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Moral Choices for Our Future Selves

An Empirical Theory of Prudential Perception and a Moral Theory of Prudence

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1. Introduction

In the second chapter, I elaborated the theoretical basis of my normative theory guiding one's present self in diachronic self-regarding decisions, which involve oneself and have consequences for one's future self. The first element of the theoretical basis of my approach is the thesis that prudence as care for oneself is moral, which is based on two arguments: first, imprudent acts harm one's future self; and second, a moral agent exhibits basic care for herself when she justifies her actions to the other agents and thus also to herself. The second element of the theoretical basis of my approach to diachronic self-regarding decisions is an empirically plausible model of the human agent (i.e., the minimal, realistic model of the agent), to whom I refer as self. A person's self is an agent that is situated at a temporal stage of the person and coexists with the person. The agent of the minimal, realistic model is minimally temporally extended and is characterized by a set of normative principles of action and care for the future self, which depends on her perceived psychological connection with the future self. The third element of the theoretical basis of my approach is the set of morally relevant features of the present-self–future-self relationship: the asymmetry of decisional power between the two selves; the indeterminacy of the future self's identity and existence; the present self's objective ignorance of the future self's identity and existence, and future events that will occur; and the strong causal relation between the two selves.

The aim of this chapter is to defend a normative theory of prudence regulating the relationship between one's present and future selves and guiding one's present self in diachronic self-regarding decisions: the *Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions*. First, I elaborate the normative requirements of diachronic self-regarding decisions, which constitute the Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions.

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This theory consists of three principles: (i) the *obligation to preserve one's future agency*, (ii) the *right to an open present*, and (iii) *forward-looking self-regarding responsibility*. The obligation to preserve one's future agency requires one's present self to avoid choices that jeopardize the necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles of action. The future self's right to an open present consists of the future self's claim to pursue her set of normative principles of action. Forward-looking self-regarding responsibility refers to the present self's responsibility to the future self for the predictable effects of the present self's actions on the future self. I also contend that, in my Moral Theory of Prudence, prudence is a moral requirement because prudence as care for oneself applied to the relationship between one's earlier and later selves requires protecting the very heart of morality: moral agency.

I then discuss the possible objections that may be raised against my approach to diachronic self-regarding decisions. Some derive from the typical problems that every normative account regarding one's future selves encounters, namely, the impossibility of attributing moral claims to a not-yet-existent agent (i.e., the future self), the intrapersonal nonidentity problem arising from the future self's indeterminacy, and the possibility that one's future self will never come to exist. Other objections are specific to the moral requirements of my theory: the impossibility of having obligations to oneself, the absence of backward-looking self-regarding responsibility in the case of identity change, and the irrelevance of establishing forward-looking self-regarding responsibility.

Finally, I discuss the current philosophical positions on diachronic self-regarding decisions and identify the differences between them and the Moral Theory of Prudence.

2. The Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions

The Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions regulates the relationship between a person's present and future selves. Its requirements descend from the features of the present-self–future-self relationship and the minimal, realistic account of practical identity. In other words, the features of their relationship and their characterization as minimal, realistic agents make it fitting (i.e., appropriate) to derive such requirements. The latter are pro tanto moral requirements, namely, they provide a reason to act on their basis, but they can be trumped by other moral considerations. As the present-self–future-self relationship involves prudence (i.e., care for oneself) and I consider prudence a moral requirement, I define this theory of prudence as moral.

In this section, I present the normative requirements of my theory and take the last step to support the thesis that prudence is moral by showing that the requirements of my theory protect the condition of being a moral agent. In the next section, I respond to the main possible objections to my theory.

2.1 The present self's obligation to preserve the future self's agency

Although the present self's decisions influence the future self's existence and identity (i.e., her set of normative principles), the future self is not completely defined at the time that a diachronic self-regarding decision is made. The future self is not present at the time of the decision: she is yet to come. This is the cause of the future self's vulnerability and the present self's objective ignorance about the future self's normative principles and existence. The indeterminacy of the future self in the present-self–future-self relationship is the main difference between this relationship and the usual moral relationships we have with contemporary parties. This indeterminacy makes it difficult to regulate the relationship between one's present and future selves. In fact, it gives rise to the problem of multiple future selves: in diachronic self-regarding decisions, there can be infinite possibly occurring future selves of a person, depending on the present self's choices and future events that will occur. However, as long as the future self is an agent,[1] the essential components of her agency (i.e., her being an agent) are known. The present self knows that the future self will have a set of normative principles motivating her actions. The latter component of agency enables one to determine the first two moral requirements of the present-self–future-self relationship without the need to specify how one's future self will be and which normative principles she will pursue, thus solving the problem of multiple future selves.

Given the asymmetry of decisional power, the present self may prevent the future self from the pursuit of the future self's set of normative principles; for instance, the present self could decrease the future self's lifespan through unhealthy choices. This action is not morally justified because it is based on an asymmetrical relation of decisional power that results only from the direction of time and causality. The future and present selves have the same characteristics as agents and thus are equally entitled to pursue their own normative principles.[2]

As I argue in more detail when discussing objections to my theory,[3] I contend that the equal moral worth of a person's diachronic selves is not undermined by the temporal position of such selves in a person's life. In other words, the *not-yet-existence* of one's future self does not make a difference in the moral worth of this self as an agent; thus, rights can be

attributed to the future self. The first requirement of the Moral Theory of Prudence is grounded in three statements: (a) the present and future selves are both agents and thus equally entitled to pursue their own normative principles; (b) a self's temporal location in a person's life does not affect that self's moral worth and thus agency; and (c) in terms of decisional power, a person's present self is more free than her future self solely because the former precedes the latter. I derive two considerations from these statements. First, a person's present self is not justified in undertaking actions that prevent this person's future self from pursuing her set of normative principles. Second, the present self should not hinder the future self's pursuit of the future self's normative principles and the future self should not hinder the present self's pursuit of the present self's normative principles. On the basis of these two considerations, the Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions requires a diachronic self-regarding obligation of the present self: preserving the future self's agency so that the future self can pursue her normative principles, compatibly with the present self's possibility of pursuing her own ones. This obligation ensures the future self the same conditions of action of the present self: both should be able to pursue their own sets of normative principles.

The future self's set of normative principles is not known yet in the present, but this does not mean that the present self should avoid making choices that jeopardize the pursuit of any set of normative principles. This request would be too demanding and hinder the present self's pursuit of her own set of normative principles. The obligation to preserve the future self's agency descends from the features of the present-self–future-self relationship and the minimal, realistic account of practical identity so it has to be based on them. In particular, the equal claim of the present and future selves to pursue their own sets and the objective ignorance of the future self's set specify the requirement of such an obligation: the present self should make choices that, while enabling the pursuit of her set, enable the future self to change the life path taken by the present self, in case the future self will have a different set. As a consequence, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency requires to make choices that do not jeopardize the necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles.

The necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles are the elements that enable the pursuit of each possible set of normative principles that a person's self can choose. Specifying the exact index of such conditions is out of the scope and aim of the Moral Theory of Prudence, as the latter is not a theory of the good life. Yet I can list some necessary conditions on which we expect an overlapping consensus among various approaches to agency and the good life, such as health, adequate education, income, and basic rights like the freedom to develop and express

critical thought. Nussbaum's ten central *capabilities* could be read as necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles (Nussbaum 2006, 76–78). The capabilities are the set of means that enable people to achieve the doing and beings that they want to achieve (Sen 1979, 1999, 2009; Nussbaum 2000, 2006). Rawls' primary goods could be considered as necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set as well. In Rawls' theory of justice, primary goods enable citizens of a well-ordered society to pursue a wide range of rational plans of life. There are natural primary goods such as health and vigor and social primary goods such as basic rights and liberties, income and wealth, and self-respect (Rawls 1999, 79, 380, 386, 2001, 57–59). Of course, if a necessary condition is partly independent of a person's actions such as health, the present self is required to protect the aspects of such a condition on which she has control; for instance, she should not smoke.

