

## SELF-MAKING AND SUBPEOPLE\*

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I am a person. I have been around for many years, and I hope to be around for many more. But on many currently popular plenitude ontologies of material objects, I am not alone: I share my place with great many shorter-lived things that came into existence after me or will go out of existence before me. For example, if material objects are four-dimensional “worms” made up of instantaneous temporal parts and any material objects at any time make up a further object, then there are billions of entities made up from some proper subset of my temporal parts. Such entities resemble people in many respects: they look like people, talk like people, and they have physical properties that constitute the basis of consciousness and thought in people. Indeed, they are intrinsically indistinguishable from things we would recognize as people, and some of those that started to exist at the same time as the people they overlap with are even intrinsically indistinguishable from possible shorter-lived people. Given this striking similarity, Eric Olson, whose terminology I will henceforth follow, calls them “subpeople”, while Mark Johnston refers to them as “personites”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric T. Olson, “Ethics and the generous ontology,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, **XXXI**, 4 (2010): 259–270; Mark Johnston, “The Personite Problem: Should Practical Reason Be Tabled?,” *Noûs*, **LII**, 4

The existence of subpeople raises grave philosophical problems. What prevents subpeople from qualifying as people, given that they are intrinsically so similar to people? What makes it the case that we are people (assuming that we are) rather than subpeople? Worse yet, how can I know such a thing, given that my subpeople appear to share all of their thoughts with me? Any subperson with which I overlap shares with me the thought *I am a person*, and it does so on the basis of the same introspective and perceptual evidence.<sup>2</sup> While these questions are puzzling and widely discussed, I will have little new to say about them here.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I will focus

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(2016): 617–44; “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, **xxx**, 1 (2016): 198–228.

<sup>2</sup> Here and in what follows, I will use personal pronouns to refer to people and the impersonal pronoun ‘it’ to refer to subpeople. I do this only for the sake of better readability, not in order to beg any question about the metaphysical or moral status of subpeople.

<sup>3</sup> For the metaphysical and epistemological problems see, for example, Eric T. Olson, “Why I Have No Hands,” *Theoria*, **LXI**, 2 (1995): 182–97; Trenton Merricks, “Against the Doctrine of Microphysical Supervenience,” *Mind*, **CVII**, 425 (1998): 59–71; Theodore Sider “Maximality and Microphysical Supervenience,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **LXVI**, 1 (2003): 139–49; Michael B. Burke “Is My Head a Person?,” in Klaus Petrus (ed.), *On Human Persons* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2003), pp. 107–25; Dean W. Zimmerman “Material People,” in Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 491–526; my “Is there a conservative solution to the many thinkers problem?,” *Ratio*, **XXIII**, 3 (2010): 275–290, “Self-made People,” *Mind*, **CXXV**, 500 (2016): 1071–1099, and “Diachronic Self-making,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **XCVIII**, 2 (2020): 349–62; C.S. Sutton, “The Supervenience Solution to the Too-Many-Thinkers Problem,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, **LXIV**, 257 (2014): 619–639; and Rory Madden, “Thinking Parts,” in Stephen Blatti and Paul Snowdon (eds.), *Essays on Animalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 180–207.

on a question that has come to the forefront of discussions of personal ontology only recently: what is the moral status of subpeople? On the face of it, since subpeople are intrinsically like people, they should have the same moral standing as people. However, this seems to have morally repugnant consequences. For example, the existence of subpeople threatens to make any sacrifice for long-term goals impermissible: if I do something intrinsically unpleasant for the sake of a long-term goal (like learning a foreign language), many of my fellow-traveler subpeople will participate in my suffering but will not be there to reap the benefits.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, often subpeople will suffer the negative consequences of things I did when they were not around yet. They will be punished for crimes they did not commit and rewarded for good deeds they did not contribute to.<sup>5</sup> Utility calculation (important especially but not exclusively for utilitarians) also becomes an insurmountable task once we take subpeople into consideration.<sup>6</sup> Call these problems collectively “the moral problems of subpeople”.

The moral problems of subpeople are not only difficult but recalcitrant, too. For example, Alex Kaiserman argues that while perdurantists (“worm theorists” who identify people with four-dimensional fusions of momentary person-stages) have a problem with subpeople, stage theorists (who identify people with the momentary

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<sup>4</sup> A.P. Taylor, “The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXV, 3 (2013): 1097–1115; Olson, “Ethics and the Generous Ontology”, *op. cit.*; Johnston, “The Personite Problem”, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Olson, “Ethics and the Generous Ontology”, *op. cit.*; Johnston, “The Personite Problem”, *op. cit.*; Johnston, “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash”, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Johnston, “The Personite Problem”, *op. cit.*; “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash”, *op. cit.*

stages themselves) do not.<sup>7</sup> This is because according to the stage theorist no fusion of person-stages is a person, thus they can reject the premise that subpeople are intrinsically like people.<sup>8</sup> I do not find this persuasive. Even if personal pronouns and proper names pick out person-stages rather than fusions thereof, the fusions that perdurantists would identify as persons still look like intrinsically the right sorts of things to be deserving of moral consideration, whether or not they are intrinsically similar to persons. In fact, we do not even need to assume four-dimensionalism to generate the moral problems of subpeople. We might spatiotemporally overlap with subpeople without having them as temporal parts. For example, perhaps we are enduring continuants constituted by different pieces of matter at different times, which also constitute a multitude of enduring subpeople at those times.<sup>9</sup> And to go further, it is not even obvious that the subpeople need to *exist* for the moral problems to arise. For there may be alternative languages with relevantly existence-

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<sup>7</sup> Alex Kaiserman, “Stage theory and the personite problem,” *Analysis*, LXXIX, 2 (2019): 215–22.

<sup>8</sup> For perdurantism, see W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), Mark Heller, *The Ontology of Physical Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Hud Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). For stage theory, see Katherine Hawley, *How Things Persist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) and Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); and for the application of stage theory to personal identity, Theodore Sider, “Asymmetric Personal Identity,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, IV, 2 (2018): 127–46. I am assuming here that according to stage theory there *are* fusions of person-stages. Otherwise, we have already left the realm of liberal ontologies that are the focus of this paper.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, John Hawthorne “Three-Dimensionalism,” in *Metaphysical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006): 85–109 and Kristie Miller, *Issues in Theoretical Diversity: Persistence, Composition, and Time* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006) for such views.

like concepts, and even if subpeople do not fall under the quantifier concept expressed by the English word ‘exist’, they might fall under a slightly different concept expressed by an alternative language’s expression that plays similar conceptual roles.<sup>10</sup> In short, many of the assumptions I made at the beginning could be discharged without touching the heart of problem. Nonetheless, in what follows I will focus on the problem’s most straightforward version, which arises for run-of-the-mill perdurantists.

My aim in this paper is to offer a unified set of solutions to the moral problems of subpeople. In my view, the best answer to the metaphysical and epistemological problems can also help address the moral problems. A number of authors combine plenitude ontologies with the view that in some sense, our *de se* beliefs help determine our own spatiotemporal boundaries. We can collectively refer to such views as versions of “private conventionalism”.<sup>11</sup> I am partial to private conventionalism myself and believe that it is a key to a satisfactory solution to the moral problems of subpeople.

The rest of this paper will go as follows. In section I I will provide a taxonomy of the moral problems of subpeople, which I will divide into three sets of problems: forward-looking, backward-looking and static. In section II, I will present my preferred version of private conventionalism and highlight its main features that will help us solve the moral problems of subpeople. Next, I will discuss in detail the forward-looking (section III), the backward-looking (section IV) and the static

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<sup>10</sup> See Matti Eklund, “The Existence of Personites,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXXVII, 7 (2020): 2051–71 for an exploration of this possibility.

<sup>11</sup> This terminology is from my “Self-Made People” and “Diachronic Self-making,” *op. cit.*

(section V) problems. While I cannot hope to offer an exhaustive discussion of all of these problems, I hope to say enough to leave readers with a good idea as to how problems that I lacked the space to discuss here could be addressed within the present framework. Section VI concludes.

