

I think Mark describes a fascinating and serious difficulty for a wide range theories of personal identity. I will focus on the “worms” version of four-dimensionalism.

Here is one of Mark's main examples. Mark decides to learn Hungarian in the month of May, before going on a trip to Budapest. Mark argues that, if four dimensionalism is true, then his decision was *morally impermissible*. Call this **the absurd result**.

Mark's argument that four-dimensionalism leads to the absurd result goes as follows. On four-dimensionalism, there is a “personite” who is a temporal part of Mark and who exists just during the agonizing month of May in which he learns Hungarian. Call this personite **Shorty**. Mark argues Shorty should have a moral status, just like a complete person, and so have right not to be mistreated. But then Mark has infringed on that right, since his decision to learn Hungarian led to Shorty's doing nothing but learn Hungarian for its short life, with no benefit to itself. Call this **the argument from moral status**.

Does the four dimensionalist have a plausible way to block Mark's argument from moral status, which is meant to show four dimensionalism has the absurd result, that it is impermissible to learn Hungarian?

While I am very sympathetic to Mark's worry for four-dimensionalism, I will try out a few responses on behalf of the four dimensionalist.

(1) First the four-dimensionalist might agree that every subject S with the right intrinsic character (e. g. the capacity to suffer) has a moral status *in roughly this sense*: S has a right not to be mistreated by any distinct individual. Now notice that in explaining what having a mor-

¹ This was a comment on an early draft of Johnston's fascinating paper “The problem of personites”, now published in *Nous* (“The personate problem”, 2016). Johnston has since discussed in detail my first style of response – the response concerning “distinct individual” discussed under (1) below – in another paper (“Personites, Maximality and Ontological Trash”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 30, 2016), at p. 211ff. The basic idea of response is that when ethical principles invoke the idea of “distinct individual” or “same individual”, four-dimensionalists should understand that idea, not in terms of strict identity or distinctness, but in terms of the co-personality relation.

al status comes to we use the notion of “distinct individual”, or “the other”. So the question arises, how would the four dimensionalist understand this notion?

He might naturally suggest that in explaining a subject’s S having moral status we should understand a “*distinct individual*” to be an individual whose temporal stages are not co-personal with S’s temporal stages.

Now notice that Mark and the personite Shorty he has as a part are not distinct individuals in this sense: for their temporal stages are co-personal. So, on this four-dimensionalist interpretation of moral status, even if Shorty has moral status, it does not follow that it has a right not to be infringed upon by *Mark*. So, on this four-dimensionalist interpretation of moral status, the argument from moral status for the impermissible result is blocked. For all that argument says, it is perfectly permissible for *Mark* to cause Shorty to learn Hungarian.

Now consider another of Mark’s examples. Suppose that there is a small person lodged alongside your right lung, who suffers horribly when you breathe heavily. You and the small person don’t have any co-personal person stages. So the present four dimensionalist interpretation of moral status yields in this case the intuitively correct verdict that it is wrong for you to decide to go for run, for that harms a “distinct individual” while not providing any compensating benefit.

Does this response face any serious problems?

????? Take another case: Mark is about to be hit by a car. A bystander violently pushes him away, so that he has a bad fall but the car misses him. It looks like what the bystander did was morally permissible, even morally required. But notice that some of Mark’s short-lived personites were badly scraped up, yet they themselves received no compensatory benefit, because they ceased to exist once the incident was over anyway. If those personites have moral status in their own right, how is this morally permissible? The reply might be that Mark himself receives a benefit: he lives on. And these personites and Mark are not distinct individuals, in sense relevant here. They are as one. Another point is that the personites (like Mark) care very much about Mark and his continued existence. So, in causing Mark to live on, the bystander is causing the personites to get something they very much want (and would want even if they were told of the truth of four dimensionalism). ???????

One question is this: if four dimensionalism is right, then why is it reasonable to think that this is the right way of interpreting the rights that come with having moral status? Does this not look arbitrary to read “distinct individual” in this way – rather than as meaning simply

“numerically distinct individual”? Well, the four dimensionalist might answer: because it would fit our considered judgments about cases if we knew all the relevant facts, including the fact that four-dimensionalism is true. For instance, in Mark’s case about learning Hungarian, even if the philosophy oracle tells that four dimensionalism is true, we still judge it is morally permissible for Mark to cause his personite Shorty to learn Hungarian, while we would judge that it is wrong for *Mark’s neighbor* to enlist Mark in Hungarian classes without his consent.