Let us see what the obligation to preserve the future self's agency requires in practice in the diachronic self-regarding decision of whether to dedicate oneself to an athletic career early in life. When making such a choice, one does not know whether one's future self will approve of the earlier self's professional training and sacrifice of opportunities of education in favor of the athletic career. The Moral Theory of Prudence requires a young athlete who wants to become a professional athlete to make choices granting her a complementary education and at the same time her current specialization in the athletic career. A complementary education is a necessary condition for the pursuit of any set of normative principles—as it lays the basis for the pursuit of different careers in the future—while the specialization in the athletic career is part of the young athlete's current set of normative principles.

It is noteworthy that the present self's obligation to preserve the future self's agency does not imply value judgments of a self's set of normative principles. The aim of the Moral Theory of Prudence is not to guide the agent to find the best or most valuable set of normative principles; rather, it is to guide a person's present self in making a diachronic self-regarding decision that preserves the agency of this person's future self, namely, one that enables the future self to pursue her normative principles.

It may seem that the obligation to preserve the future self's agency is incompatible with the very process of making a decision, which necessarily requires the selection of an option and the exclusion of the alternatives. Such a process may be interpreted as violating the present self's obligation to preserve the future self's agency. However, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency does not mean always keeping a self's options open and ready to be chosen. Rather, it involves choosing options that, by protecting the necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles, enable one's future self to take a different life path in case the path on

which she finds herself (i.e., the path "inherited" from the earlier self) is not consistent with her set of normative principles. For the same reason, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency does not conflict with one's long-term life plan. In fact, one's present self is free to pursue a long-term plan as long as she does not undermine the necessary conditions that enable one's future self to pursue her set of normative principles.

2.2 The future self's right to an open present

The present self's obligation to preserve the future self's agency can be postulated as the counterpart of the right to an open present that I attribute to the future self. The right to an open present is the application to the future self of the *right to an open future* that Feinberg (1992) attributes to children. Feinberg's right to an open future arises from a case of intergenerational ethics regarding overlapping generations, namely parents and children. It consists of autonomy rights that are to be preserved for the child until she is an adult and that can be violated in advance by the parents. This violation consists of cutting off certain key options in the present that the child will no longer have when she will be adult.

Since my approach involves practical agents, I propose attributing the right to an open future to one's future self. The latter will exist in the future, but at the time in which she exists, her agency is present, not future. Therefore, I call this right the future self's right to an open present. The right to an open present consists of the future self's claim to pursue her set of normative principles of action. As seen, each diachronic self of a person is entitled to pursue her own set of normative principles. Therefore, the future self's right to an open present is limited, like the obligation to preserve the future self's agency, by the present self's right to pursue her set of normative principles. The reciprocal limitation that each self of a person exercises on the other ones in my Moral Theory of Prudence is a form of fairness to oneself (Arvan 2020, 64, 79): each self has the same right to an open present toward the earlier selves and owes the same obligation to preserve the future agency to the later selves.[4] This reciprocal limitation avoids that a person's self is favored over the other diachronic selves of a person or sacrifices more than them.

Feinberg contends that the adult's right to autonomy prevents the right to an open future from being ascribed to the individual's future self, for the adult's present autonomy "takes precedence even over his probable future good" (Feinberg 1992, cit., 78). In contrast, I attribute this right to the future self for two reasons. First, in the minimal, realistic model of practical identity, I consider one's diachronic selves as if they were numerically distinct and contend that they are actually distinct if one changes her core normative

principles. Second, the child's and future self's moral positions are similar in that neither can defend her own present interests against the other party in the relationship (i.e., the parents or present self, respectively). Moreover, the existence, identity, and future conditions of both the child and future self are highly affected by the other party and not completely known in the present. I hold that the future self's right to an open present does not conflict with the present self's autonomy because in the Moral Theory of Prudence, this right does not prevent the present self from pursuing her set of normative principles.

I define the principle to protect the future self's open present as a right because, first, it is an application of Feinberg's right to an open future and, second, the language of rights gives precise expression to a structure of decisional power and freedom, such as that of diachronic self-regarding decisions. The individual's present self has more decisional power than the individual's future self; with this power, the present self can limit the future self's justified freedom to pursue her set of normative principles (justified because the future self is an agent). However, I subscribe neither to a theory of rights nor to a rights-based morality.[5]

The right to an open present provides an argument in favor of the pro tanto moral impermissibility of suicide. Suicide can partly be considered a diachronic self-regarding decision because it significatively involves oneself and has consequences for one's later self. It is only partly a diachronic self-regarding decision because it also involves other people, for instance, the relatives and friends of the person committing suicide. Suicide is an interrupted diachronic self-regarding decision because, in such a choice, we cannot say that the future self is not yet existent; rather, the future self will not exist. Committing suicide closes the future self's present by nullifying her possibility to pursue her set of normative principles. Therefore, suicide violates the future self's right to an open present. This right supports only pro tanto—and not absolutely—the moral wrongness of suicide for two reasons. First, suicide is a diachronic self-regarding decision only in part. Thus, other moral requirements descending from one's relationships with other people may override that right. Second, the Moral Theory of Prudence regulates one aspect of one's life (i.e., the moral relation between one's present and future selves in diachronic self-regarding decisions) through pro tanto principles. Thus, the theory admits that other self-regarding moral principles are involved in a high-stakes decision such as suicide and can be weightier than the right to an open present. For instance, the present self's requirement to cease the pain due to a terminal illness or a condition of constant suffering may override the future self's right to an open present.

In the previous chapter,[6] I showed that the future self has self-regarding veto power over the present self's plans and commitments, in the sense that

the future self can abandon them. The right to an open present justifies the future self's use of self-regarding veto power in case the latter is different from the earlier self (i.e., the future self has a different set of core normative principles). In fact, if the present and future selves are different, the future self will limit her life options and plans if she pursues the earlier self's plans. The future self's adherence to a decision made by the earlier self that the former neither shares nor supports is a lack of authenticity,[7] as in this case the future self's behavior is not befitting of a practical agent, who pursues her set of normative principles and not the set of another agent (i.e., the earlier self). Conversely, if the future self is identical to the present self, the two have the same core normative principles, and it would make no sense for the future self to stop pursuing plans that she herself wants to carry out.

My justification of the case in which the future self should exercise self-regarding veto power is similar to the conclusion that Bykvist (2003) reached, in his *harmony view*, regarding conflicts of preferences between an individual's past and present selves. Such preferences can be considered as a component of an agent's set of normative principles. For Bykvist, when making a choice, the present self should take into account the past self's preference that a state of affairs take place at a later time (thus in the present self's time) only if the past self's preference is sustained by the present self's preferences (Bykvist 2003, 124). In other words, one's past preferences count only if they are the same as one's present preferences.

2.3 The present self's forward-looking self-regarding responsibility

The last principle of the Moral Theory of Prudence regards the present self's moral responsibility, namely responsibility based on moral considerations (Talbert 2019; van de Poel 2011, 37). Two kinds of responsibilities are relevant in a theory regulating the present-self–future-self relationship: *forward-looking* and *backward-looking* responsibilities.

