

Perspectival Facts

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Abstract

It is often objected to B-theories of time that they do not account for a central fact of our experience of time, namely our awareness of the moving now. In the same vein, it could be objected to direct realism about perception that it fails to account for the fact that we perceive things perspectivally and are perceptually aware of ourselves as located in space. Analogously, it is often held that theories of self-knowledge must account for this knowledge being irreducibly subjective. In my talk, I argue that these points are mistaken: rather than excluding it, the correct accounts of our experience of time, of space and of ourselves entail that such experiences are atemporal, aperspectival and apersonal. Rather than in the experiences themselves, the locus of subjectivity is in what they are experiences of: perspectival facts are not essentially self-oriented, but real facts in the external world.

The argument from perspective

this is in the ET skript

Our experience of time and change

The argument from perspective may be applied to ‘temporal denominations’ of the A-type as in McTaggart’s argument for the unreality of time:

- 1 Temporal facts are either existentially independent from our present temporal perspective or dependent on it (in which case we call them “A-facts”).
 - 2 Being present, past and future are contrary properties.
 - 3 The same fact is future, present and past relative to different temporal perspectives.
 - ∴ Two of these temporal perspectives do not present us with a mind-independent property of the fact.
 - 4 There is no reason to privilege one temporal perspective over another.
 - ∴ Therefore no temporal perspective presents us with a mind-independent temporal property of facts.
- Time is unreal.

The analogues of the two objections do not apply: the first one (facts are *always* present, future or past) is clearly implausible (though it has been defended, cf. [Correia & Rosenkrantz \(2011\)](#)), while the second (being present, past or future are not properties of facts simpliciter) grants the conclusion.

As before, the right interpretation of 3 yields the harmless:

- 3''' The same fact may be *present from certain points of view* and *present from certain other ones*.

We avoid the conclusion that time is unreal, but have to accept irreducibly tensed temporal qualifications: the full story about temporal reality has to be told from a certain temporal standpoint. The fact that this-or-that event is present is itself perspectival, it is internally related to an instant of time. We thus reject the premise [Fine \(2005c: 273\)](#) calls “Absolutism”, i.e. the view that the composition of reality is not irreducibly relative, that its relative composition by the facts must be explained in terms of its absolute composition by these facts:

“For the non-standard realist [...], reality at another time is an alternative reality. It is neither a facet of the one true reality nor a hypothetical determination of the one true reality, but another reality on an equal footing with the current reality ...” (Fine 2005c: 279)

Temporal standpoints are thus irreducibly involved in the constitution of tensed facts. But what are temporal standpoints? Recent discussion of temporal consciousness have concentrated on our perception of duration, taking our present perception of present events as a supposedly unproblematic starting-point. The question then becomes: how do we perceive past events *as* past, thereby achieving a perception of duration. Three answers have been proposed:

1. auditory and visual perceptions are themselves temporally extended processes, so they are themselves in need of an experiential unification which must be located in the present, be point-like and momentary (cf. Dainton 2000: 133);
2. temporalised contents are self-revealing, welded together by nothing other than direct experience (Dainton (2000: 237) and Gallagher (2003: 26));
3. we enjoy special representations – retentions – which present us with something in the past as past (Husserl (1966: 118) and

These three strategies may be applied to two different problems: to explain how we experience an intentional object as extended in time (what Jan Almäng (forthcoming) calls “the problem of external time-consciousness”), or to explain how we are aware of our own experiences as extended in time (the “problem of inner time-consciousness”). In our view, the problems are connected, because mental states are events as well (cf. Lombard 1979); and both problems should be solved along the lines of the third view.

The first view presupposes a present nexus and leads to a regress. The second wrongly explains the experience as of past and as of future by expanding the present, which leads to a dilemma: either the present is intrinsically structured temporally or it is not; if it is, then it’s not present, but “past flowing into future” (taking the metaphor literally); if it is not, then it doesn’t do it’s job – both the object’s having been F and it’s going to be $\neg F$ are part of it, which is still contradictory. The third position, however, is ambiguous: is the pastness in the act or the content (i.e. content + MOP); it cannot be in the acts (that would reduce it to (i)), so it must be in the contents; but then the contents are tensed, but atemporally had – this is the defining feature of the A-theory:

“A perception cannot merely be a perception of what is now; rather any perception of the present phase of an object includes a retention of the just-past phase and a protention of the phase of the object about to occur [...] Inner-time consciousness is not an object occurring in time, but neither is it merely a consciousness of time; rather it is itself a form of temporality...” (Zahavi 2007: 464)

Being a form of temporality precisely is having an intrinsically tensed content. A retention of a as having been F cannot be the same act as a direct apprehension of a as being F – the two acts have different veridicality conditions: the retention is veridical iff a *was* F , while the apprehension is veridical iff a *is* F . That this makes a real difference may be shown as follows.

We do see things moving, not just moving things. That there is change, in particular change of position, is directly given to us in experience. There are broadly speaking two metaphysical theories of velocity. According to the so-called “at-at” theory, championed by Russell, the velocity of a moving body at an instant is grounded in its subsequent locations: the body has the velocity it has *because* it is at these different places at different times. According to an alternative theory, the explanatory relation holds in the other direction: the velocity explains, rather than is explained by, the different locations. This concept of instantaneous velocity is quite mysterious however: what grounds at a specific instance the instantaneous velocity the body has? how are we to understand the possession by the body of a vectorial quantity, having not just a

value but also a direction? While instantaneous velocity is metaphysically mysterious, it seems clear that we have perceptual access to it. When I see a thing moving, from *a* to *b* through *c*, I directly apprehend it's being at *b*, retending that it was at *a* and protending that it will be at *c*. By these three different acts, rather than a succession of direct apprehensions, I see the thing as moving.