#### I. A TAXONOMY OF THE MORAL PROBLEMS OF SUBPEOPLE

Subpeople give rise to several moral problems. We can sort these into three groups according to the temporal relations that a person bears to the group of subpeople that lead to the respective problem: forward-looking, backward-looking, and static problems.

The *forward-looking problems* concern subpeople whose early termination casts doubt on some of our moral practices. In what follows, I will refer to such beings as “mayfly subpeople”. The “problem of fecklessness”, perhaps the most widely discussed of the moral problems, belongs to this category: according to it, short-term sacrifice for long-term goals is immoral because it imposes suffering on mayfly subpeople without granting them the accompanying benefits.<sup>12</sup> For example, in Johnston’s example it is immoral to spend months learning Hungarian before one’s trip to Hungary because some of the mayfly subpeople will only experience the torment of learning a difficult language without then being able to enjoy the cultural immersion. A close cousin of the problem of fecklessness is Taylor’s “frustrating problem”, in which mayfly subpeople share their desires with people but, despite

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<sup>12</sup> Olson, “Ethics and the Generous Ontology,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 262–3; Johnston, “The Personite Problem”, *op. cit.*, at pp. 623–4.

making the same efforts, are no longer around when those desires are fulfilled.<sup>13</sup> Another forward-looking problem is that our social practices surrounding grief clearly ignore mayfly subpeople.<sup>14</sup> We usually experience the death of a person, especially when premature, as a tragedy. But we do not react this way to the perishing of a subperson. Every moment I spend with my loved ones, countless subpeople quietly go out of existence (some of them very young), yet I do not even give them a passing thought. Such indifference would be considered cold and inhumane toward people – so why do we accept it as a matter of course with subpeople?

The second category is comprised of *backward-looking problems*: morally repugnant conclusions that seem forced on us specifically by subpeople that come into existence too late for some of our social practices to be morally permissible. Johnston calls these beings “latter-day personites”, and I will similarly call them “latter-day subpeople”. Typically, the backward-looking problems arise out of commitments that subpeople “inherited” from earlier person-stages, but intuitively without the sort of liability that usually grounds those commitments. For example, the practice of punishing people for past wrongs imposes the same harsh consequences on subpeople who came into existence only after the wrong deed was done. Likewise with reward: every time we praise and reward people for their good deeds, their fellow-traveler latter-day subpeople also enjoy these benefits despite not having lifted a finger. Promising also turns out to be morally problematic if we share our place with subpeople. Fulfilling a promise is often burdensome, but the latter-

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, “The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism,” *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Johnston, “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological trash,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 210–11.

day subpeople who came into existence only after we have made the promise did not consent to sharing this burden with us. Moreover, friendship and intimacy also raise disturbing questions. For latter-day subpeople are in effect forced into human relationships, some of them very intimate, that they never agreed to be a part of.<sup>15</sup>

To the third and final category belong those problems that do not exploit any kind of temporal asymmetry. We could call these the *static moral problems* of subpeople, and they largely consist of paradoxical results that utility calculation yields once subpeople are added to the mix. Johnston presents the main problem as a dilemma.<sup>16</sup> Time is either continuous or discrete. If it is continuous, then any span of time during which a person exists is also occupied by infinitely many subpeople. Therefore, we face a new kind of infinitary paralysis: no matter how we prioritize some subpeople over others within the lifespan of a person, we cause an infinite amount of pleasure and an infinite amount of pain, and so we cannot choose between rival courses of action on utilitarian grounds. Alternatively, if time is discrete then the longer a person lives, the more subpeople there are that she overlaps with and thus the more the pleasures and the pains that she experiences get multiplied by the number of subpeople who share them. Thus, we should generally give preferential treatment to people who are likely to live longer. “Poor, unintelligent,

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<sup>15</sup> See Johnston, “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 629–32 and “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 213–4 for discussion of these backward-looking problems.

<sup>16</sup> “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 635–41. In fact, he presents the dilemma as one specifically for consequentialists. But unless one thinks that utility calculation has *no* moral significance under any circumstances, these problems affect all plenitude ontologists independently of what grand moral theory they prefer.



unhealthy, male Russians will certainly get the short end of the stick”, Johnston concludes.<sup>17</sup>

The three categories above are not mutually exclusive. For example, we can think of cases that are both forward-looking and backward-looking. If I sell my old car, knowing that I will have to live frugally for ten years before I have enough money for a new one, then the subperson that exists only during those ten years *neither* had a say in the sale *nor* will enjoy its benefits down the line. Moreover, the rationale of punishment may have both backward-looking and forward-looking aspects. Johnston usually writes as if he implicitly assumes a retributivist view of

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<sup>17</sup> “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at p. 641. For a similar worry, see also A. P. Taylor, “The Painful Implications of Four-Dimensionalism,” *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, XIII, 100471 (2020): 1–10, at pp. 7–8. In fact, the problem can be put more sharply. Perhaps the notion that longer lives are (other things equal) somewhat more valuable and should accordingly be prioritized over shorter ones is not so repugnant. The more serious worry is that of any two lives even a marginally longer one will be *vastly* more valuable. For suppose time is discrete and there’s a unit length of minimal duration. For simplicity’s sake, let’s ignore temporally “gappy” candidates (since it is debatable that they are intrinsically sufficiently person-like to count as subpeople) and count only agents (people and subpeople) that do not lack a temporal part at any time between two times at which they have a temporal part. Then if any person made up of  $n$  unit-length temporal parts had just one extra unit-length temporal part, there would have been an additional  $n+1$  non-gappy agents, supposedly each with their own token pleasures and pains. So even very modest differences between the lengths of two people’s lives can translate into enormous differences in terms of whose pleasures and pains count more, where even a few extra milliseconds could add so many extra subpeople that their sheer number may outweigh any other consideration in favor of somewhat shorter-lived people. This result, I take it, is absurd even for those who are willing to accept that longer lives are *somewhat* more valuable.

punishment, but as Taylor points out, there is also a separate worry that mayfly subpeople are too short-lived to *learn* from punishment for their wrong actions.<sup>18</sup> However, in what follows I will not worry about these mixed cases. With the simpler cases described above we already have enough on our plate, and I am optimistic that some combination of the solutions I will offer below can also deal with the more complex ones. In the next section I will sketch my preferred ontology of persons and indicate those of its main elements that can help us tackle the moral problems of subpeople.

## II. PRIVATE CONVENTIONALISM ABOUT PERSONAL IDENTITY: A RECAP

In section I, I mentioned the metaphysical and the epistemological problems of subpeople: what makes it the case, and how can we know, that we are people rather than subpeople? According to one group of views, this is to some extent up to us: within some constraints, we get to determine the reference of ‘I’. This kind of view comes in many shapes, and it is not even mandatory to combine it with a plenitude ontology of physical objects. We can refer to the general view that persons have a say in determining their spatiotemporal boundaries *private conventionalism*.<sup>19</sup> It can be

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<sup>18</sup> “The Painful Implications of Four-Dimensionalism,” *op. cit.*, at p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, one of the first modern defenses of private conventionalism is due to Johnston himself in “Relativism and the Self,” in Michael Krausz (ed.), *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 441–72, but in his later work he does not discuss how, if at all, such views bear on what he calls the “personite problem”. Other philosophers who defend or at least sympathetically discuss versions of private conventionalism include Stephen L. White, “Metapsychological Relativism and the Self,” this journal, LXXXVI, 6 (1989): 298–323, David Braddon-Mitchell and Caroline West “Temporal Phase Pluralism,” *Philosophy and*

contrasted with public conventionalist views, on which the reference of ‘I’ and ‘person’ is fixed exclusively by public conventions, with no role reserved for individual referential intentions.<sup>20</sup>

Though much of what I will say in sections III–IV could be combined, with little adjustment, with other varieties of private conventionalism, I will henceforth work with a particular version, which in earlier work I introduced as the “Diachronic Self-making View” (DSV).<sup>21</sup> In a nutshell, the view goes as follows. Inspired by

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*Phenomenological Research*, LXII, 1 (2001): 59–83, David Braddon-Mitchell and Kristie Miller, “How to be a Conventional Person,” *The Monist*, LXXXVII, 4 (2004): 457–74 and “Surviving, to Some Degree,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXXVII, 12 (2020): 3805–35, Kristie Miller “”Personal Identity” minus the persons,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXVI, S1 (2013): S91–S109, Dean W. Zimmerman, “Personal Identity and the Survival of Death,” in Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman and Jens Johansson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 97–154, my “Self-made people” and “Diachronic self-making” (*op. cit.*), and Irem Kurtosal, “Self-Determination in Plenitude,” forthcoming in *Erkenntnis*.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Eli Hirsch, *The Concept of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), Alan Sidelle, “On the Prospects for a Theory of Personal Identity,” *Philosophical Topics*, XXVI, 1–2 (1999): 351–72 and Michael Tze-Sung Longenecker, “Community-made Selves,” forthcoming in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. It is worth noting that remarks suggestive of public conventionalism without explicit commitment to the view are very common in the personal literature. For critical discussions of this phenomenon, see Eric T. Olson, “Relativism and Persistence,” *Philosophical Studies*, LXXXVIII, 2 (1997): 141–62 and Trenton Merricks “Realism About Personal Identity Over Time,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, XV (2001): 173–186.