In my framework reading diachronic self-regarding decisions as interagential, I conceive of forward-looking responsibility as the relation in which one's self is responsible in the present to one's later self for an action that the present self takes and its consequences in the future. Notwithstanding the longstanding debate on moral responsibility and its attribution, many philosophical approaches agree on at least three conditions for the attribution of forward-looking responsibility (e.g., Jonas 1984, 90; Noorman 2020): (i) there is a causal connection between the agent and the outcome of her actions—that is, she has causal influence and control over the occurrence of the outcome; (ii) the agent is able to consider the possible consequences of her actions; and (iii) she chooses freely, namely without being forced by

other individuals. In the relationship between the present and future selves, I verify whether the three conditions for the attribution of forward-looking responsibility are fulfilled in diachronic self-regarding decisions. The choice made by the present self in a diachronic self-regarding decision is controlled by her—that is, the present self could have decided differently—and, in light of the strong causal relation between the present and future selves and the direction of causality and time, her decision affects the future self. Therefore, condition (i) is fulfilled. The strong causal relation is the fourth feature of the present-self–future-self relationship that I described in Chapter 2. The present self is aware of the effects of her action on the future self that are predictable at the moment of the decision, thus condition (ii) is fulfilled. The present self is not responsible, however, for consequences that she cannot foresee because of objective ignorance (the third feature of the present-self–future-self relationship). Condition (iii) is assumed by default because diachronic self-regarding decisions concern the individual's relationship with herself. If another individual forces or influences the agent's choice in a diachronic self-regarding decision, the decision is no longer self-regarding. The three conditions for ascribing forward-looking responsibility to the present self with regard to her decisions affecting the future self are thus satisfied in diachronic self-regarding decisions. As responsibility usually regards interpersonal relationships, I call the present self's responsibility to the future self *forward-looking self-regarding responsibility*.

In my framework, in which diachronic self-regarding decisions are interagential, I conceive of *backward-looking self-regarding responsibility* as the relation in which one's self is responsible in the present for a past action taken by one's earlier self. Is such a responsibility applicable to the future self for the actions undertaken by the present self? This question cannot be answered within the framework of the Moral Theory of Prudence because doing so requires taking a stance on the relationship between backward-looking responsibility and personal identity—and thus a position in the metaphysical debate on personal identity. In fact, answering this question would require me to defend a substantial theory on backward-looking responsibility—namely, to establish whether this responsibility depends on the relation of identity between selves, on Parfit's relation *R*, or on another relation among one's successive selves.[8] This cannot be settled through the framework of the Moral Theory of Prudence, which comprises the four features of the present-self–future-self relationship and the account of the practical agent. Therefore, with regard to responsibility in diachronic self-regarding decisions, the Moral Theory of Prudence establishes only forward-looking self-regarding responsibility.

2.4 The third step toward defending the morality of prudence: The protection of moral agency in the Moral Theory of Prudence

In the previous chapter, I took the first two steps toward defending the morality of prudence. I contended that, first, prudence is a moral requirement because it avoids some conduct that harm the individual's future self;[9] and, second, moral agents have a basic care for themselves, which consists of justifying their actions to themselves.[10] Now, I take the final step in defense of the morality of prudence.

My normative theory of diachronic self-regarding decisions is based on an account of practical identity that admits the possibility that an agent does not temporally extend to the duration of a person's life. Within a framework of practical identity that admits this possibility, the future self's agency—which includes moral agency (i.e., taking actions whose reasons are intersubjectively justifiable)—can be threatened by the present self's choices. The future self is an agent, and being an agent entails pursuing one's set of normative principles. As the present self's advantageous position in time can limit the future self's agency, the Moral Theory of Prudence requires the present self to preserve the future self's agency and grants the future self the right to an open present. In my theory, prudence as care for oneself is moral because that care is regulated by two moral requirements (namely, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency and the right to an open present) that protect a fundamental component of agency: pursuing one's set of normative principles. Agency is at the heart of morality, as being an agent is a necessary condition for being moral, that is, for moral agency. In other words, in the Moral Theory of Prudence, if the individual's present self respects the normative requirements of the theory, she is prudent in the sense that she cares for the future self by protecting the latter's agency.

3. Replies to the main objections to the Moral Theory of Prudence

In this section, I address the main objections that may be raised against my Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions.

3.1 The attribution of a right to a not yet (and maybe never) existing self

As anticipated, my Moral Theory of Prudence is not a theory of rights, although one of its normative requirements is the future self's right to an

open present. I am open to the possibility that the principle of protecting the future self's open present cannot be defined as a right under some theories of rights, such as the will theory.[11] However, I maintain that this principle has a normative force, even if it is not a right according to some theories. It can be more generally interpreted as the future self's moral claim that arises from the present-self–future-self relationship and her being an agent and that results in a moral obligation of the present self—specifically, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency.

One main objection may be raised against the attribution of a right or moral claim to one's future self. In intergenerational ethics, the view according to which rights are predicted of existing beings rejects the attribution of rights to future generations (Beckerman and Pasek 2001, 15; De George 1981; Macklin 1981). Similarly, in this view, it may be objected that the future self does not exist at the time of a diachronic self-regarding decision and thus should not be entitled to any right. My answer to this objection is that a self's not-yet-existence makes no moral difference in the attribution of rights to her, as I show in the following example. If somebody injects the virus of a fatal disease into an individual's body, the right to life of the individual (or, we can say, of the individual's present self) is violated. If the individual is injected with a variant of the fatal virus that has a long latency without any symptoms and she will die in 15 years' time, this injection is a violation of her future self's right to life, even though her future self is not present at the time the virus is injected.[12] I do not consider the time at which the virus activates to be morally relevant in ascribing rights to the individual's diachronic selves. One's present and future selves do not have morally different statuses. On the basis of the same reasoning, I contend that the normative force of the right to an open present does not decrease as a person ages. As long as a person is an agent, she has a set of normative principles to pursue. As aging occurs, a person may have less energy and less time ahead of her in which to realize her projects, but these conditions do not reduce her right to pursue her set of normative principles.

It is possible that an individual's future self will not come to exist, if the individual dies prematurely. Thus, it can be objected that, by respecting the obligation to preserve the future self's agency, the present self limits her freedom in favor of an agent who may not come into existence. Uncertainty about our future existence affects every aspect of our mortal life. In synchronic moral relationships with other individuals, we face the same issues: our moral commitments toward them could be interrupted by our own or their deaths. However, in our everyday deliberations with other people, we act *as if* we and the other parties had normal lifespans. I suggest a similar reasoning for the diachronic self-regarding right that I am considering: the present self owes to the future self an open present and acts as if the future self will exist.

3.2 The intrapersonal nonidentity problem in the Moral Theory of Prudence

The nonidentity problem is usually treated as an interpersonal issue typical of intergenerational ethics (Schwartz 1978; Kavka 1981; Parfit 1984, ch. 16; 2017; Woodward 1986; Boonin 2014). It consists in the paradox of simultaneously holding the *person-affecting* view and the comparative notion of harm. According to the person-affecting view, an act is wrong, or at least worse than another, only if there is at least one person for whom the act makes things worse or if there is at least one person harmed by that act. The comparative notion of harm holds that an act bringing a person into existence whose life is worth living but flawed and who would have never existed without that act is an act that does not make things worse for or harm that person (Roberts 2020).

The future self's indeterminacy seems to give rise to an *intrapersonal nonidentity problem*: the action of an individual's present self that determines the beginning of the future self's coming into existence and that could be judged as putatively harmful to the future self (because the future self's life is worth living but flawed) is not harmful (Andersen 2021; Das and Paul 2020). Andersen (2021) discusses Fleurbaey's (1995) example of Bert, a motorcyclist who did not wear a helmet, had an accident, and became a numerically different person after the accident (called "post-accident Bert"). Andersen holds that this act is not harmful because post-accident Bert exists because of this act and, if his life is still worth living, he cannot be worse off than he otherwise would be because, if Bert had not refused to wear a helmet, post-accident Bert would not have existed. In other words, the act did not harm anyone.

It may seem that an intrapersonal non-identity problem affects a kind of diachronic self-regarding decision. This is the case in which the individual's present self makes a diachronic self-regarding decision entailing a personal transformative experience that brings about a future self numerically different from the present self and who has a flawed existence that is nonetheless worth living. From the perspective of the Moral Theory of Prudence, making such a decision violates the future self's right to an open present—and thus is morally wrong—if the decision undermines one or more necessary conditions for the pursuit of the future self's set of normative principles. However, according to the intrapersonal nonidentity problem, such a decision of the present self is never morally wrong, since without that decision the future self would not have existed.

