a parallel when talking about species membership.

Christiano claims it makes sense to enhance the rational capacities of beings who are already persons and that “...this must be the desire of any rational being.... It is not within the realm of concerns of the

sentient being to become rational” (Christiano 2015: 73). Given the empirical data about connectedness to future selves, many persons do not have such desires and might be incapable of forming them for multiple reasons. Some persons might be cognitively unable to think abstractly enough about what increased rationality is and what it would entail. It appears persons must have a sufficient degree of connectedness to their future selves in terms of similarity, vividness and positivity to have the desire for increased rationality. Thus, it’s not in the realm of concern for all rational beings to become more rational. Among those that do have such a desire, some will have it to a much greater degree than others.

Dramatically increasing the rationality of a person might make that person unrecognizable to himself and others. Increased rationality would likely involve an increase in IQ and an increase in the similarity, vividness and positivity a person has toward his future self since these features are necessary for rational self-interest. Imagine the contrary situation where your level of rationality is dramatically reduced to the point you still belong in the class of persons; you’re just past the threshold. How different would your life be? Would you still be able to understand and enjoy reading philosophy? Would you be able to have the same meaningful relationships and connections with friends and family? Would you have the same kind of relationship with your current and future selves? We would be right to wonder if you were the same *individual*. We might wonder if a radical change in degree of rationality would destroy a person’s essence or eliminate the psychological connections that matter most.

Christiano claims increasing the chimpanzee’s rationality beyond a certain point is “not identity-preserving” (Christiano 2015: 73) because the chimp becomes a different kind of being. Increasing a person’s level of rationality “... is not to turn the ordinary human into a new type of being” (Christiano 2015: 73). Based on the previous considerations, the claim that increased rationality for persons is identity preserving is likely false assuming the change is dramatic enough. First, increasing a person’s rational capacity increases that person’s general personhood. The new being is more of a person than the old person. Second, it may be tantamount to a loss of personal identity or a loss of relevant psychological connections. Finally, if the increase in rationality now affords the person type-3 future-directed interests and a much stronger affective connection to future selves, that person can now exercise the capacity for autonomous self-creation. The person has become a new kind of being—a self-creator.

Perring presents a “superperson” who develops features relevant to personhood far beyond the typical human (Perring 1997: 186). Kaufmann comments similarly that Nietzsche maintained “... the gulf separating Plato from the average man is greater than the cleft between the average man and the chimpanzee” (Kaufmann 2013: 151)

The differences between the superperson and the typical person could exceed the differences between a chimp and an average person in terms of degrees of general personhood and particular personhood. The average man may be barely more of a self-creator than a chimpanzee, both being largely products of accidental factors rather than autonomous choices to become a *particular someone*. Treating differences in rationality and self-determination above the threshold as arbitrary differences in talent that should be mitigated by egalitarian considerations—an idea examined by Christiano—is problematic. Rationality and autonomy have an ontological role to play in the kind of beings they constitute even above the threshold; they are essential properties. Mere talents, like other arbitrary factors such as race and gender, have no ontological role to play.

Carter (2011) notes neo-Kantians avoid Kant's non-empirical conception of rationality and instead appeal to a naturalized conception of reason. Carter claims, as if echoing Nietzsche, neo-Kantians and political philosophers fail to address the moral implications of a naturalized conception of reason. Once naturalized, rationality is scalar, and while it may provide a basis for respect, it doesn't necessarily provide a basis for equal respect. The failure to take seriously the problem a naturalized account of reason poses for morality is an example of Nietzsche's claim in *The Antichrist*: despite knowing god is dead "...everyone nonetheless remains unchanged" (Nietzsche 1968: 160).

Carter discusses range properties as a basis for equality. He argues there are two issues with the use of range properties. First, we need to know why the range property is morally relevant. If the subvenient property is more fundamental, why shouldn't we focus on that property? Second, if the range property is morally relevant, we would need additional arguments to show the base properties are not relevant. Equally instantiating a range property is not enough to guarantee equality since people would still have the subvenient property in varying degrees.

There is a more fundamental objection to range properties. We need to establish range properties are real properties distinct from their disjunctive base properties. A similar problem occurs in the philosophy of mind with multiply realized higher-order properties.⁸ If we ask where a mental property gets its causal powers, the most plausible answer is from its physical base property. Given that a mental property can have multiple physical realizers all with varying causal powers, it is doubtful that mental properties have determinate causal powers of their own that would make them scientifically respectable properties. An empirical property ought to play a causal or metaphysical role independent of our ethical theorizing. Range properties are generally treated as empirical properties, but their ontological status is largely unclarified. We need to show range properties have some causal role to play which is distinct from their base properties. The problem is that they don't have

⁸ See Kim 2011: 184–186.

an explanatory role above and beyond what is provided by the base property. All of the causal or metaphysical work that determines degrees of personhood is accomplished by the particular base properties of each individual.

