

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Heller, “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects”

- The Lewis quotation reminds us of what we found in Chisholm: stages (or temporal parts) are like ordinary (successive) objects in their ordinary properties, they just have a shorter life-span and cannot instantiate properties that require longevity.
- Heller claims that the 3-dimensionalist must accept at least one of 5 unpleasant theses, as listed on p. 313. Heller argues against 3-dimensionalism by using the denial of each thesis as a premise.
- Heller’s central thesis:

A physical object is the material content of a region of space-time... Instead of thinking of an object as existing at various times, we should, adopting the four-dimensional stance, think of it as existing within regions of time. (313–314)

- Note the analogies between space and time that are developed, as well as the claims about naming.
- “I emphasize that, because a thing’s parts are no more ontologically fundamental than the thing itself, existence of four-dimensional objects in no way depends upon their being built up out of instantaneous objects.” (314)
- Heller explains the various ways in which his 4-dimensional ontology is neutral on scientific issues, as well as other metaphysical disputes.
- Heller endorses the principle that parts of physical objects are themselves physical objects. (317)

Temporal part: “A temporal part of O is a spatiotemporal part that is the same spatial size as O for as long as that part exists, though it may be a smaller temporal size.” (317)

○ On the 4-dimensional view, only *parts* of ordinary objects exist at moments—the temporal parts. E.g., strictly speaking, I do not exist now (in the sense that not all of me exists now).

● 4-dimensionalism also resolves many paradoxes of coincidence, such as fission cases.

● Q: What is Thomson’s “crazy metaphysic” charge?

I suggest that Thomson’s objection is founded on the belief that there is no significant material change occurring at the time that the temporal part is supposed to be coming into existence. The piece of chalk does not undergo any alteration. No molecules need be altering their internal structure or their relationship to other molecules. No matter from outside the chalk is added, nor is any matter that was part of the chalk released into the surrounding atmosphere. In short, nothing has occurred that would be enough to bring an object into existence. (319–320)

● The Chisholm/Edwards conception of temporal parts:

All that is essential to Chisholm’s conception of a temporal part is that the momentary objects be ontologically basic, and that longer-lasting objects be ‘built up’ out of the momentary ones by convention. It may be human convention, rather than divine convention. (321)

○ Heller holds that temporal parts and the wholes that they compose are on par ontologically (i.e., neither is more fundamental than the other).

● Van Inwagen’s “Descartes-minus” argument against temporal parts.