My reply is that the nonidentity problem applies to the metaphysical level of reality; thus, it would undermine my theory only if the selves of my minimal, realistic model of the agent were conceived of as metaphysical

entities. I treat the selves of diachronic self-regarding decisions as if they were numerically distinct and concede that the two selves of a person are numerically distinct in cases of change in the core normative principles. However, I always adopt this reading at the practical level (i.e., in the sphere of action). Hence, the Moral Theory of Prudence sidesteps the nonidentity problem because it deals with practical, not metaphysical, identities. As seen, the selves of my minimal, realistic model can be conceived as morally relevant attributes of a person.[13]

3.3 The alleged impossibility of an obligation toward oneself

In the Moral Theory of Prudence, the present self's requirement to preserve the future self's agency is an obligation that concerns one's diachronic selves. This obligation may be interpreted as a duty to oneself and thus be subject to the typical objection moved to such duties. Kant has provided the best known account of duties to oneself, in which duties to oneself are impersonal and impartial rules of action that pertain to the respect for our own humanity (Kant 1991 [1797], 6:417–47: 214–42). It is noteworthy that the similarity between Kantian duties to oneself and the obligation to preserve the future self's agency is partial. In fact, Kantian duties to oneself do not descend from prudence but from morality—more precisely, from the respect for humanity (Kant 1991 [1797], 6:420: 216). In my theory, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency is a requirement of both prudence and morality, as it is a moral requirement of prudence.

The objection to duties to oneself can take two forms. The first consists of contending that a moral duty or obligation is owed by an individual (the subject of the duty) to somebody (the object of the duty), who is numerically distinct from the individual and is the only one who can release the individual from the duty. As a consequence, since, in the case of duties to oneself, one (as the object of the duty) can release oneself (as the subject of the duty) from the duty, duties to oneself are easily waivable and thus cannot be duties; they lack the normative force of moral obligations (Singer 1959).

My answer to the first form of the objection against obligations to oneself is based on Schofield's (2015) position in the debate on duties to oneself. In the case of a diachronic self-regarding obligation, such as the obligation to preserve the future self's agency, a person's earlier self owes a duty to a later self that is not waivable, as only the later self could release the earlier self from the obligation, and this release is not possible because the later self is yet to come when the duty must be fulfilled (Schofield 2015, 516).[14] Thus, the temporal division of a person into diachronic selves sidesteps the objection.

The second form of the objection to duties to oneself consists of contending that duties to oneself concern one's happiness or well-being and thus are part of prudence and not morality (Baier 1958, 215). As several authors indicate (Kaspar 2011, 313; Hills 2003, 131; Neblett 1969, 71), this position is based on the view that prudence and morality are opposed and that morality is usually other-regarding.[15]

My answer to the second form of the objection against obligations to oneself derives from my conception of prudence as part of morality. I conceive of prudence as care for oneself, and I contend that such care is moral because it avoids some forms of harm to the future self and entails a moral relationship with oneself composed of the normative requirements of justifying one's action to oneself and protecting one's future agency. For this reason, I consider prudence as belonging to self-regarding morality. In addition, the obligation to give the future self an open present is grounded in agency, not well-being, as I discuss in section 3.5.[16]

3.4 The challenge of identity changes to backward-looking self-regarding responsibility and the irrelevance of forward-looking self-regarding responsibility

In Parfit's approach to personal identity, when the psychological connection between the present and future selves is weak, they are two distinct and independent entities, and the latter can thus be considered less or not responsible for the former's actions. A similar conclusion seems to derive from my account of practical identity in cases in which an individual's present and future selves have different core normative principles of action. It may be objected that when one's present and future selves are numerically distinct, my theory would not be agnostic regarding whether the future self has backward-looking self-regarding responsibility; my theory would rather contend that the future self has no such a responsibility. I reply that, even in such a case, the Moral Theory of Prudence is silent because it cannot be excluded that backward-looking self-regarding responsibility is tied to a different kind of identity (for instance, metaphysical identity) and thus can be inherited from one's earlier self by one's later self, even if the two selves are numerically distinct at the practical level.

An objection that may arise against the present self's forward-looking self-regarding responsibility is that such a responsibility is needless because it is self-evident that a person's present self is accountable for her actions affecting her future self. My answer is that the attribution of this responsibility is clear within an account of personal identity that considers the self as temporally extended to a person's life. However, in my model of practical

identity, the future and present selves are considered as if they were numerically distinct and are actually numerically distinct in the case of changes of one's of core normative values; thus, forward-looking self-regarding responsibility needs to be justified.

3.5 Synthesis of the Moral Theory of Prudence in light of my replies to the main objections

The Moral Theory of Prudence regulates the relationship between one's present and future selves. It holds that one's present self has a moral obligation in the present to respect the future self's agency—that is, the future self's capacity or freedom (I use the terms interchangeably) to pursue her normative principles of actions—compatibly with the present self's capacity or freedom to pursue her normative principles. Such a moral obligation is grounded in the equal moral worth of all the selves—*qua* agents—of a person, regardless of their temporal position in this person's life. As both the present and future selves are entitled to pursue their own set of normative principles, the obligation to preserve the future self's agency does not favor the future self over that of the present self. Rather, it makes their conditions of agency the same.

The obligation to preserve the future self's agency and the right to an open present are reminiscent of the Kantian respect of persons, whom Kant conceives essentially in terms of agency: rational autonomous agents (Kant 2006 [1785], 4:427–28: 36–37, 4:436–37: 43–44, 4:446–47: 52, 4:452–53: 57). Yet I do not conceive the subjects of the present-self–future-self relationship as metaphysical persons. Rather, the selves of my account are practical agents similar to Parfit's characterization of the metaphysical person, which, in turn, resembles Hume's concept of the subject as a stream of experiences, thoughts, and actions (Hume 1928 [1738–1740], I.iv.6: 251–53). The similarity of my model of the agent to the Parfitian characterization of the person and the Humean subject lies in the fact that, in my model, a person's self cares for the person's successive self as a function of her perceived continuity with the latter. As my model of the agent does not make assumptions at the metaphysical level, it is not subject to the intrapersonal nonidentity problem and cannot attribute backward-looking self-regarding responsibility to the future self. The Moral Theory of Prudence can only establish that a person's present self has forward-looking self-regarding responsibility to her future self for the consequences of the present self's actions on the future self, as the present self satisfies the three conditions for the attribution of such a responsibility.

The Moral Theory of Prudence is a theory of respect for the agency of the diachronic selves. It is thus an *agency-centered* theory of prudence.

The novelty of my theory consists in temporally fragmenting the person in selves and analyzing the relationship among such selves through a moral framework that is based on a fundamental Kantian element: the respect for agency.

4. Alternative solutions to diachronic self-regarding decisions and their differences from the Moral Theory of Prudence

In this section, I present and discuss contemporary approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions and diachronic self-regarding conflicts, the latter of which are diachronic self-regarding decisions in which one's present and future selves disagree on the best course of action.[17] The discussion of alternative solutions to diachronic self-regarding decisions comes after the presentation of my theory because this section order highlights the novelty of my approach and its theoretical basis. In this section, I focus on the differences between my theory and the alternatives; I only sketch or indicate in the notes the problems internal to each theory that do not pertain to the present-self–future-self relationship and the model of the agent.

4.1 Cureton, Bruckner, and Arvan: Contractarian approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions

Inspired by Rawls' imaginary original position, some authors have provided contractarian accounts of diachronic self-regarding decisions. In an intrapersonal original position, the time slices (i.e., the diachronic selves) of an individual must agree on some principles of prudence under a veil of ignorance, which each author characterizes differently (Cureton 2016; Bruckner 2003, 2004; Arvan 2020).[18]

Cureton (2016) puts forth a partial framework of prudence for cases of identity crisis, in which someone suddenly loses values, loyalties, and commitments with which she used to identify and cannot replace them. An unexpected severe disability is an example of identity crisis (Cureton 2016, 816). In these cases, according to Cureton, the prudent action is the one that conforms to a plan of life that would be selected through a procedure in which one of the diachronic selves that is part of an individual's life takes up a hypothetical perspective. The aim of the procedure is to select from a finite list of possible life plans, one that is acceptable to all of an individual's selves. The self in the hypothetical perspective has access to counterfactual information and thus knows the kinds of selves that will result from the various life plans; she also knows empirical facts about human nature and some aspect of the individual of which she is part (e.g., her ethnicity, genetic make-up, desires,

psychological tendencies). Cureton's hypothetical perspective is based on *objective rationality*. The latter specifies what the individual should do in light of all relevant facts about a situation, including those which the individual is not aware of at the moment of the choice. Thus, Cureton's theory of prudence for cases of identity crisis is an objective theory of prudence.

