

FINE'S MCTAGGART, TEMPORAL PASSAGE, AND THE A VERSUS B-DEBATE

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Abstract

I offer an interpretation and a partial defense of Kit Fine's 'Argument from Passage', which is situated within his reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox. Fine argues that existing A-theoretic approaches to passage are no more dynamic, i.e. capture passage no better, than the B-theory. I argue that this comparative claim is correct. Our intuitive picture of passage, which inclines us towards A-theories, suggests more than coherent A-theories can deliver. In Finean terms, the picture requires not only Realism about tensed facts, but also Neutrality, i.e. the tensed facts not being 'oriented towards' one privileged time. However unlike Fine, and unlike others who advance McTaggartian arguments, I take McTaggart's paradox to indicate neither the need for a more dynamic theory of passage nor that time does not pass. A more dynamic theory is not to be had: Fine's 'non-standard realism' amounts to no more than a conceptual gesture. But instead of concluding that time does not pass, we should conclude that theories of passage cannot deliver the dynamicity of our intuitive picture. For this reason, a B-theoretic account of passage that simply identifies passage with the succession of times is a serious contender.

Introduction

Contemporary metaphysics of time is shaped by the opposition between A-theorists and B-theorists. B-theorists claim that there are no monadic temporal properties like presentness or pastness or futurity – instead there are only dyadic temporal relations like simultaneity and succession. They typically also hold that all times exist equally (a thesis known as 'eternalism') and that there are, fundamentally, no tensed facts (such as the fact that it is Monday) but only tenseless facts (such as the fact that this article is (tenselessly) written on a Monday). A-theorists come in many varieties, but they all deny one or more of these claims. One of the most popular kinds of A-theories is presentism, which is the view that (necessarily) only present things exist. Other well-known

A-theoretic views include the growing block view, which says that only the past and the present exist, and the moving spotlight theory, which says that all times exist but they become present successively.

For obvious reasons, the A versus B-debate is often taken, in part, to be a debate about whether or not time has a dynamic aspect, i.e. whether or not time passes. Thus, A-theorists are seen as vindicating the claim that time passes by providing robust metaphysical accounts of what its passing consists in, while B-theorists typically deny that time passes.

In this paper, I aim to raise some doubts about this construal of the debate. I offer an interpretation and a partial defense of Kit Fine's 'Argument from Passage', which is situated within his reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox. Fine argues that existing A-theoretic approaches to passage are no more dynamic, i.e. capture passage no better, than the B-theory. I argue that this comparative claim is correct. However unlike Fine, and unlike others who advance McTaggartian arguments, I take McTaggart's paradox to indicate neither the need for a more dynamic theory nor that time does not pass. A more dynamic theory is not to be had: Fine's 'non-standard realism' amounts to no more than a conceptual gesture. But instead of concluding that time doesn't pass, we should conclude that theories of passage cannot deliver the dynamicity of what I call 'our intuitive picture' of passage. For this reason, a B-theoretic account of passage that simply identifies passage with the succession of times is a serious contender.¹

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I briefly sketch Fine's reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox and his 'Argument from Passage'. In the second section, I defend that argument and interpret it as concerning two opposed elements of our intuitive picture of passage. In the third section, I argue against Fine's non-standard realist approach to passage. In the fourth and final section, I apply the 'Argument from Passage' to

¹ Such an account is defended in Steven Savitt, 'On Absolute Becoming and the Myth of Passage' in Craig Callender (ed.) *Time, Reality and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 153–168; L. Nathan Oaklander (ed.) *The Philosophy of Time: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, Vol. I: *The Reality and Language of Time* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008), General Introduction, pp. 1–11; L. Nathan Oaklander, 'A-, B-, and R-theories of time: A Debate' in Adrian Bardon (ed.) *The Future of the Philosophy of Time* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–24; and Natalja Deng, "'Beyond A- and B-time" Reconsidered', *Philosophia* 38 (4) (2010), pp. 741–753.

two prominent A-theoretic views, namely presentism and the growing block view.

1. Fine's Reconstruction of McTaggart and the 'Argument from Passage'

1.1 *Fine's McTaggart*

Fine's McTaggart comes in two versions. The first version is as follows.² Assume that there is a basic notion of constitution for temporal reality. Then consider the following four principles:

Realism: Reality is constituted (at least, in part) by tensed facts.

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

Absolutism: The constitution of reality is an absolute matter, i.e. not relative to a time or other form of temporal standpoint.

Coherence: Reality is not contradictory, it is not constituted by facts with incompatible content.

Realism expresses a commitment to tensed, as opposed to tenseless facts. Neutrality is the claim that there is no privileged time t such that reality is constituted by just the facts that obtain at t . Absolutism states that the concept of constitution that appears in the other three principles is such as to make it the case that the constitution of reality is absolute, i.e. not temporally relative. Coherence states that reality is not contradictory.