Mark does not consider this kind of response. Maybe there is some serious problem with it, but I thought it was at least worth mentioning.

(2) Now I turn to a second response to Mark’s argument. On this response, personites do not in any sense have a moral status at all, even if maximal persons do. On this response, Shorty doesn’t have any kind of moral status on its own, even though Mark does. This too would block Mark’s argument from moral status for the impermissible result, because then there would be no reason for thinking it is impermissible for Mark to cause Shorty to learn Hungarian, if that this brings Mark some later benefit in interacting with Hungarians. Call this the **unequal status response**.

As Mark notes, on the unequal status response, the property of having a moral status comes out as extrinsic. The only reason why Shorty doesn’t have a moral status is he is not a *maximal* series of person stages and hence not a full-fledged person: there are person stages which come before and after Shorty.

But, against this, Mark insists “moral status is not an extrinsic matter” (13). This is how he would object to the unequal status response.

But the reductive four-dimensionalist might respond as follows. The reductive four dimensionalist already holds that the property of being a person is extrinsic, since he holds whether a series of co-personal person stages counts as a person depends on whether it is maximal. In addition, he probably should hold that even the property of being consciousness is extrinsic, also because of considerations of maximality (Sider 2003, Merricks 1998). Once the reductive materialist says these things, it looks like just another drop in the bucket to add that the property of having moral status is extrinsic too. He could treat this as another surprising discovery, rather than as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Yes, it is pretty counterintuitive that all these properties should turn out to be extrinsic. But the reductive four dimensionalist might say that the intuitive cost of his view must be meas-

ured against its many theoretical benefits. It is overall much better than alternatives that might more easily avoid Mark's puzzle about personites, for instance, the soul pellet view.

(3) Now I turn to one last response to Mark's argument from moral status against four dimensionalism. I will call it the "**no special status**" response.

On this view, neither persons nor personites have a special moral status, in the deontological, "side-constraint" sense that conflicts with consequentialist ethical theories. Mark considers this response. He says that, on this response, "we must abandon the special protections which deontology demands for beings with a moral status". Given no special status, Mark's argument from moral status no longer applies.

The no special status response goes naturally with consequentialism. On the face of it, given consequentialism, even if four dimensionalism is true, Mark's decision to learn Hungarian was morally ok. True, Shorty suffers a bit in learning Hungarian. But he is getting what we want: he wants to learn Hungarian. True, he doesn't get the benefits of learning Hungarian, because he only exists for the month of May. But Mark's latter day personites do. They can order in Hungarian at restaurants, and make some new Hungarian friends. So it looks like the benefits of Mark's decision outweigh the costs.

Mark though raises a problem. He says that consequentialism and four dimensionalism (and the assumption that time is discrete) together have the following consequence: "other things being equal, the interests of the presently rich should be privileged over those of the presently poor", because "an acceptable consequentialist policy should perhaps be sensitive to the *expected* number of personites who will benefit", and because in general the rich live longer than the poor and so house more personites.

I have a few questions about this. (1) Is this a consequence of every form of consequentialism? Consequentialism is a very flexible doctrine. (What about prioritarian forms, for instance?) (2) It might help to describe a concrete case, showing how consequentialism delivers the intuitively wrong verdict in that case, given the facts. (3) Isn't Mark describing here a general problem for consequentialism (since it is reasonable to think independent of 4Dism that all else being equal longer lives contain greater good)? – it's not totally clear to me why he puts the blame on four dimensionalism.

(Mark also raises an intriguing problem, which he thinks arises if "time is continuous": the problem of "infinitarian paralysis". I wonder if the four-dimensionalist might reply as follows. All personites are non-instantaneous, because, intuitively, having any occurrent mental

state – hearing a musical note or feeling pain – takes time. Also, mental states are realized by spatial-temporal neural patterns, which take time. True, if time is continuous, there is still an infinite number of personites within any lifetime, because there is an infinite number of possible ways of partitioning a person into non-instantaneous personites. But of course many of the personites in this infinite set will be overlapping, so it would seem like double counting to count them all. It would seem that to compute the amount of goodness in a life or a situation we must use some partition of a life into a finite number of non-overlapping non-instantaneous personites. Then there is no reason to question the standard assumption that we can do only a finite amount of good or bad.