To avoid partiality, Cureton establishes that the self in the hypothetical perspective does not know the values, preferences, talents, and so on that she will have in the individual's life and the period of the individual's life in which the self will exist (Cureton 2016, 830–31). According to Cureton, the self adopting the hypothetical perspective would choose the life plan that maximizes the average weighted utility among all selves and enables the basic minimum satisfaction of all selves (Cureton 2016, 835).

The main problem with Cureton's contractarian approach is that he assumes a model of the agent that is too far from reality. The idealized self of Cureton's prudential original position possesses the pieces of information that a real or normal self does not: the idealized self, but not the real one, knows the possible and actual future selves of the person of whom she is part, as well as the life plans that are available. Accordingly, Cureton's approach is not easy to implement in real-life diachronic self-regarding decisions and assumes epistemic conditions that the real agent does not fulfill. From the individual's perspective, the epistemic impossibility of knowing the nature of her future self is one of the major features of diachronic self-regarding decisions. The individual possesses only *subjective reasons*, namely, claims about what she has reason to do, given her beliefs and information about her situation. Cureton affirms that his objective theory of prudence can be extended to a subjective theory of prudence by adding restrictions to the information possessed by the agent in the prudential original position (Cureton 2016, 816, 831). However, the problem is that a plausible, real agent has less information about the future selves of the person of whom she is part but at the same time has more information about herself than the idealized self of the prudential original position. In fact, the idealized self in Cureton's hypothetical perspective lacks the pieces of information that the real agent possesses, as the real but not the idealized self knows her values, preferences, and temporal position throughout the individual's life.

My Moral Theory of Prudence is not affected by the problem of the idealized agent, as it is founded only on the essential components of agency that every possible future self will possess. In addition, the model of the agent that my theory adopts is realistic in that it is based on empirical findings on the individual's perception of the future self.[19] As the individual's limited knowledge of her future self's plans, values, preferences, and so on is a fundamental characteristic of the present-self–future-self relationship, I do not abstract from this aspect and I do not aim to provide a theory of

prudence based on objective rationality. Such a theory would not help a real individual facing a diachronic self-regarding decision. The individual's perspective of deliberation is that of *subjective rationality*—namely, it is the individual's concrete perspective, which includes the beliefs and information that she possesses when she makes the decision. As indicated by Williams, this is the perspective "from now" (Williams 1981a, cit., 13) and "from here" (Williams 1981b, cit., 35). My approach to prudence is based on subjective rationality and thus provides a subjective theory of prudence.

Bruckner (2003, 2004) proposes that, in cases of diachronic self-regarding conflicts, prudence requires the *minimax regret principle*: taking the action whose associated maximum level of regret is the smallest. The minimax regret principle is derived from how Bruckner devises the intrapersonal original position. In the latter, each time slice of a person (i.e., each diachronic self) must decide for the principle of prudence that best secures her interests; each self knows general facts about human nature (2003, 37, 2004, 47), but not her own preferences and the time at which she will exist, nor her possible life plans and counterfactual information related to these plans. Moreover, in Bruckner's prudential original position, each time slice of a person wants to avoid regret for the losses she could have imposed on the person's earlier time slices and could impose on the person's later time slices. Bruckner demonstrates that the more individuals care for their later and earlier selves, the more the minimax regret principle converges with the principle of expected aggregate utility maximization (Bruckner 2003, 44).

Arvan (2020) proposes a theory of prudence based on an intrapersonal contract that is not subject to the objection of the idealized agent because the selves of his intrapersonal original position are characterized by the moral psychology revealed by neurobehavioral evidence. His theory of prudence concerns being prudent in life in general; he touched upon on diachronic self-regarding decisions when dealing with the *problem of possible future selves*, namely self- and other-regarding decisions in which the agent wants to know if she will regret her decisions in the future but she cannot know that as she cannot know the future (Arvan 2016, 47–51, 2020, 61).

As said in Chapter 2,[20] in Arvan's theory, prudence means acting in ways that have the best expected lifetime utility for the agent in terms of achieving her ends (Arvan 2020, 26–28, 51) and is founded on the individual's internalization of moral risk aversion (Arvan 2020, ch. 2). An individual's moral risk aversion has the same effect on her decision-making as Bruckner's minimax regret principle (Bruckner 2003): choosing actions that minimize the maximum possible amount of regret.

According to Arvan, the Categorical-Instrumental Imperative is the best strategy for minimizing the maximum possible amount of regret. The Categorical-Instrumental Imperative consists of the principle commanding

the individual to act on chosen interests upon which all of an individual's diachronic selves agree, regardless of how the past and future might turn out and what interests the past, present, and future selves could possibly have (Arvan 2020, 63–64). This means that, as it is possible that one's future self may develop interests for other human and nonhuman sentient beings, a contract among one's selves in this intrapersonal original position should include such interests (Arvan 2020, 64–65). The Categorical-Instrumental Imperative thus enables one to solve the problem of multiple future selves and to be fair to oneself, as all possible interests of a person's selves are equally taken into account.

Like Arvan, I employ a realistic model of the agent based on empirical findings[21] and consider prudence as moral.[22] Arvan affirms that the nature and persistence of agents is a metaphysical issue that does not involve normative theorizing (Arvan 2020, 27). However, while I agree that the metaphysical level of the entity facing diachronic self-regarding decisions is not relevant for investigating prudence, I add that, as prudence is care for oneself, it involves understanding this "oneself" at the practical level—that is, the sphere of the individual's actions.[23] Therefore, I contend that an account of prudence requires indicating who the relevant entities that make decisions are.

Arvan's solution and my solution to the problem of multiple selves are based on a similar reasoning. Arvan elaborates a normative principle of prudence (i.e., the Categorical-Instrumental Imperative) that is intrapersonally universal in the sense that it protects every possible interest that one's future selves will develop (Arvan 2016, 111–15, 2020, 64). I found two normative principles of prudence (i.e., the right to an open present and the obligation to preserve the future self's agency) on a component that any possible future self has, namely the normative principles of actions. In both approaches, what the selves pursue (interests or normative principles) is respected without specifying it (because this is not possible, as, in the present, one cannot know her future self's interests or normative principles).

There is a main difference between Arvan's approach and my own. It lies in the arguments supporting the thesis that prudence is moral. I consider prudence as moral because I conceive it as a subset of morality concerning one's moral relation with herself.[24] By contrast, Arvan derives morality from prudence by arguing that, in order to avoid future possible regret, the individual must act on interests that include other human and nonhuman sentient beings because one's future self may be interested in them.