Carter intends to go beyond Rawls' account of range properties by attempting to find "...an independent reason for assessing persons in terms of the range property rather than in terms of the basis of that range property..." (Carter 2011: 550). Of course, if the range property is not a real property, there is nothing to assess persons in terms of other than the base property. When we examine Carter's approach, the only properties ever evaluated are the base properties of particular individuals. Evaluative abstinence does not involve the examination or awareness of a higher-order range property. Carter explains, "...we need to *avoid* looking inside people" (Carter 2011: 551). Avoiding looking at X does not entail looking at Y instead. Choosing not to see the unequal extent to which people have a property does not entail our empirically encountering some other higher-order range property equally instantiated.

Carter admits looking inside a person is a "precondition" for determining whether we should subsequently treat that person as opaque (Carter 2011: 552). We determine if a being is above the "absolute minimum" threshold, but once we have surmised they are above, we adopt an attitude of opacity. Again, we determine whether a being has passed the threshold not by examining a range property but by looking at the degree to which the being has the base property. The range property itself has no role to play in the theory. Furthermore, if Perry's superman or Nietzsche's Plato has an ontological status far superior to the average person which involves differences in kind, choosing to intentionally disregard or ignore their superior status would be disrespectful. It would be disrespectful in a way analogous to failing to treat the average person as being worthy of greater respect than Koko the gorilla.

Carter's argument depends on the appropriateness of opacity respect to beings who meet a certain absolute standard of personhood. He argues that additional considerations about respect override the conclusions we would draw about moral status based on factual differences. Opacity respect is supposed to provide independent, non-question-begging justification for ignoring variations in the base properties. In order for the argument to succeed, it must not implicitly include some notion of equality. Carter gives two necessary conditions for adopting an attitude of opacity respect. The first is when the being "possesses *dignity as agential capacity*," and the second is when it is appropriate for us to view that being *simply as an agent* (Carter 2011: 556).

Carter correctly avoids a mythological, Kantian notion of reason, yet the notion of dignity as agential capacity introduces another mythical concept. Persons vary in their agential capacities and how well they use those capacities. It's unlikely we can make good sense of agency

apart from how it is exercised. The idea that there is a general property of agency that bestows dignity on persons regardless of how it is exercised (i.e., its content) or the degree to which it is instantiated is a way of mythologizing agency. An argument is needed based on an empirical account of human agency that then entails, through the application of a bridge premise, the possession of the moral property of dignity.

Carter focuses on the relationship between political institutions and citizens to justify the second condition. However, how political liberals feel about institutions treating citizens might be another instance of Nietzsche's "everyone nonetheless remains unchanged." Carter explains that political liberals feel the state should not evaluate the rational capacities, abilities to make responsible decisions, or abilities to form worthwhile life plans of its citizens, and that doing so would be disrespectful. In contrast, a Nietzschean might find it disrespectful for the state to treat higher-type persons as equal to those lacking in robust rationality and higher forms of autonomy. Thus, "appropriateness" is a matter of taste and one influenced by our affects and prior moral commitments.

One might object that the commitment to evaluative abstinence is the result of a desire to avoid admitting people have unequal status and therefore they ought to have unequal basic entitlements. Carter responds that the liberal commitment to the outward dignity of agents is not based on the equality of agents but is instead based on "respect for agency itself" (Carter 2011: 558). However, the idea of "agency itself" smuggles in a notion of equality. "Agency itself" is a conceptual abstraction which ignores the real agential differences between persons. As previously mentioned, it is a mythological notion of agency used to justify equality in a way analogous to Kant's non-empirical account of rationality.

Miklosi (2022) argues against the Response Co-variation Thesis: "If there is a valuable property P, such that its presence constitutes a reason for a certain kind of response R to its bearers, then every variation in the degree of P necessarily constitutes a reason for a corresponding variation in R" (Miklosi 2022: 374). The implicit acceptance of this thesis severely limits the argumentative strategies available to advocates of status parity. By rejecting the co-variation thesis, Miklosi hopes to increase the conceptual space for responses to variations in status-grounding properties which would preserve equality. Miklosi argues that although the co-variation thesis may hold for some values, it is not generally true, and importantly it does not hold in the case of valuing rational beings. The same considerations which explain the significance of rationality for moral status in the first place will explain why differences above the threshold don't matter to moral status.