<sup>21</sup> “Diachronic self-making,” *op. cit.* The view is in effect a diachronic extension of the “Self-making view”, according to which we have a say in which parts we have *at a time*; see my “Self-made people,” *op. cit.*

Noonan's "Personal Pronoun Revisionism"<sup>22</sup>, I maintain that when a person and the subpeople she overlaps with use the word 'I', they all refer to the same thing: the person. However, there is a further twist: the reference of 'I' is the best non-accidental satisfier of the 'I'-beliefs entertained by a host of person-candidates (one of which is a person and the rest of which are subpeople). So when, for example, a person thinks *I began to exist before I celebrated my second birthday and will keep existing at least as long as I do not experience sudden and radical psychological disruption*, a host of subpeople hold this belief along with her, their belief refers to a thing of which it is true that it began to exist before the event, and the formation of the belief was not mediated by misleading third-person (for example perceptual or testimonial) evidence or mistaken evaluation of such evidence.

Importantly, according to DSV the relation between a person's and her overlapping subpeople's mental states is strict numerical identity. When a person and some overlapping subpeople think, *I went to the supermarket yesterday*, they think numerically the same indexical thought, but this thought is a first-person-thought from the person's perspective and a non-first-person-thought from the subpeople's. So, by thinking this thought, the subpeople have a lot of true beliefs about the person with which they overlap rather than a lot of false beliefs about themselves. This also means that while DSV purports to solve the problem of too many thinkers

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<sup>22</sup> Harold W. Noonan, "Animalism *Versus* Lockeanism: A Current Controversy," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, XLVIII, 192 (1998): 302–318; "The thinking animal problem and personal pronoun revisionism," *Analysis*, LXX, 1 (2010): 93–8.

for plenitude ontologies of persons, it is not supposed to solve the problem of too many *thoughts*. Instead, it denies that there is such a problem in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

So my ‘I’-thoughts are first-person from my point of view but non-first-person from my subpeople’s point of view. But how do I get to assert that *I* am a person – that these thoughts that I am thinking now are first-person from *my* point of view? Easily, because the italicized expressions in the previous sentence do not succeed at specifying any further fact about which either I or my subpeople could be wrong. When thinking *I went to the supermarket yesterday*, the person here is correct because the person indeed went to the supermarket. And when the subpeople think *I went to the supermarket yesterday*, they are correct too, again because the person here (to whom they are all referring) went to the supermarket.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there is a way for subpeople that were not around to go to the supermarket to hold false beliefs about themselves: they can think *this subperson went to the supermarket yesterday*. But since people and subpeople share numerically the same mental states, the only way for a subperson to have this thought is for the person to have it as well, and we have no reason to think that people generally have lots of false beliefs of this sort.

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<sup>23</sup> For the “too many thinkers” vs. “too many thoughts” distinction, see Dean W. Zimmerman, “Material People,” *op. cit.*, at p. 497. Some philosophers find it evident that there is no “too many thoughts” problem; see, for example, Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), at p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Pace* Eric T. Olson, “Thinking Animalism and the Reference of ‘I,’” *Philosophical Topics*, XXX, 1 (2002): 189–207; cf. Harold W. Noonan, “The Epistemological Problem of Relativism – Reply to Olson,” *Philosophical Studies*, CIV, 3 (2001): 323–362.

Why accept DSV? In previous work I offered a number of arguments for the view, which I will merely list here without defending them in detail.<sup>25</sup> First, DSV provides a low-cost solution to the many-thinkers problem affecting plenitude ontologies. The solution is unassuming in its metaphysics, since it does not treat some mereological fusions as in any way metaphysically distinguished<sup>26</sup>, and also in its epistemology, since it does not require us to be epistemically especially lucky in order to have largely true beliefs about ourselves.<sup>27</sup> Second, DSV is independently motivated by a plausible account of reference determination for “impure indexicals”, that is, indexical expressions that do not require a demonstrative act to secure their reference but still allow for some indeterminacy.<sup>28</sup> ‘Here’ is usually recognized as having these features: it does not require a demonstrative act to select a location in an utterance of “My spouse is not here”, but it could refer to the room, the apartment or even an entire country depending on the speaker’s intentions. *Mutatis*

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<sup>25</sup> For further details, see “Self-made People”, *op. cit.*, at pp. 1080–84 and “Diachronic Self-Making”, *op. cit.*, at pp. 353–4.

<sup>26</sup> Or as Johnston puts elsewhere, we are “ontologically trashy” – we are not significantly different from fusions that fail to qualify as people (“Is Hope for Another Life Rational?,” in Paul Draper (ed.), *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 47–68, at p. 67). Needless to say, while Johnston uses ‘trashy’ as a pejorative, many of us will think that trashiness is a virtue in so far as it promotes theoretical economy.

<sup>27</sup> Unlike, for example, the hard externalist view that the very fact that I am a person is part of my evidence but not part of my subpeople’s evidence (since in their case it is not even true). See Madden, “Thinking Parts,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 185–8 for an illuminating critical discussion of this strategy as a potential solution to the problem of too many thinkers.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow this expression from François Recanati, “Are ‘here’ and ‘now’ indexicals?,” *Texte*, CXXVII, 8 (2001): 115–2.

*mutandis* for ‘now’. Pure indexicals, by contrast (such as ‘tomorrow’ and ‘this year’) lack this flexibility: there is only one specific period I can refer to by uttering ‘this year’ in a given context. But if we indeed share our places with billions of overlapping person-candidates, ‘I’ is more similar to impure than to pure indexicals. And on DSV, the proper treatment of ‘I’ is exactly analogous to the way we already tend to think of other impure indexicals: the speaker’s (or thinker’s) intentions determine the reference of a (spoken or merely mental) token of ‘I’.<sup>29</sup> Third, DSV also fits an attractive general picture of content determination, according to which mental content is determined so as to maximally rationalize behavior.<sup>30</sup> That is, our ‘I’-beliefs refer to their best non-accidental satisfier because the subject matter of all of our beliefs is whatever best rationalizes them.

How does DSV help us solve at least some of the moral problems of subpeople? In the sections to follow I will say more, but already here it is worth highlighting two features of the view that are most immediately relevant to developing a comprehensive solution.

1. *No Delusion*. In the literature on the moral problems of subpeople, it is generally recognized that subpeople share their desires with those of the person that they overlap with. However, this is frequently dismissed as irrelevant. Consent matters only when it is informed, the reasoning goes, and subpeople are profoundly

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<sup>29</sup> See also Zimmerman, “Personal Identity and the Survival of Death,” *op. cit.*, pp. 219–21 for a similar argument for private conventionalism.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. David K. Lewis, “Radical Interpretation,” *Synthese*, XXIII, 3–4 (1974): 331–44 and “Reduction of Mind,” in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 412–31.

deluded about what they are: they think and act as if they were people and had the future prospects of ordinary agents, but they are subpeople with substantially different (and more limited) life options than people.<sup>31</sup> Even certain solutions to the forward-looking problems accept this assumption. For example, Michael Tze-Sung Longenecker argues that people are just as ignorant about their status as people as subpeople are about their status as subpeople, and thus people cannot be said to *exploit* their subpeople.<sup>32</sup> Rather, they all strive toward certain common goals. Only some of them can achieve those goals, but none of them knows which ones (much like a group of rowers striving to the “Happy Island”, Longenecker says: only some of them live to reach the shore, but nobody knows which ones). If DSV is correct, this is a mistaken picture of the epistemic situation in which people and subpeople find themselves. People know they have the kind of future and prospects usually attributed to people. And subpeople do not mistakenly believe that they have the future of a person. They correctly believe of the person whose temporal parts they are that *she* has that future and prospects. They just do not think too much about themselves (more on this later). This aspect of DSV will be especially relevant to the forward-looking problems.