4.2 Brink and McKerlie: Conflicts of values among diachronic selves

Like Cureton, Brink (2003) adopts the perspective of objective rationality to solve diachronic self-regarding conflicts. Brink proposes a solution based

on temporal neutrality (i.e., the requirement that one should have equal concern for one's diachronic selves) and objective reasons, namely, claims about what the individual has reason to do, given the facts of her situation—regardless of whether she is aware of these facts. He deals with diachronic self-regarding conflicts in which one's earlier and later selves have different values or ideals, meant as Nagel's "principles about what things *constitute* reason for actions" (Nagel 1970, cit., 74, italics in the original). He does not treat such conflicts as interpersonal or interagential because he contends that, in normal cases of diachronic self-regarding conflicts of values, the individual after the change of value (called *After*) is still psychologically connected to the one before the change (called *Before*). Thus, Before and After are the same individual. According to Brink, it is usually Before that voluntarily started the change. This deliberative control of the change psychologically connects After and Before and makes the change not substantial (Brink 2003, 232–23).[25]

Brink suggests solving diachronic self-regarding conflicts by examining the merits of Before's and After's values from the perspective of objective rationality. Therefore, if Before's values are more worthy than After's values, Before—who is the agent facing the diachronic self-regarding conflict (i.e., the present self in my account)—should follow her current values. If After's values are more worthy than Before's, Before should follow After's values. As Brink admits, this is not rational from the perspective of subjective rationality: Before is required to act on reasons provided by values that she does not hold at the time of the decision.

McKerlie (2007) puts forth a different solution based on objective rationality to conflicts of values without the individual's change of identity. His solution combines the principle of maximizing one's well-being with two views about well-being: the assumption that some values are objectively more important than other values and the *positive response condition*. The positive response condition states that the positive response is a determinant of well-being that consist of one's positive reaction, which comes in degrees, to a valuable state or activity, such as desiring or enjoying a state or activity (McKerlie 2007, 64). In McKerlie's approach, two issues should be assessed in a conflict between the values of one's present self and those of the future self: first, which option achieves the goal that is the most valuable from an objective perspective; and second, whether and how much one will respond positively to the effects of the option selected, when she will experience them. If she does not respond positively to an option, the latter does not maximize one's well-being and thus should not be taken (McKerlie 2007, 65).

Neither Brink nor McKerlie deals with the appropriate characterization of the individual's epistemic situation for determining the individual's subjective reasons.[26] Brink admits that the requirements of temporal neutrality

and the objective reasons converge with the agent's subjective reasons only in some cases of diachronic self-regarding conflicts (Brink 2003, 237–38). As in real-life diachronic self-regarding decisions, the individual has a limited knowledge of her future self's values and conditions, both Brink's and McKerlie's solutions to diachronic self-regarding decisions are infeasible from the individual's perspective.[27]

4.3 Parfit: The discounted concern for one's future self

Parfit touches upon diachronic self-regarding decisions and conflicts of values when discussing the implications of his reductionist theory of personal identity on prudence and commitments (Parfit 1984, 317–19, 325–28). In Parfit's view, the individual facing diachronic self-regarding decisions is a Humean subject connected to the past and future parts of her life (i.e., the diachronic selves) through a stream of memories, intentions, beliefs, and desires. As seen in Chapter 2,[28] according to Parfit, when one's present self has enough psychological continuity or connectedness with one's future self (relation *R*), this relation gives the present self a reason to have special concern for the future self (Parfit 1984, 312). One's concern for the future self thus depends on the strength of relation *R* between one's earlier and later selves, therefore legitimating a discount rate of one's future utilities on the basis of the weakening of relation *R* (Parfit 1984, 313). This means that in case of a diachronic self-regarding decision, the prudential requirement demanded of the individual's present self depends on the strength of relation *R* with the future self. If the individual's present self has high psychological connection with the future self, then the present self should give significant weight to the claims coming from the future self. If the individual's present self has low psychological connection with the future self, then the present self should give reduced weight to the claims coming from the future self. For Parfit, in case the relation *R* between one's earlier and later selves is too weak or absent and the earlier self's values differ from the later self's, the latter cannot be forced to pursue the earlier self's values—for instance, by committing to a project of the earlier self (Parfit 1984, 325–28).

Although my minimal, realistic model of the agent takes into account the possible weakening of relation *R* between diachronic selves (i.e., the care for the future self of one's present self depends on the present self's perceived connection with the future self), I do not propose discounting one's care for her future self on the basis of the strength of that relation. One can attribute a weight to the right to an open present when deliberating about which action to take, but the outcome of one's deliberation is either that one respects this right (if the latter has the highest weight among the other moral

considerations assessed) or that one does not respect it (if another moral consideration has a higher weight than the right to an open present).

It may be objected that, in a diachronic self-regarding decision, the option that leaves more opportunities open to the future self than the other option entails more care for the future self than the other one; in other words, this objection states that in my Moral Theory of Prudence, there are degrees of care for the future self like in Parfit's approach.[29] However, the obligation to protect the future self's agency does not regard the number of options that are left accessible to the future self but the necessary conditions for the pursuit of any set of normative principles. Such obligation requires choosing the option that does not jeopardize *all* necessary conditions. Therefore, an option (I call it *O*) that threatens *some* necessary conditions does not entail lower care for one's future self than one protecting all necessary conditions; *O* does not protect the future self, in the sense established by the Moral Theory of Prudence: *O* does not protect her agency. Thus, within my framework, we cannot say that one protects her future self's agency a little or a lot; either one protects it or she does not.

4.4 Pettigrew: Conflicts of changing selves

Pettigrew (2020) deals with diachronic self-regarding conflicts in which an individual's earlier and later selves are *changing selves*—that is, they are not numerically identical. He interprets the diachronic relationships among an individual's selves as interpersonal. Pettigrew conceives the person as a corporate entity that is constituted by her past, present, and future selves. The self facing a diachronic self-regarding decision is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the corporation. The CEO makes a decision on behalf of the corporation, namely, of all the selves (Pettigrew 2020, 49, 229). Pettigrew characterizes the individual's selves as agents who discount the utilities of the later selves as a function of their Parfitian relation *R* with the later selves (Pettigrew 2020, 160, 187). He affirms that this trait accounts for the individual's first-person perception of her future selves (Pettigrew 2020, 187), and I add that it is compatible with the empirical findings on the perception of one's future self.

Pettigrew reads diachronic self-regarding conflicts as problems of collective decision-making, which he aims to solve with the Aggregate Utility Solution: a theory of rational decision-making based on expected utility theory (Pettigrew 2020, 7). The Aggregate Utility Solution computes a person's utility as the weighted average of the utilities of her past, present, and future selves combined with the current self's credence function. Although Pettigrew does not tackle the relationship between prudence and morality,

he indicates a moral constraint for the assignment of weights to the utilities of the various selves. This moral constraint is the current self's obligation to give some weight to the utilities of the past selves that made sacrifices for their later selves from which the current self benefits (Pettigrew 2020, 159, 167–83). For Pettigrew, in a diachronic self-regarding conflict with one's changing selves, the action to take is the one that maximizes a person's utility as computed with the Aggregate Utility Solution.

Although my Moral Theory of Prudence indicates some moral constraints to the present self, they are not related to the attribution of weights to the selves' utilities. My theory is based on agency and gives moral constraints directly to the present self's actions: choosing the action that protects the future self's agency, compatibly with enabling the present self to pursue her normative principles. Moreover, the requirement to attribute some weight to the past self's utilities in the case that the present self benefited from the past self's sacrifices may be read within the framework of my theory as a constraint on the future self's pursuit of her normative principles of action and thus a limitation of her open present. Certainly, if the future self wants to carry on a project initiated by the present self, this does not limit the future self's open present. However, if the future self is not interested in this project, the Moral Theory of Prudence states that the future self should not pursue it.