Miklosi examines cases in which the response R does not vary despite variations in property P. These cases are intended to provide an analogical basis to show our responses should not change when

we encounter varying degrees of rationality above the threshold. The strength of this inference depends on two factors: (1) whether Miklosi's description of the initial cases is correct, and (2) whether the latter case involving rationality is sufficiently analogous.

Miklosi uses two initial cases: "historically significant" and "worthy of philosophical understanding" (Miklosi 2022: 378). Once a topic has crossed the threshold of either "historical significance" or "worthy of philosophical understanding," variation in degree of significance or worthiness do not and should not affect the seriousness of our response R. P will vary above the threshold but R will not. Miklosi states the norms which govern intellectual inquiry are not "different or less stringent," and the same norms of "seriousness, devotion, sincerity, clarity, and precision" apply equally (Miklosi 2022: 378). Miklosi admits variations in P might affect whether we will engage with P, but they do not affect *how* we engage with P. Once we determine P is worthy of engagement, changes in P do not affect the norms which govern *how* we engage.

The first objection to Miklosi's account of these cases is that the norms which apply to intellectual inquiry are not, in general, determined by the objects of study. The *basis* of intellectual or academic norms of honesty, precision, rigor, etc., is found in the goals of intellectual activity such as knowledge and, in the case of professional academics, fair evaluation of oneself and one's peers. Therefore, the reason R does not vary with changes in P in these two cases is precisely because R is not based on P to begin with. The intellectual norms which govern our responses to things we find intellectually interesting or significant have little or no grounding relationship to those things. Using Miklosi's distinction, the variations in the objects of study are the grounds for *whether* we engage, but they are not the grounds for *how* we engage.⁹

A second objection challenges Miklosi's intuitions about these cases. The first objection grants we have an equal response R to variations in P, but claims that fact is not relevant because the basis of R is independent of P. The next objection examines whether equal responses are in fact always appropriate. A researcher who lied or misrepresented facts about the holocaust, perhaps by minimizing the atrocities, does something much worse than a researcher who minimizes the extramarital activities of a past government leader. Intuitions might reasonably vary between those who think intellectual norms are equally stringent regardless of subject matter and those who do not.

The first objection lends itself to a third objection which challenges the analogy these cases are intended to provide regarding our response to the value of rational beings. In the case of moral status, the value of rational beings is supposed to *ground* the norms governing our responses to such beings. The moral status of beings is supposed to explain *both* why we should engage with them, and why we should

⁹ I believe the same is true of Miklosi's conversational norms.

engage with them equally (i.e., the how question). The earlier cases of historical significance and philosophical understanding are only analogous to moral status regarding the engagement question and not in terms of the norms governing the engagement. Therefore, the fact the co-variation thesis does not hold in those cases suggests very little if anything about moral status of persons because the grounding relation is absent.

Miklosi argues we ought to value rational beings because they are valuers by which he means they are capable of responding to “the reason-giving aspects of the world” (Miklosi 2022: 381). Miklosi continues, “As far as each rational being’s own life is concerned, their decisions about which of many rationally eligible goals to adopt should be treated as authoritative. We should treat rational beings as authorities regarding their own lives” (Miklosi 2022: 381). It’s not clear what the exact inference is to the conclusion that each and every typical person should be considered an authority about their own lives. Furthermore, it’s not clear why we ought to treat people as being *equally* authoritative about their own lives. We typically view persons as authorities when they have extensive or specialized knowledge which then produces the right kinds of results. Given the empirical data mentioned earlier, such as the temporal discounting by those who are less connected to their future selves, some persons are far better than others at adopting goals, appropriately evaluating those goals, and pursuing them rationally. Why then should we treat them as equally authoritative?

Miklosi’s justification for why our responses to rational valuers should not “be modulated in a way that tracks variations in levels of rationality” (Miklosi 2022: 382) is interesting. He writes:

Rational beings are valuers capable of incorporating value in their lives in a distinctive way, i.e., through engaging with it. The crucial point is that it is *only through their own valuing activity* that rational beings can realize this distinctive form of value, which explains the reason for “respect,” i.e., treating their own determinations of reason as far as their own life is concerned as authoritative. (Miklosi 2022: 382)

The relationship Miklosi creates between valuing and rationality is important. He claims decisions persons make about “which of many *rationally eligible* [my emphasis] goals” are pursued should be treated as authoritative. Non-rational beings are capable of valuing but that valuing is explained by instinct or emotion. The fact my dog values lying on my couch rather than the floor or a child values a candy bar before dinner ought not to be taken as authoritative. Not all valuing activity is equally valuable, or valuable at all, and therefore does not automatically confer value on the valuer. The respect owed to persons’ choices is proportional to the rationality of those choices and the overall degree of rationality of the person.