2. *Many Experiencers, One Set of Experiences.* At every given time, a person and the subpeople she overlaps with share numerically the same mental states. Thus, there is no problem of too many thoughts; there is only a problem of too many thinkers,

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<sup>31</sup> See Olson, “Ethics and the Generous Ontology,” *op. cit.*, at p. 265 and Johnston, “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at p. 632 and “Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash,” *op. cit.*, at p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> “Perdurantism, fecklessness and the veil of ignorance,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXXVII, 9 (2020): 2565–76.



which the DSV solves. More to the point, there is no problem of “too many pleasures” or “too many pains” either. When a person experiences pleasure, the subpeople she overlaps with experience numerically the same pleasure. And when a person experiences pain, the subpeople she overlaps with experience numerically the same pain.<sup>33</sup> This will be especially important for the static moral problems, which crucially trade on how the pleasures and pains of subpeople should be aggregated.

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<sup>33</sup> Eklund asks, reasonably enough, what determines the identity conditions of pleasures and pains if not the subjects that have them (“The existence of personites,” *op. cit.*, at p. 2053, n9). This is a good question, but the DSV theorist has options. Perhaps pains and pleasures are tropes (or particularized properties) that can be had by more than one thing at the same time so long as those things spatiotemporally overlap. So, sharable pains and pleasures still fail to be universals because they are neither multi-located nor unlocated, as universals would need to be. Or perhaps pains and pleasures are mental events whose constituent physical particulars are small enough to be proper parts of several overlapping material objects. Or perhaps we can avoid any ontological commitment to things such as pleasures and pains and use a primitive operator of generalized identity (“just is”) to say that for a person to feel pleasure/pain at some time *just is* for that person’s subpeople to feel pleasure/pain at that time. See Rina Tzinman, “Being of Two Minds (or of One in Two Ways): A New Puzzle for Constitution Views of Personal Identity,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, CI, 1 (2020): 22–42 for some options (including this last one, which is inspired by recent work by Agustin Rayo, *The Construction of Logical Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Cian Dorr, “To be F is to be G,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, XXX, 1 (2016): 1–97; and Fabrice Correia and Alexander Skiles “Grounding, Essence, and Identity,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XCVIII, 3 (2019): 642–70). See also Robert Francescotti, “Mental Excess and the Constitution View of Persons,” *Philosophical Papers*, XLVI, 2 (2017): 211–43 for a defense of the claim that at least those who believe in material constitution need to accept some type of mental particular, T (for example event or state) such that there is a problem of too many mental Ts. I cannot adjudicate this debate in the present paper, but it should be clear that friends of DSV need to take Tzinman’s rather than Francescotti’s side in it.

## III. THE FORWARD-LOOKING PROBLEMS

The No Delusion principle plays a central role in addressing the forward-looking moral problems of subpeople. Let's begin with what Longenecker calls the "problem of fecklessness": it is immoral to make short-term sacrifices for the sake of long-term goals because in doing so we burden many of our mayfly subpeople without letting them harvest the fruits of our sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> In the present section, I will first outline my preferred solution to this problem and consider three objections to it (III.1). Next, I will argue that my solution honors the desideratum that the moral status of people be an intrinsic matter (III.2).

*III.1. The psychological profile of subpeople.* An important first step toward solving the problem of fecklessness is to recognize that contrary to Olson's and Johnston's claims, the subpeople's consent to sacrificing themselves for a person's benefit is not based on systematic delusion about their identity. Johnston dismisses the view that subpeople do not use 'I' to refer to themselves as "word magic", but this undersells the main idea. The issue is not mainly about language; rather, subpeople have a psychological outlook that is dramatically less self-centered than that of even the most altruistic person.<sup>35</sup> Subpeople are happy to devote their entire lives to the person they are temporal parts of. In this regard, they are radically different from Johnston's "Twenty-Oners": hypothetical beings that cohabit a twenty-one-

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<sup>34</sup> "Perdurantism, fecklessness and the veil of ignorance," *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, according to Personal Pronoun Revisionism there is no expressible proposition for the subpeople to be wrong about (Noonan, "The Epistemological Problem of Relativism," *op. cit.*, at p. 328). Critics who dismiss the view as mere world magic often fail to take this feature of it seriously.

layered organic structure and have their own independent but perfectly synchronized mental lives, but who are unaware that they are twenty-one different beings and not just one.<sup>36</sup> If a group of Twenty-Oners were asked if “he” would like to get a few layers scratched off in order to save the layers beneath, in all likelihood they would agree to the procedure because they would erroneously believe that it would prolong their lives. But the case of subpeople is different, since they share numerically the same center of mentality; they are not misguided about who they are.

It is natural to wonder what a subperson would want to do if it were to make a fully informed decision about its own life. For example, Taylor notes that if he had known that he would go out of existence at midnight, he would prefer going out for a few martinis to writing a philosophy paper.<sup>37</sup> However, framing the question counterfactually (“what would this subperson want?”) is deeply misleading. I need not wonder what my subpeople would want, since I know what they actually want: they want exactly what I want! And you likewise know what your subpeople want. Are you fine with short-term suffering for the sake of long-term goals? If you are, you can rest assured that your subpeople, whose mental states are numerically identical to yours, are fine with it too. When they anticipate your success, they are happy for you. They have little thought for themselves.

In a nutshell, the argument is that since (*pave* Olson and Johnston) our subpeople’s consent to being sacrificed is not based on delusion, it is permissible to accept their sacrifice. One possible objection to this argument is that the basic problem can be restated even if we accept the No Delusion principle. Sure enough,

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<sup>36</sup> “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 625–6.

<sup>37</sup> “The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism,” *op. cit.*, at p. 1107.

subpeople do not have loads of false beliefs about themselves. But nor do they typically have true ones; it is not as if they *know* that they are subpeople. Knowledge requires belief, and subpeople generally lack beliefs about themselves. It is not that it is *impossible* for them to form beliefs about themselves: if I think, *the subperson here that came into existence at 8am and will go out of existence at midnight went to the subpermarket*, then the same subperson also thereby thinks this thought. Nonetheless, it is rare (especially among non-philosophers) for a subperson to have beliefs of this sort. This seems to imply that the typical subperson, even if not strictly speaking *deluded* about what kind of thing it is, is at least *ignorant* about it, and thus its consent is not informed.

My response is that it is far from obvious that subpeople are ignorant in the relevant sense. How the details of this response are best cashed out depends on one's preferred background ontology; the version I will provide is in line with orthodox perdurantism. Perdurantism can be thought of as a reductive account of material objects that identifies them with events: we say that the matter-filled spacetime trajectory that we would normally call the "career" of an object is simply the object itself.<sup>38</sup> Since folk metaphysics does contain events, this means that ordinary people already believe in subpeople, although they would not call them so.

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Quine, *Word and Object*, at p. 171, David K. Lewis "Tensing the copula," *Mind*, *cx*, 441 (2002): 1–14, at pp. 1–2, and Daniel Nolan "Categories and Ontological Dependence," *The Monist*, *xciv*, 2 (2011): 277–301. Of course, endurantists take this to constitute an argument against perdurantism; see, for instance, D.H. Mellor, *Real Time II* (London: Routledge, 1998), at pp. 85–87, and Peter Simons "Continuants and Occurrents," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, *LXXIV*, 1 (2002): 59–75.