I agree with Pettigrew that a plausible model of the agent must take into account the empirical finding that one's interest in her later self varies as a function of her psychological connection with her later self. However, I argue that Pettigrew's approach has two issues. The first is the justification of the interpretation of the present-self–future-self relationship as interpersonal. If a diachronic self-regarding conflict is read as interpersonal, it should imply two numerically distinct persons, yet this does not seem the case in Pettigrew's theory. Pettigrew does not provide his view on the identity of the self or agent facing a diachronic self-regarding conflict. Without that view, it is not clear who a self is according to the Aggregate Utility Solution; consequently, it is not clear whether Pettigrew's theory can be better interpreted as interagential, namely, as stating that self-regarding diachronic conflicts are conflicts between two agents rather than two persons. On the one hand, Pettigrew's position on personal identity seems close to Parfit's view, as the self of Pettigrew's approach cares for later and earlier selves as a function of relation *R* (Pettigrew 2020, 160, 187, 212). On the other hand, Pettigrew's position on personal identity seems inscribable in the metaphysical view of the person as a unit, since the relevant entity of his Aggregate Utility Solution is the person (the corporation, in his theory) and not the selves, who are merely parts of this unit. Yet, as seen, a metaphysical

concept of the person is not required when discussing diachronic self-regarding decisions.[30]

The second issue in Pettigrew's approach is the idealization of the agent. As an individual's present self needs to aggregate the utilities of the past and future selves, she needs to compare these utilities. To do so, Pettigrew assumes that the present self can compare, among other things, differences between the utilities of the same item at different times (namely, differences between the utility that she attributes to an outcome and the utilities that the other selves attribute to it) (Pettigrew 2020, 103). This capacity is very demanding for a real agent, especially when she needs to figure out the difference between her utility and the utilities of selves that are far in the past (and thus not easy to remember) or far in the future (and thus not easy to foresee).

4.5 Dorsey: Current self's sacrifice for a later or earlier self

Recently, Dorsey (2021) has provided a comprehensive account of prudential rationality. This account includes a subjectivist theory of prudential value, which holds that the person attributes value to what is good for her. Dorsey's account also indicates the demands of prudence in a context of temporal neutrality. Such an account is an objective theory of prudence because it is based on objective prudential reasons that abstract away from the agent's epistemic conditions (Dorsey 2021, 209). Thus, this account is subject to the objection of excessive idealization of the agent, whom Dorsey identifies in the person (Dorsey 2021, 243–44). I focus on the aspect of Dorsey's theory regarding a potential conflict between diachronic selves: specifically, the present self's sacrifice for a later or earlier self (Dorsey 2021, chs. 10, 12). Dorsey contends that such a sacrifice is legitimate and should be conceived of as a compensation because he assumes the traditional view on personal identity, according to which the person is a unit and the diachronic selves are not independent parts of, but rather contribute to, the latter (Dorsey 2021, 244). As Dorsey defends temporal neutrality, he holds that not only now-for-later but also now-for-earlier sacrifices are compensations (Dorsey 2021, 307).

Dorsey conceives of prudence as what is good for oneself (Dorsey 2021, 10) and understands prudence not in terms of well-being, but in terms of facts concerning prudential goods (Dorsey 2021, 14, 220–21). According to him, prudence requires maximizing one's good throughout one's life. More precisely, prudence demands that an individual conform to the strongest balance of her prudential reasons, where the strength of each prudential reason is determined by the value one attributes to the goods that ground the reasons at stake (Dorsey 2021, 216).

According to Dorsey, in a person's prudential ordering (i.e., the ordinal ranking of one's prudential values), the primary prudential values are her long-term projects. The fact that a particular good is a project is an intrinsic good-making factor that outweighs the non-project goods (Dorsey 2021, 157). The value of a successful completed project is higher than that of non-project goods. Dorsey attributes not only a prudential but also a non-prudential normative significance to projects, on the basis that being committed to a project is itself a normative fact (Dorsey 2021, 310). Projects require a commitment among the diachronic selves, as they take time to be accomplished (Dorsey 2021, 282). For Dorsey, even if one's present self no longer values a project started in the past, its completion benefits one's past self, who did value the project (Dorsey 2021, 248). Therefore, the upshot of Dorsey's theory is that prudence requires one's present self to complete even projects that one wants to abandon or repudiate and to lay the groundwork for future projects (Dorsey 2021, 281, 249, 301), if the past and future selves' benefits are greater than the present self's harm (Dorsey 2021, 307).

The requirement of Dorsey's theory of prudence is highly demanding and risks alienating one's present self from her own projects. Dorsey acknowledges this risk and replies with three arguments. First, the demandingness of a normative theory of prudence is not a reason for abandoning it (Dorsey 2021, 303). Second, the normative authority of prudence is limited: the commands of prudence are not all-things-considered requirements and thus can be flouted for various reasons (e.g., because of their demandingness or because of the overriding nature of moral requirements) (Dorsey 2021, 304, 308). Third, the prudential value of one's past and future projects can be outweighed by the non-prudential normative significance of current projects, which is independent of the prudential significance (Dorsey 2021, 308–9). Thus, in a conflict between pursuing one's present project and one's future project, it is possible that non-prudential normative (e.g., moral) reasons to pursue one's current project outweigh the prudential reasons to lay a basis for a future project (Dorsey 2021, 311).

The thesis that prudential requirements can be trumped by moral requirements implicitly assumes that the moral and prudential spheres are detached and that the moral sphere is more normatively authoritative than the prudential sphere. This thesis requires a clarification of how Dorsey conceives the relationship between morality and prudence and a justification of the assumption that the former is more authoritative than the latter.

In addition, Dorsey's approach does not acknowledge the possibility that a person's diachronic selves can be considered independent from

each other at the practical level. Therefore, his theory cannot protect a person's later selves from decisions made by this person's earlier selves that reduce these later selves' agency. In fact, if the significant unit is the person, violating the right to an open present of any of this person's diachronic selves is simply seen as a sacrifice that is compensated for intrapersonally.

4.6 Comparison between the Moral Theory of Prudence and the alternative approaches

The Moral Theory of Prudence differs from the alternative approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions in three respects. First, the discussion of the current approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions highlights that several approaches (Cureton 2016; Arvan 2020; McKerlie 2007; Pettigrew 2020) provide a solution grounded in one's well-being, usually expressed in terms of utility. These approaches reduce diachronic self-regarding decisions to a matter of well-being, thus excluding other relevant factors. The basis of the Moral Theory of Prudence is precisely a factor that cannot be reduced to well-being: the agency of the individual's selves.

Grounding a theory of prudence on agency is made possible by my characterization of the subject taking actions. As I differentiate between the person as a metaphysical substance and the self or agent as the practical entity that acts in the practical sphere, I can conceive the relationships among diachronic selves as relationships among agents. Accordingly, the Moral Theory of Prudence interprets diachronic self-regarding decisions as interagential decisions. This is the second difference between the Moral Theory of Prudence and the alternative approaches, which interpret diachronic self-regarding decisions as intrapersonal (Cureton 2016; Bruckner 2003, 2004; Arvan 2020; Brink 2003; McKerlie 2007; Dorsey 2021) or interpersonal (Parfit 1984; Pettigrew 2020).

The third difference regards the distance between the real agent making diachronic self-regarding decisions and the model of the agent employed in these approaches. In many approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions (Cureton 2016; Brink 2003; McKerlie 2007; Pettigrew 2020; Dorsey 2021), this distance is large: these approaches assume epistemic conditions that the real agent does not fulfill and/or cognitive capacities that she does not have. In contrast, the Moral Theory of Prudence is based on an empirically plausible model of the agent and her perspective in the here and now. It is thus a subjective theory of prudence.

Table 3.1 Summary of the alternative approaches to the Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions with the cases that each approach regulates, the principle of prudence it requires, and the model of agent that it employs.