Even if it is true that we ought to take the rational decisions of persons as decisive, generalizing to the conclusion that we should treat rational beings as authorities regarding their own lives is a *non sequitur*.

Respect for some decisions does not logically entail respect for all decisions which constitute a person's life. Perhaps we ought to respect the short-term choices of persons lacking a significant amount of foresight, but respect less or not at all their long-term choices. Parents of teenagers wisely modulate the degree of autonomy allotted to their children based on the degree of rational decision-making they exhibit.

Somewhat similarly, Carter (2018) argues it is consistent with some egalitarian principles to limit the initial freedom agents have based on their limited degrees of temporal integration. The right to freedom does not have the same "absolute weight" it does when we assume personal identity depends on a non-reductive "further fact" (Carter 2018: 838). Recognizing the empirical fact that persons vary greatly in their temporal unity, he writes: "The kind of agent relevant for a theory of equality of opportunity is not the unified agent but the normal agent. Respect for normal agents is compatible with the enforcement of certain interpersonally uniform limits on the right to distribute future opportunities intrapersonally" (Carter 2018: 838). This kind of egalitarianism is almost Nietzschean. The normal agent has one normative principle of freedom, and the highly integrated agent has another.

Carter admits that were temporal unity constituted by a "further fact" or some other account of "highly diachronically integrated agents" then there would be an "unlimited" right to freedom (Carter 2018: 838). Carter thinks the "further fact" approach is philosophically unsound and the notion of "highly diachronically integrated" agents is "empirically dubious" (Carter 2018: 838). According to Carter, "normal agents" are not that highly integrated. However, given the empirically informed and philosophically motivated account of temporal integration offered here, we do have reasons for thinking some persons have a right to greater freedom than others consistent with some of Carter's own claims.

Returning to Miklosi, there are two additional claims he believes strongly support equal responses to all rational beings: the Directedness Claim and the Singularity Claim. The former claims rational beings themselves are the bearers of value rather than the states of affairs their choices create. The latter claims each rational being has only one life to instantiate value (Miklosi 2022: 382–383). It is important to recall Miklosi previously explained that the same considerations which explain the significance of rationality for moral status in the first place will explain why differences above the threshold don't matter to moral status. In other words, the way in which rationality is relevant to *separating* beings into higher and lower status will also help explain why we should give typical persons equal moral status.

However, Miklosi's summary of the significance of the Directedness and Singularity claims in response to the objection that his view entails we ought to treat minimally rational non-human animals the same way we treat human persons undermines his earlier claims for equality among typical persons. To see why this is so, I quote Miklosi at length:

In particular, it seems to me that the view suggests an important divide between beings who are responsive to reasons in a way that enables them to make sense of their lives as wholes, to have a broadly temporally extended sense of their own existence that is capable of being organized in response to reasons, on the one hand, and beings who are responsive to reasons in more immediate and localized ways, without a sense that their lives as wholes could hang together on the basis of long-term pursuits and relationships. (Miklosi 2022: 284)

Miklosi relies on the concept of a richly temporally extended sense of self which involves pursuing long-term interests and relationships. The threshold for Miklosi depends on the relative degree of temporal extension or localization.

In terms of my earlier analysis, Miklosi's typical person must have richly integrated type-3 future-directed interests to which the current self has strong affective connections in terms of vividness, similarity and positivity. Unfortunately, the research suggests many people do not have a "broadly temporally extended sense of their own existence" which is "responsive to reasons." Instead, some people view their future selves as strangers and, as we have seen, that difference is reflected in their brain activity. There is no reason to suppose that all persons have robust type-3 future-directed interests or that they are capable of such interests. Thus, the supposed threshold between non-human, minimally rational animals and typical persons carves a further morally significant difference among so-called "typical" persons.

Defenses of moral equality attempt to address the scalar nature of morally relevant properties. These theories correctly note that empirical or naturalized accounts of temporal unity, rationality, and autonomy require us to recognize their scalar nature. However, these theories frequently fail to notice naturalized accounts of those properties also involve recognizing differences in kind which constitute real differences between persons. Attempts to make these properties binary through the use of range properties will not address the variations in kind among persons. While there may be responses to some of the internal challenges to these defenses, different approaches will be needed to address the differences in kind among persons.

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