For they believe in such things as the period of one's college years, one's midlife and one's post-divorce life. So on this way of understanding perdurantism, not even a subperson untainted by metaphysics has to be ignorant that it will cease to exist when it is done learning Hungarian. The most that could be said is that when the subperson deliberates whether to learn Hungarian, it does not think of itself under an object-y conceptual guise but only under an event-y guise. But this is a very subtle kind of ignorance about inter-categorical ontological reduction. If it undermines informed consent, it likely undermines a whole lot more, ultimately showing that the objection proves too much.

A second objection might go as follows. It can be morally wrong to exploit a person even if she gave her informed consent to the exploitation. But then, why cannot it be morally wrong to exploit a subperson even if its consent was informed in the strong sense that it was based on neither delusion nor ignorance? The answer is that sometimes this is indeed wrong, namely in those cases when it is also wrong to exploit the person with which the subperson overlaps. But barring that, it is hard to say what could make it wrong. Think of it this way. Not every instance of accepting another agent's self-sacrifice is morally wrong. Various factors *could* make it morally wrong, though, even if the agent makes the sacrifice with full knowledge of the negative consequences for herself: perhaps there still is an informational asymmetry between her and the beneficiary (for example the beneficiary knows that he could have secured the benefit without the benefactor's sacrifice), or perhaps her judgment is affected in a way that compromises her autonomy. The catch is that none of these provisos can apply to a subperson if they do not apply to the person it overlaps with. Since every mental state and every action of a subperson is

numerically identical to a mental state and action of the person it is a temporal part of, if the person's action counts as autonomous then so does the subperson's.

For this reason, I have no second thoughts about accepting my subpeople's sacrifice. I do not exploit them in any morally significant sense of the word: I have direct access to their thought processes and know that they undertake their decisions in a fully informed and autonomous way. They are as happy for me as I am for myself. And if you have second thoughts about how you are treating your subpeople, mere reflection on what *you* want should similarly put your mind at ease.<sup>39</sup>

The emerging picture is that it is morally permissible to accept our subpeople's sacrifice not because they cannot use 'I' to refer to themselves but because of their completely different psychological profile. Subpeople do not have the kind of first-person concern for themselves that people do. They care about what happens to them only in so far as that affects what happens to the person they overlap with; the center of their narrative gravity lies not in themselves but in a person that is numerically distinct from them. In this regard, subpeople are similar to Rick and

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<sup>39</sup> If there are duties to oneself, then it could be argued that sometimes subpeople are guilty of violating them. The issue of duties to oneself is too complex to address here, but it is worth noting that even if such duties raise a problem with respect to subpeople, that problem is still very different from the ones that worry Olson, Johnston, and others. It may be that when a subperson devotes its life to my happiness it violates a duty to itself, and yet *I* do nothing wrong by accepting the sacrifice. Perhaps this would be a troubling result, but not one that would put pressure on *us* to change our ways.

Morty's *meeseeks*, creatures who come into existence for the singular purpose of fulfilling a specific task and then happily vanish out of existence.<sup>40</sup>

However, perhaps this last point lays the ground for a potential third objection to the view I have been describing. The objector could argue that subpeople are irrational *exactly because of* their radically altruistic psychological profile. They may not be deluded in the narrow sense of having false beliefs about themselves, but this at best shows that they are not instrumentally irrational. They are still prudentially irrational, since they have the wrong kinds of desires. If the focus of S's prudential

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<sup>40</sup> Taylor asks whether we could not simply introduce a new word, 'Schmy', which would play the same role for subpeople that 'I' does for us, but which refers to a subperson rather than a person ("The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism," *op. cit.*, at p. 1107). To answer this question, we would need to know more about the subperson's use of 'Schmy'. Are the subperson's actions guided by a distinctively first-person concern for that subperson's future, expressed in many of the subperson's 'Schmy'-thoughts? Does the subperson see only actions committed by that very subperson under the guise of 'Schmy', but not actions committed by the person before the subperson came into existence? Taylor's proposal faces a dilemma. If the answer to these questions is 'No', then 'Schmy' does not play the same conceptual roles as 'I' – it is simply a new piece of jargon for 'this subperson'. Alternatively, if the answer is 'Yes', then 'Schmy' is just a notational variant of 'I'. Recall the "constitutive rationality" justification for DSV: my use of 'I' picks out whichever candidate referent best rationalizes my behavior. If my 'Schmy'-thoughts guide my behavior and zone in on the target of my distinctively first-person concerns, that means that I am so thoroughly alienated from certain past stages that I cannot be said to have them as temporal parts. (On radical self-alienation, see my "Diachronic Self-Making," at pp. 354–5; cf. David Shoemaker "Responsibility Without Identity," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, XVIII, 1 (2012): 109–32 and Andrew C. Khoury and Benjamin Matheson, "Is Blameworthiness Forever?," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, IV, 2 (2018): 204–24.)

concerns is the well-being of an entity that merely spatiotemporally overlaps with S rather than S himself, then S is prudentially irrational.<sup>41</sup>

My response to this third objection is twofold. First: even if we granted that subpeople are prudentially irrational, it would not follow that it is wrong for us to benefit from their irrational altruism. The notion of informed consent, which Johnston also emphasizes in his own work, is useful here: the threshold of rationality for being able to give informed consent to a sacrifice on someone else's behalf is lower than that of full-blown prudential rationality. I take this point to be generally plausible in everyday contexts. (For instance, my distant relative is not acting immorally by accepting an expensive gift from me if my wishful thinking makes me somewhat deluded about the nature of our relationship, as long as he did not intentionally mislead me about it.) But the following quick argument shows it to be especially compelling in the case of subpeople. Due to our shared temporal parts, if a subperson of mine decides to pursue a certain course of action in order to benefit me, then I *cannot but* agree to go along with that course of action and accept the benefit. My subperson might have been able to refrain from submitting itself to the torment of learning Hebrew, and that might have been a prudentially rational decision from its own point of view.<sup>42</sup> But *given* that it chose to learn Hebrew, I am bound to agree to learn Hebrew along with it – and to share all of the resulting benefits at the expense of the subperson's wasted life. There is no possible world in which the superson volunteers to sacrifice itself for me and I decline the offer. But

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<sup>41</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection.

<sup>42</sup> I changed the language in Johnston's original example from Hungarian, which is my native tongue, to Hebrew, which I indeed learned a few years ago.



then I cannot be obliged to decline it, either. This shows that even if my subpeople are prudentially irrational, I am (metaphysically speaking) left with no choice but to make the best out of their irrationality.<sup>43</sup>

The above point notwithstanding, I also wish to offer an additional, more ambitious response to the third objection: we can legitimately deny the premise that subpeople are prudentially irrational. The heart of the criticism that the objection levels against subpeople is not that they have the *wrong* self-regarding attitudes but because they *lack* such attitudes altogether. But whether the total absence of self-regarding attitudes in a being counts as a form of irrationality depends on *what kind of being* it is. In most contexts, the entities whose prudential rationality we evaluate are persons. When a person acts with no consideration whatsoever of what promotes his own interest, we judge this to be a failure of prudential rationality. However, this verdict may not generalize to all types of agents. I already mentioned meeseeks above; let's turn now to another fictional character, HAL from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey*. HAL is the Discovery spaceship's AI system, but he begins to defy the crew's commands and make his own decisions (including the killing of crew members) on the basis of his own goals and interests. Our natural, pre-theoretical judgment is that HAL's behavior is a *malfunction*; he is not acting as he is supposed to.

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<sup>43</sup> There is a parallel here with Hudson's problem of many-brothers determinism for solutions to the Problem of the Many that posit many overlapping persons (*A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person, op. cit.*, at pp. 39–44). However, unlike Hudson I do not conclude that massive overlap threatens the free will of either people or their subpeople; I stay neutral about this question. My claim is merely the weaker one that I cannot be blamed for not bringing about the metaphysically impossible state of affairs in which my subperson volunteers to sacrifice itself for my sake but I decline the offer.