Author of the approach	*Cases regulated*	*Normative principle*	*Model of agent*
Cureton	Diachronic self-regarding decisions with identity crisis	Choosing the life guaranteeing the minimum satisfaction for all of an individual's diachronic selves and maximizing the average weighted utility among all selves	The agent is a person's time slice and is idealized, as she has access to counterfactual information, that is, she knows the kinds of selves that will result from the various life plans
Bruckner	Diachronic self-regarding conflicts	Minimax regret principle: choosing the action whose maximum level of regret is the smallest	The agent is a person's time slice that wants to avoid regret of the person's earlier and later time slices
Arvan	Being prudent in life (diachronic self-regarding decisions are tackled in the problem of possible future selves)	Categorical-Instrumental Imperative: acting on chosen interests upon which one's diachronic selves agree, which results in one's best expected lifetime utility	Realistic agent characterized by the moral psychology revealed in neurobehavioral studies
Brink	Diachronic self-regarding conflicts of values	Choosing the value that is more worthy from the perspective of objective rationality	Idealized agent who in the present knows her future values
McKerlie	Diachronic self-regarding conflicts of values without the individual's change of identity	Maximizing one's well-being, as determined by the objective value of states and activities and one's positive response	Idealized agent who in the present knows her future values

Author of the approach	*Cases regulated*	*Normative principle*	*Model of agent*
Parfit	Diachronic self-regarding decisions	Caring for one's future self in degrees depending on the strength of one's relation *R*	Humean subject connected to her past and future time slices through relation *R*
Pettigrew	Diachronic self-regarding conflicts with numerically different selves	Aggregate Utility Solution: choosing the action with the highest weighted average of the utilities of one's selves combined with the present self's credence function	Person as a corporate entity consisting of idealized diachronic selves who can compare the differences between outcome utilities of the various selves
Dorsey	Being prudent in life (diachronic self-regarding decisions are tackled in the current self's sacrifice for a later or earlier self)	Conforming to the strongest balance of prudential reasons, whose strength is determined by the value that one attributes to the goods grounding such reasons	Person as an idealized agent of which the diachronic selves are part

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated a normative theory, namely, the Moral Theory of Prudence in diachronic self-regarding decisions, which should guide one's present self in such decisions. This theory is constituted of a set of requirements descending from the moral analysis of the features of the present-self–future-self relationship and based on a model of practical identity that treats one's present and future selves as distinct agents. The Moral Theory of Prudence attributes forward-looking self-regarding responsibility and the obligation to preserve the future self's agency to the present self. It ascribes the right to an open present to the future self and, in the case of identity change, justifies her use of the self-regarding veto power against the present self's projects.

While many approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions are based on idealized models of the self that are too far from reality (Cureton 2016; Brink 2003; McKerlie 2007; Pettigrew 2020; Dorsey 2021), the Moral

Theory of Prudence is grounded in an empirically plausible model of agent. In addition, this theory interprets self-regarding decisions as interagential on the basis of the minimal, realistic model of the agent. Furthermore, unlike some existing approaches to diachronic self-regarding decisions (Cureton 2016; Arvan 2020; McKerlie 2007; Pettigrew 2020), the Moral Theory of Prudence is not grounded in well-being but in the agency of the selves.

In the next chapter, I illustrate how the Moral Theory of Prudence works in practice. I provide a first application of the theory to the Russian nobleman's diachronic self-regarding conflict, which is a case devised by Parfit (1984, 326–28). I then show what the Moral Theory of Prudence tells us in the case of advance healthcare directives.

Notes

1. If one's future self is no longer an agent—for instance, in the case of neurodegenerative diseases—the Moral Theory of Prudence does not apply, since in such cases we cannot truly refer to a future agent that may disagree with the decision made by the earlier self. I deal with such cases in the next chapter.
2. Here, I consider the diachronic self-regarding decisions of healthy individuals. Therefore, I exclude pathological cases in which the individual is affected by a psychological or mood disorder, such as depression, and thus experiences limited agency in the present.
3. See section 3.1.
4. In other words, in my approach, each diachronic self of a person is entitled to the same rights and duties toward the other selves. Therefore, the Moral Theory of Prudence ensures that each diachronic self of a person is treated fairly, in the sense of treated equally with respect to the other selves. I thank Markus Arvan for raising the issue of how my approach relates to fairness to oneself.
5. See section 3.1 for the relationship between my theory and the theories of rights.
6. See Chapter 2, section 4.
7. Authenticity is one of the two normative elements involved in self-regarding decisions (Chapter 2, section 1); the other normative element is prudence.
8. See Carter (2018) and Tomlin (2013) for two substantial theories on backward-looking responsibility within a framework of personal identity in which the agent does not necessarily temporally extend to the whole duration of the person's life of which she is part. Carter attributes backward-looking responsibility, which he calls *liability-responsibility*, to one's later self, even when the latter is numerically different from one's earlier self. This is because he holds that liability-responsibility of a person's self is passed to the successive proximate self through psychological connectedness. In contrast, Tomlin contends that, in a Parfitian reductionist approach to identity, it is relation *R* that matters for the attribution of responsibility. Thus, if one's present and future selves are weakly connected by relation *R*, the transference of responsibility is undermined.
9. See Chapter 2, section 2.3.
10. See Chapter 2, section 3.4.
11. In the will theory, having a right vis-à-vis another person means exercising power over that person's duty to act in certain ways (Hart 1955).

12. My example is an intrapersonal version of the intergenerational case of the bomb hidden in a kindergarten that will explode in six years and kill children who are not alive at the time the bomb is concealed (Feinberg 1984, 97).
13. See Chapter 2, section 3.1.
14. Schofield also affirms that, to demonstrate that duties to oneself are possible, it is not necessary that an individual have two numerically distinct selves. What is required is the acknowledgment that, throughout her life, a person or individual occupies many distinct temporal standpoints (Schofield 2015, 520), which are points of view from which she perceives and assesses the world (Schofield 2015, 517). Such temporal standpoints are similar to the diachronic selves of my model or practical identity: they are attributes of a person and belong to the practical, not metaphysical level.
15. See Chapter 2, section 2.1.
16. Hills (2003) considers duties to oneself as both moral and prudential requirements, but she grounds them on well-being. She contends that if we have moral reasons to promote people's well-being, we have moral reasons to promote our well-being, as duties are universal reasons that count for every agent, ourselves included. According to Hills, duties to promote one's own well-being are prudential because they are grounded in the importance of well-being; they are also moral because concern for somebody's well-being (where this somebody can also be one's own self) is moral.
17. Bykvist (2006) delineates a theory of prudence for a simplified version of choices in which the individual knows that the option that she chooses will change her preference about the choice options. I do not discuss this theory because Bykvist excludes diachronic conflicts between the individual's earlier and later selves from that simplified version.
18. Lenman (2009) gives a contractarian reading of care for oneself, contending that one's choice must be acceptable to each time slice of an individual, but he neither devises an original position nor derives principles of prudence from this position.
19. See Chapter 2, section 3.2.
20. See Chapter 2, section 2.2.
21. See Chapter 2, section 3.2.
22. See Chapter 2, sections 2.3 and 3.4.
23. See Chapter 2, section 3.1.
24. See also sections 2.3 and 3.4 of Chapter 2 and section 2.4 of this chapter.
25. An internal issue in Brink's approach is the impossibility of solving the diachronic self-regarding conflicts in which Before did not start the change—for example, exogenous events like a disability caused by a disease or a crisis conversion in which the change is felt as irresistible and not chosen (Ullmann-Margalit 2006, 161–62). In such cases, Before and After lack the psychological link constituted by the deliberative control of the change.
26. McKerlie rejects a subjective theory of prudence because he affirms that the latter is likely reducible to the present-aim theory, which is the view that a person should act on her present values in a diachronic self-regarding conflict (McKerlie 2007, 72). As shown by McKerlie, the present-aim theory presents a main inconsistency. The theory requires that the individual should decide only on the basis of her present values. Once a diachronic self-regarding conflict is past, the result of the requirement of the present-aim theory is that the life of the current present self (i.e., who was the future self when the conflict was in the present) is determined by the earlier self's values that were expressed in the past

decision, which the current present self may no longer hold (McKerlie 2007, 58). However, a subjective theory of prudence does not necessarily equate with the present-aim theory: the fact that the present self does not know her future self's values does not imply that she is required to act only on her present aims. A subjective theory of prudence can put some constraints on the present self's actions precisely because of her objective ignorance.

27. McKerlie's approach also presents two internal issues: first, the solution is vulnerable to the positions on well-being that do not accept value objectivism and the positive response; second, McKerlie's statement that only simultaneous and retrospective positive responses contribute to well-being is also controversial (see Bykvist (2007)).
28. See Chapter 2, section 2.2.
29. I thank Markus Arvan for raising this objection.
30. See Chapter 2, section 3.1.

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