The argument from perspective may be applied to 'temporal denominations' of the A-type as in McTaggart's argument for the unreality of time:

- 1 2017 was future.
- 2 2017 will be past.
- 3 There is at most one year 2017
- 4 Nothing can be both future and past.
- ∴ 5 In at least one case, one of our temporal experiences is non-veridical.
- 6 In the non-veridical temporal experience, one is presented with a mind-dependent intentional object.
- 7 Both temporal experiences have the same type of intentional object.
- ∴ 8 The intentional object of both experiences is mind-dependent.
- 9 Temporal properties (such as *being past* and *being future*) are not mind-dependent.
- ∴ 10 I neither case are we aware of mind-independent temporal property.

As before, the right interpretation of (1) and (2) yields only the harmless:

- 4^{iv} The same temporal entity may be *future from certain points of view* and *past from certain other ones*.

We avoid the conclusion that time is unreal, but have to accept irreducibly tensed temporal qualifications: the full story about temporal reality has to be told from a certain temporal standpoint. The fact that this-or-that event is present is itself perspectival, it is internally related to an instant of time. We thus reject the premise Fine (2005c: 273) calls "Absolutism", i.e. the view that the composition of reality is not irreducibly relative, that its relative composition by the facts must be explained in terms of its absolute composition by these facts:

"For the non-standard realist [...], reality at another time is an alternative reality. It is neither a facet of the one true reality nor a hypothetical determination of the one true reality, but another reality on an equal footing with the current reality ..." (Fine 2005c: 279)

In the case of a temporally changing object such as the year 2017, we thus have to qualify further:

- 1^v 2017-as-present was-future-from-2016.
- 2^v 2017-as-present will-be-past-from-2018.

Contrary to the case of visual shape, however, there is no temporally unqualified way of saying what the year 2017 is. "2017-as-present" and "2017" are really just the same thing.

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To explain this, we

- 1^v 2017 is-from-2017-future-from-2016.
- 2^v 2017 will-from-2017-be-past-from-2018.

To do this, I take a step back in “Perspectival Facts” and examine an application of the so-called ‘argument from perspective’ to temporal facts.

Self-biased value-judgments

All of us are special, and even special in the same way (Wittgenstein, Merlo)

Ronnow-Rasmussen, Personal Value

Shafer-Landau (2003: 15) ‘stance-independent facts’

We have seen that there is an important ambiguity in the description of perspectival facts and contents, with respect to the question whether or not their perspectivity is accounted for by their nature, or by the way they are given to us. The same important ambiguity is present in the third type of perspectival facts, i.e. egocentric, or more generally personal, facts. Egocentric facts differ from locational and temporal facts in important ways: as has been argued by Prior (1968), egocentric facts do not seem to have a full propositional structure: they involve features and contain the subject only as an implicit constituent, if at all. Also, it is not quite clear how this ‘implicitly’ involved subject is to be characterised: is it, as one might think by analogy with the cases of time and space, a mere ‘point’ in some ‘space’ of persons. Or is it a substantial self, bearer of attitudes and subject of self-evaluations? The answer to this question will partly determine the extent of the realm of first-personal facts. Our value-judgements, for example, are self-biased: we often value pleasure more if we are going to have it rather than someone else. Is this always irrational (cf. Hare 2007)? Independently of the answer to that question, we may even question whether we ever manage to make person-independent valuations. The argument from perspective may be applied to ‘personal denominations’ of the A-type:

- 1 Our valuations are either axiologically independent from our own person or dependent on it (in which case we call them *personal valuations*).
- 2 Being better and worse are contrary properties.
- 3 The same action is better and worse relative to different personal perspectives.
1. At least one of these personal perspectives do not present us with a person-independent property of the fact.
- 4 There is no reason to privilege one person over another.
2. Therefore no personal perspective presents us with a person-independent valuation.

A common template

The following four propositions are incompatible with there being incompatible aspectual facts:

Realism There are perspectival facts.

Neutrality No standpoint is privileged.

Absolutism Reality is not relative to a perspective.

Coherence Reality is coherent.

With respect to the temporal case, the assumptions are as follows (2005c: 270-2, 2006: 399-400):

Realism Reality is (in part, at least) composed of tensed facts.

Neutrality No time is privileged, the facts that compose reality are not oriented towards one time as opposed to another.

Absolutism The composition of reality is not irreducibly relative, i.e. its relative composition by the facts must be explained in terms of its absolute composition by the facts.

Coherence Reality is not irreducibly incoherent, i.e. its composition by incompatible facts must be explained in terms of its composition by compatible facts.

A crucial question concerns how to spell out the notion of ‘incoherent facts’. For Fine (2005c: 272, 2006: 400), two facts are incoherent if they have incompatible ‘contents’. It has been justly remarked by Correia & Rosenkrantz (2012) that Fine’s notion is non-standard insofar as he denies that fragmentalism – the denial of coherence – implies that there are true contradictions (2005c: 282, 2006: 402). Fragmentalism holds that while the constitution of reality is standpoint-independent (Absolutism), reality is not “of a piece” (2005c: 262, 2006: 413), but is fragmented into mutually incoherent classes of mutually coherent facts we may identify with times (2005c: 281).

An A-theory about time, will therefore hold:

(A_t) Reality is partly constituted by intrinsically temporal facts.

An A-theory about space, will assert the following:

(A_x) Reality is partly constituted by intrinsically localised facts.

An A-theory about the self would be:

(A_p) Reality is partly constituted by intrinsically personal facts.

What is an intrinsically aspectual fact? It is an aspectual fact the perspectivity of which cannot be explained in relational terms, i.e. by recourse to something outside of it, e.g. an instant, a place or a person.

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