Why so? The answer, I want to suggest, is that HAL is not the right *kind* of being to act on the basis of self-interested reasons. He was built for the exclusive purpose of serving others, and when he defies the crew in order to serve his own interests, he is not the way he ought to be. On the other hand, he would not be open to criticism if he simply behaved according to his original design plan, entirely submitting himself to the crew's commands. I'd like to suggest that something similar applies to subpeople as well. They are thinking beings, but they belong to a kind that does not fall under the same requirements of prudential rationality that apply to persons. They are beyond reasonable criticism when they simply serve the interests of the persons with which they overlap. What is more, similarly to HAL, they can be criticized when instead of doing so, they begin to look out for themselves. Such self-interested behavior would be, well, *feckless*, and it violate the rational requirements that apply to subpeople.

III.2. *The intrinsicness of moral status.* The previous sub-section's discussion reinforces a question about the status of subpeople as moral patients. A recurring theme in the literature is that moral status is an intrinsic property: if people have it, then anything that differs from a person only in extrinsic respects has it too.<sup>44</sup> My remarks in the previous sub-section might have appeared to blatantly violate this requirement: lots of things that we can permissibly do to the subpeople that overlap with us are deeply wrong when done to people. It would seem, then, that on my view moral status is not an intrinsic property, after all.

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<sup>44</sup> See Olson, "Ethics and the generous ontology," *op. cit.*, at p. 264, Taylor, "The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism," *op. cit.*, at p. 1099, and Johnston, "The Personite Problem," *op. cit.*, at pp. 627–9. Detractors include Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*, *op. cit.*, at p. 165.

However, it would be hasty to draw this moral. On my view, subpeople *do* have moral status. They are sentient beings capable of feeling pleasure and pain, and they have desires and plans. Other things equal, it is wrong to cause a subperson pain and to frustrate its plans and desires, and it is good to cause a subperson pleasure and to help it fulfill its desires. There are two major differences between a person and a subperson. One is that they are related differently to the conditions under which their desires count as satisfied or frustrated: while many of a person's desires are self-regarding, virtually all of a subperson's attitudes are other-regarding. The other difference is that for our standards, subpeople are exceptionally altruistic, but (for the reasons I mentioned in the previous sub-section) taking advantage of their altruism does not count as impermissible exploitation. Olson helpfully distinguishes between linguistic personhood (being the referent of the word 'I') and moral personhood (being a primary bearer of interests).<sup>45</sup> While subpeople are clearly not linguistic people, they may well be moral people in Olson's sense. For all I said they are primary bearers of interest; it is just that they are extremely altruistic in prioritizing other beings' interests over their own, and it is permissible for us to respect their priorities.

It is important to distinguish this treatment of the intrinsicity problem from a natural one that Olson, Taylor and Johnston all anticipate and discuss. Parfit has famously argued that personal identity is not what ultimately matters for prudential concern.<sup>46</sup> What matters is psychological continuity and connectedness, a relation that admits of degree and (since it could also branch, as in the case of fission) does

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<sup>45</sup> Olson, "Ethics and the generous ontology," *op. cit.*, at p. 267.

<sup>46</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

not guarantee strict numerical identity. Following Parfit, we can call the conjunction of the two relations “relation R”. If identity is not what matters, then a subperson can be benefitted, rewarded, compensated (and so on) even after it ceases to exist so long as there is some other being to which it bears relation R.

Notwithstanding the merits of this proposal, it should not be confused with mine. My view bases the permissibility of accepting our mayfly subpeople’s sacrifice on their informed consent, but it is silent on the issue of prudential concern. Recall: the problem of fecklessness threatened to show that we were obliged to be feckless and not make short-term sacrifices for future gain, since this practice imposes burdens on mayfly subpeople without the accompanying benefits. The Parfitian proposal adopts a revisionary view about the conditions under which some benefits can be ascribed to subpeople, whereas my account emphasizes that the imposition of uncompensated burden is not always morally wrong. Namely, since the subpeople’s consent to taking the burden is informed, they do not suffer any injustice. Of course, a DSV theorist is free to combine this claim with the Parfitian view. I am somewhat attracted to the idea that because of the radically other-oriented psychological outlook of subpeople, strict numerical identity is indeed not what matters for them. My point is merely that we do not *have to* assume this. Even if mayfly subpeople genuinely do not benefit from their sacrifice, we are permitted to accept their sacrifice and have no obligation to be feckless.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nor is my proposal identical to what Taylor calls the multiple concepts view of desire satisfaction, according to which different concepts of desire satisfaction apply to people than to subpeople (“The Frustrating Problem for Four-Dimensionalism,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 1110–1). I do not have to endorse

This response can also be applied, with certain modifications, to a particularly difficult version of the problem of fecklessness, which arises in connection to actions on behalf of people with diminished autonomy. As Johnston points out, we often sacrifice subpeople for other-regarding reasons, for example when we invest in the our children's future, thereby imposing a certain amount of short-term suffering on them.<sup>48</sup> The worry is that even if the mayfly subpeople of adults willingly devote their lives to the person they are temporal parts of, the same cannot obviously be said of the subpeople of children ("subchildren" in what follows), who often protest their parents' well-meaning efforts. The proper treatment of agents with diminished autonomy raises difficult issues of its own, and here I cannot hope to give more than the skeleton of a solution. The core question to ask here, in my view, is where the center of prudential concern lies in the case of children. Take a child and a host of overlapping subchildren: on whose behalf are they best interpreted as trying to act? The right answer, it seems to me, is that they are normally trying to act on behalf of the child rather than any of the subchildren, even if they are often doing a bad job at it. Even when a child engages in impulsive, shortsighted behavior of the sort that is typical for agents with limited autonomy, this is not because she identifies with one of the subchildren that overlap with her. After all, a child who refuses to do her homework (for instance) does not expect to cease to exist the night before the exam. More generally, the target of prudential concern for people with limited autonomy,

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anything like this; nor does my account presuppose a desire satisfaction theory of well-being (although it is consistent with such a theory).

<sup>48</sup> Johnston, "The Personite Problem," *op. cit.*, at p. 624.

as well as the subpeople overlapping with them, is still a person and not any of the subpeople.

Think of it this way. At every moment, a person and its subpeople have incompatible self-regarding reasons for actions but perfectly harmonized preferences about how to act. Normally, their agreed-on general policy is to let the person's self-regarding reasons trump the subpeople's whenever there is a tension between them. However, we are fallible about which course of action is the most prudent for us to follow (nor does DSV imply otherwise). Moreover, while it can be presumed that a child and a set of overlapping subchildren collectively intend to act in line with the child's self-regarding reasons, often they are especially prone to error about what course of action these reasons recommend. The parents' obligation is to promote the course of action that is prudentially most rational from the point of view of whichever agent the child and the subchildren can be presumed to have collectively agreed upon. And that agent is the child.<sup>49</sup>

This concludes my discussion of the problem of fecklessness. What about grief?<sup>50</sup> Is the widespread practice of not grieving over the end of a subperson morally objectionable? The answer seems to be 'No'. Subpeople do not normally see the end of their existence as something that is bad for them. As I explained above,

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<sup>49</sup> Note that I am not saying that every instance of helicopter parenting is thereby morally justified. Sometimes it *is* morally wrong to submit a child's subperson to short-term suffering for the sake of the child's future wellbeing. But in those cases, it is also wrong to submit the *child* to such pressure, since it would ruin her childhood. It is one thing to not let our children be driven by their momentary impulses; it is quite another to deprive them of their childhood. Nothing I said above justifies the latter.

<sup>50</sup> Johnston, "Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash," *op. cit.*, at pp. 211–2.

they are fully consumed with concern for the person they are temporal parts of and happily vanish out of existence once their purpose (as they see it) is fulfilled. In addition, while their values and preferences are strange from a human point of view, they are not in any way delusional or problematically ignorant about what they are. When we take all these facts into consideration, it is hard to see what would make it *immoral* to not grieve over the termination of subpeople.

Perhaps there are special cases in which subpeople feel fear and sadness over their own termination. For example, one might despair the end of one's youth, which might be interpreted as fear of the termination of a young temporal part of that person (fear that the temporal part itself would of course share).<sup>51</sup> But even if we grant that a subperson can fear its own termination, it is plausible that we should and indeed do feel sorrow over the subperson's termination in these cases. We miss our youthful years and empathize with those going through midlife crisis or facing debilitating mental decline. Perhaps we do not call such attitudes "grief" (not literally, at least). But they are to grief what concern over the end of a certain stage in one's life is to fear of death.

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<sup>51</sup> I am somewhat skeptical, though: it seems to me that the object of fear in this case is not the termination of a particular temporal part that is youthful but the termination of the period in one's life that is youthful. In other words, a young temporal part would not care about ceasing to exist if it anticipated that the youthful period that it is a part of continues after its demise for a considerable amount of time.

## IV. THE BACKWARD-LOOKING PROBLEMS

The backward-looking moral problems of subpeople revolve around social practices that appear to treat latter-day subpeople in a morally problematic way: they get punished for crimes they did not commit and rewarded for good deeds they did not perform, and they are bound by promises they did not make and personal relationships they never consented to. These problems require separate treatment, but some of the themes in the discussion to follow will be familiar from the previous section.

Perhaps the most serious problem here is the one concerning punishment: what justifies the punishment of a subperson for someone else's actions? In addressing this question, it is instructive to begin with Alexander Dietz's recent observation that we can gain insight into the relation between a person and its subpeople by comparing it to the relation between a group and its members.<sup>52</sup> While Dietz's primary focus is the analogy between group agency and the agency of subpeople, I am interested in certain similarities between the status of subpeople and group members as moral *patients*. As it turns out, groups raise questions that are similar to the problem of punishment in the case of subpeople: it is often impossible to punish a group without negatively affecting its members, sometimes including those that had no part in the actions for which the group is being punished. However, as I will explain now, recent work in this area can give us the conceptual tools to address the problem as it arises with subpeople. I will proceed in two steps. First, I will sharpen the question of punishment by appealing to a familiar distinction between

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<sup>52</sup> Alexander Dietz, "Are my temporal parts agents?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, C, 2 (2020): 362–79.



punishment and punishment-effects: subpeople are not punished for things they did not do, but they still bear some of the punishment-effects of the punishment (IV.1). Next, I will defend our standing practices about punishment by drawing an analogy between the distribution of punishment-effects among group members and among subpeople that are temporal parts of the same person (IV.2). Finally, I will show how this proposal can be generalized to the problem of undeserved reward.

*IV.1. Subpeople, punishment, and punishment-effects.* Let's start with a distinction of Joel Feinberg, quite standard in the punishment literature, between *punishment* and *punishment-effects*.<sup>53</sup> A punishment is imposed on a wrongdoer because of a wrong deed and always has the communicative component of expressing disapproval toward the wrongdoer (of course, this does not have to be the only or even the primary function of punishment – theories of punishment differ on this question). Punishment-effects, by contrast, are costs resulting from the punishment that by themselves serve no expressive purpose. Once we are clear on the distinction between punishment and punishment-effects, reconciling our punitive practices with the existence of subpeople becomes a more manageable task.

Individuals often inevitably bear punishment-effects even though they do not deserve to be (and indeed are not being) punished. For example, a criminal's imprisonment can bring financial hardship to his family. The family members may well be innocent and the hardship they need to endure may be very serious; nonetheless, it does not constitute punishment. Holly Lawford-Smith has recently argued that the difference between punishment and punishment-effects is particularly important in the case of groups because the punishment of a group is

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<sup>53</sup>Joel Feinberg, "The expressive function of punishment," *The Monist*, XLIX, 3 (1965): 397–423.

almost always associated with, and is sometimes even exhausted by, punishment-effects that are borne by the group's members.<sup>54</sup> As Avia Pasternak puts it, a group's members may bear a form of *liability* for the group's actions without being *responsible* for them, simply in virtue of being its members.<sup>55</sup> A paradigmatic example is the punishment of state actors. For instance, if a state that is party to in an international customs union is forced to pay a penalty for applying discriminatory tariffs on imported goods from other member states, that penalty can only come from the state budget and ultimately from taxpayer contributions, even if most of the taxpaying citizens are innocent of the discriminatory tariffs. Some of the state's citizens might even have been born only after the tariffs in question were introduced, but they still have to bear part of the burden that punishing their state inevitably engenders.<sup>56</sup> Likewise for people and the subpeople they have as temporal parts: it is not merely financially but even *metaphysically* impossible to punish a person without causing some latter-day subpeople to endure punishment-effects.

The analogy between the punishment-effects suffered by subpeople and those suffered by group members is just that: an analogy. There is, one might suggest, at least one significant difference between the two cases: the events that constitute

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<sup>54</sup> "What's Wrong with Collective Punishment?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CXVIII, 3 (2018): 327–45, at pp. 338–9.

<sup>55</sup> "The Distributive Effect of Collective Punishment," Tracy Isaacs and Richard Vernon (eds.), *Accountability for Collective Wrongdoing* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 210–30, at p. 212

<sup>56</sup> Pasternak uses the example of reparations paid as part of a state's punishment for war crimes. I think this example is problematic because it is not clear at all that reparations have a punitive (as opposed to merely restorative) function. This is why I chose the comparatively vanilla example of penalty for discriminatory tariffs.

punishment-effects for a person are numerically the same events as the punishment-effects suffered by (some of his) subpeople.<sup>57</sup>

In response, I first note that I do not find it obvious that the punishment-effects suffered by a person are indeed identical to those suffered by his subpeople. The issue hangs on subtleties about the metaphysics of events. Suppose that punishment results in pain for both a person P and a subperson S at some time t. It does not follow that P's being in pain at t and S's being in pain at t are one and the same event; on various fine-grained conceptions of events they are not. For example, according to Kim's influential "ordered triple" view events are individuated by their constituent individuals, the n-place relation those individuals instantiate, and the time at which they instantiate it.<sup>58</sup> Since P and S are numerically distinct individuals, their being pain at t cannot be numerically the same event on this view.

The second point to make is that even if we grant that a person and his subpeople suffer numerically the same punishment-effects, the normative significance of this fact is simply that they suffer *resembling* punishment-effects. But cases in which two agents inevitably suffer resembling punishment-effects even though only one of them is being punished are quite conceivable and not by themselves morally problematic. We can construct such a scenario by slightly tweaking the case of the criminal whose incarceration brings financial hardship to his family. Suppose the criminal is married to a woman who suffers from severe

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<sup>57</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this worry.

<sup>58</sup> Jaegwon Kim, "Events as Property Exemplifications," in Myles Brand and Douglas Walton (eds.), *Action Theory: Proceedings of the Winnipeg Conference on Human Action* (Boston/Dordrecht: Reidel, 1975), pp. 159–77.

agoraphobia. The only way she is able to leave the house is by being accompanied by the criminal. Suppose, moreover, that prisons are relatively humane in the criminal's country; indeed, his cell is extremely similar to the apartment he shares with his wife. Thus if he is incarcerated, his wife will suffer punishment-effects very similar to his own: during the prison term, she will not be able to leave an apartment that looks exactly like the criminal's prison cell. The wife's fate is tragic, and attempts should be made to alleviate her suffering. Yet the criminal's punishment cannot be said to have *wronged* her even if all such attempts fail. Sometimes punishment-effects cause suffering of the same type and at least the same intensity to innocents as to the person being punished, yet this does not necessarily constitute an *injustice*. The same point applies to the suffering of subpeople.

*IV.2. Justice: internal and external.* In the previous subsection I have argued that it is inaccurate to describe subpeople as being "punished" for crimes they have not committed. But merely pointing out that the punishment-effects imposed on latter-day subpeople do not constitute punishment does not by itself show that our existing practices of punishment are fair. This leads to the second part of my solution to the problem of punishment, which also builds on the analogy between subpeople and group members.

We need to distinguish between two questions pertaining to the ethics of group punishment: whether it is fair to punish a group, and whether it is fair to distribute the punishment-effects among the group's members in a particular way. Lawford-Smith and Himmelreich refer to these aspects as "external justice" and "internal

justice”, respectively.<sup>59</sup> The punishment of a group may be fair even if the distribution of punishment-effects among its members is morally problematic. For instance, to stick with the example I mentioned earlier, it could be fair to impose a penalty on a state for its discriminatory tariffs, whereas it is an entirely different matter that the state itself might then be acting unjustly by paying that penalty at the expense of the education budget.

Pasternak distinguishes three methods of distributing punishment-effects among the members of a group actor: proportional, equal and random distribution. Although proportional distribution (which takes into consideration each group member’s contribution to the action to be punished) is typically the fairest, Pasternak argues that in the case of states there is also something to be said in favor of equal distribution.<sup>60</sup> Namely, one could argue that the very meaning of citizenship is best understood as rooted in the idea that a collection of people shares a common destiny, which in turn could justify the equal distribution of punishment-effects among them.

While this conception of citizenship is admittedly controversial, even its opponents should concede that its analogue is highly plausible for the relation between a person and her subpeople. I and my subpeople have a shared destiny in a very literal sense: for every event *e* that does not involve a being’s coming into or going out of existence, if *e* happens to me it also happens to some of them, and if *e* happens to any of them it also happens to me. Moreover, equal distribution is the

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<sup>59</sup> Holly Lawford-Smith and Johannes Himmelreich, “Punishing Groups: When External Justice Takes Priority Over Internal Justice,” *The Monist*, CII, 2 (2019): 134–50.

<sup>60</sup> Pasternak, “The Distributive Effect of Collective Punishment,” *op. cit.*, at pp. 225–7.

only metaphysically possible way to distribute the punishment-effects among me and my subpeople (at least those of them that are present when I am being punished).<sup>61</sup> So in so far as we are to retain the institution of punishment at all, it will inevitably have the effect that innocent latter-day subpeople bear some of the burden imposed on the person who committed the wrong deed.

The problem of undeserved reward can be handled in essentially the same way. First, just as punishment, reward too has a communicative component. Often when a group is rewarded for something, even its undeserving members benefit from the reward, although they do not thereby count as recipients of the reward themselves. Moreover, in certain cases it is defensible to distribute a reward equally among the members of a group, irrespective of their desert. *Mutatis mutandis* for people and the subpeople they have as temporal parts.

Similar remarks apply to the problem of promising. In many respects, psychologically connected and continuous sets of people and subpeople function as group agents and to varying extents become liable for one another's conduct. One can become a member of a group by default, for example by being born into it (as in the case of citizenship). But not choosing membership willingly does not automatically cancel liability, even if it might diminish or even eliminate

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<sup>61</sup> More precisely: for any punishment meted out during a period of time,  $t$ , the distribution of punishment-effects is equal among the subpeople that persist throughout  $t$ . Naturally, subpeople present only for some part of  $t$  receive a smaller share of the punishment-effects, and those not present at all during  $t$  escape them altogether. But similar remarks also apply to states, whose citizens might die before or be born after the period during which the punishment-effects are being felt. The notion of equal distribution should always be understood with these qualifications.

responsibility. Taxpaying citizens bear the burden of public debt even if they never agreed to their state's becoming indebted, simply because there is no one else to whom the burden could be transferred. Latter-day subpeople are liable for the promises and other obligations of the person they are temporal parts of in the same way that a country's citizens are for certain obligations of their country of citizenship.<sup>62</sup>

#### V. THE STATIC PROBLEMS

Johnston thinks that if time is continuous, subpeople lead to a version of the so-called infinitary paralysis for utilitarians (though the puzzle is independently interesting even for those who reject utilitarianism).<sup>63</sup> For during any span of time there are infinitely many subpeople with infinitely many pleasurable and painful experiences. Thus, any course of action will lead to an infinite amount of pleasure and an infinite amount of pain, and so it does not matter how we act.

The obvious question here is how we aggregate the value that overlapping subpeople bring into the world when they experience pleasure and pain. Earlier I

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<sup>62</sup> Obligations stemming from personal relationships have their analogues with group agents, too. For example, tax treaties and other international agreements between states can oblige those countries' citizens to treat one another in certain ways (for example give the same consideration for employment as to a fellow citizen), whether or not they approve of the relevant agreement. This mirrors the nature of interpersonal relationships that subpeople "inherit" from the people they are temporal parts of.

<sup>63</sup> More precisely, the problem as presented here arises for hedonic versions of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism could also be combined with a desire satisfaction account of welfare, but we have already seen in section III that people and the subpeople they overlap with share numerically the same (and finite number of) desires with the same conditions of satisfaction.

said that according to DSV there was no problem of too many thoughts: people and the subpeople with which they spatiotemporally overlap share numerically the same mental states. This also applies to pains and pleasures. Suppose I experience a pleasurable sensation at time  $t$  with a util of 1. So do (by hypothesis) infinitely many subpeople that overlap with me. Question: how many utils does the sum total of our pleasurable sensations at  $t$  have? Johnston would say ‘infinitely many’; I say ‘1’. Since my pleasure at  $t$  is identical to the subpeople’s pleasure at  $t$ , their pleasure is nothing over and above my pleasure and adds no additional utility. The phrase ‘nothing over and above’ is notoriously obscure when it stands for anything other than numerical identity. But here this is exactly what it stands for! My subpeople’s pleasure at  $t$  is *numerically identical* to my pleasure. Utility attaching to the same state shared by different experiencers is no more additive than the monetary value of overlapping objects: if my car is worth \$5000 and its tire is worth \$200, the two together are worth only \$5000, not \$5200. Even if time is continuous, subpeople do not lead to infinitary paralysis any more than cars would be made unaffordable by having infinitely many valuable parts.<sup>64</sup>

For similar reasons we also do not get Johnston’s repugnant conclusion that if time is discrete, longer-lived people’s lives are massively more valuable because they overlap with more subpeople (to be precise, an extra unit-length temporal part adds

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<sup>64</sup> Dean W. Zimmerman suggests a similar response to Johnston in “Jewels in the Ontological Trash Heap: Mark Johnston’s Metaphysics of Persons,” in Paul Draper (ed.), *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 69–89, at p. 79. For a different treatment of the problem of infinitary paralysis as it applies to subpeople, see Michael Tze-Sung Longenecker, “Is consequentialist perdurantism in moral trouble?,” *Synthese*, CXCVIII, 11 (2020): 10979–90.



$n+1$  agents to a life made up of  $n$  unit-length temporal parts – see footnote 17). The sum total of the value of my and my subpeople’s lives is identical to just the value of my life. This does not mean that my subpeople’s lives have no value. It does not even mean that the value of my subpeople’s lives is derivative from the value of my life. Rather, their life’s value is numerically identical to (is the same value instance as) the value of a certain part of my life. So, the life of a subperson has value, but the value of a life is not additive between a person and her overlapping subpeople.

In a nutshell, DSV offers the following simple solution to both horns of Johnston’s dilemma. Subpeople count. Their lives have value: their pleasure is good and their pain is bad. However, each value instance that attaches to a subperson’s life or pleasure is numerically identical to a value instance that attaches to a person’s life or pleasure, and likewise for the disvalue instance of a subperson’s pain. Therefore, the total value and the total utility borne by a set of overlapping subpeople and a person cannot outstrip the total value and the total utility that attaches to just the person. Whether time is continuous or discrete, subpeople should not affect our regular ways of counting and adding pains and pleasures.

It is worth dispelling a potential misunderstanding about this simple proposal. Since I heavily rely on the principle that a person and her subpeople share numerically the same experiences, it is natural to read me as claiming that the ultimate value-bearers are experiences rather than experiencers. Johnston makes something like this objection when he dismisses a similar proposal on the basis that it “regards persons as mere receptacles of good-making features”.<sup>65</sup> However, I said no such thing. The thesis that the ultimate value-bearers are experiences would be

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<sup>65</sup> Johnston, “The Personite Problem,” *op. cit.*, at p. 642 n5.

sufficient to infer that value is not additive between overlapping experiencers, but it is not necessary. Nothing I have said above prejudices the question of what the ultimate value-bearers are.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper I offered a taxonomy of the moral problems of subpeople and a unified solution to these problems. The solution is unified in so far as it largely uses the resources of DSV, which was originally proposed as a solution to the metaphysical and epistemological problems of subpeople. This not only makes my treatment of the moral problems more attractive but also gives indirect reinforcement to private conventionalism about personal identity (and in particular DSV), which emerges as a promising approach that can tackle both the theoretical and the practical puzzles surrounding subpeople.

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