These four principles, Fine argues, are incompatible:

It follows from Realism that reality is constituted by some tensed fact. There will therefore be some time t at which this fact obtains. Now Neutrality states that reality is not oriented towards one time as opposed to another. So reality will presumably be constituted by similar sorts of tensed facts that obtain at other times (given that there are other times!) . . . [A]ny reasonable view of how temporal reality might be constituted should allow for its being reasonably variegated over time; and

² See Kit Fine, 'Tense and Reality' in Kit Fine (ed.) *Modality and Tense: Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 261–320; Kit Fine, 'The Reality of Tense', *Synthese* 150 (3) (2006), pp. 399–414.

presumably it will . . . then be constituted by incompatible facts, i.e. facts with incompatible contents. . . . By Absolutism reality is absolutely constituted by these facts; and this is then contrary to Coherence.³

The second version of Fine's McTaggart assumes only that any notion of composition, be it basic or derived, must meet analogous explanatory demands.

Realism: Reality is 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.

As the above argument showed, a given notion of composition that conforms to Realism and Neutrality will be either relative or incoherent. To meet all four explanatory demands, that notion will have to be explained in terms of a different, perhaps more basic, notion: if relative, it will have to be explained in terms of an absolute one, but that notion will then be incoherent. If incoherent, it will have to be explained in terms of a coherent one, but that notion will then be relative. In either case, there is an infinite explanatory regress.

So much for Fine's reconstruction.⁴ Its value, as we will see, lies in making the commitments of A-theoretic accounts of

³ Fine, 'Tense and Reality', p. 272.

⁴ Note that although it reflects a particular understanding of the A versus B-contrast, which in turn reflects Fine's particular methodology, we need not endorse the latter to accept the reconstruction. Fine takes the concept of reality, and in particular that of 'metaphysical', as opposed to 'mere' or 'apparent' reality, to be central to a proper understanding of many metaphysical debates, including this one. But all that is needed as a basis of his reconstruction is the concept of temporal reality in some metaphysically fundamental sense. That concept need not be understood in the way suggested by Fine; and some such notion is presupposed by the A versus B-debate as such. For example, the B-theoretic tenet that there are no tensed facts relies on such a notion. After all, most B-theorists now hold that there are true tensed beliefs, so the notion of 'fact' in play here must be a metaphysically robust one. Anyone who is happy with the standard way of setting up the A versus B-contrast should have no worries about Fine's reconstruction on general methodological grounds.

passage explicit. Four different positions arise from the rejection of exactly one of the four principles: 'anti-realism', 'standard realism', 'external relativism', and 'fragmentalism'. Anti-realism, of course, results from the rejection of Realism; it also involves an adherence to each of the other principles. This is essentially the B-theoretic view (though Fine does not employ that terminology). The anti-realist holds that there are no tensed facts, only tenseless facts, and that what there is in temporal reality is not oriented towards one time rather than another (Neutrality). Absolutism and Coherence are unquestioned background assumptions. Standard realism shares this implicit adherence to Absolutism and Coherence, but combines it with the opposite stance towards each of Realism and Neutrality, i.e. with an acceptance of Realism and a rejection of Neutrality. (I examine the remaining two positions in section 3.)

1.2 *The 'Argument from Passage'*

Compare: the anti-realist view is that reality, at the most fundamental level, is composed only of tenseless facts to the effect that certain times succeed one another. The standard realist view, by contrast, is that reality, at the most fundamental level, is composed of tensed facts to the effect that a certain time is present, while certain other times were present or will be present. Fine's criticism is this: the standard realist view, with its collection of tensed facts oriented towards the special time that is present, amounts to no more than the anti-realist view with a privileged centre. It is the result of adding such a centre to the anti-realist view. Once one time is designated as the special present time, it follows that whichever times are earlier than it are past and were present, whereas whichever times are later than it are future and will be present. But this is not a significant difference in view, so that given (as Fine assumes) that the anti-realist view is static, we have no reason to think of the standard realist view as any more dynamic.

The argument will strike many as problematic. The problematic claim, they will say, is that the standard realist view 'amounts to no more than' the anti-realist view with a privileged centre. Is this the right way to view A-theories? It is not as if A-theorists start out with a succession of times, and with a collection of tenseless facts, and then construct their collection of tensed facts by adding to that. Instead, if they posit tensed facts at all, they start out with nothing

but a collection of tensed facts, to the effect that a particular time is present, while other times were or will be present. It is not as if those times are primarily earlier or later than the present time, and thereby past or future. They are simply past or future.

This line of thought, though correct as far as it goes, misses Fine's point. Granted, the two views differ. The question is: how comparatively well placed are they to account for passage? The standard realist view is that temporal reality, fundamentally, is composed of a collection of tensed facts to the effect that one time is present, other times were and still other times will be present. Is such a view more dynamic than the anti-realist view?

2. The Argument Defended

Fine, like most participants of the A versus B-debate, simply takes it for granted that the anti-realist view is static. He writes:

[T]he fact that time flows is a tenseless fact about time; it is not one that holds at one time rather than another. But the proposed explanation is tensed; it states of each of a number of times that it is *present* or was *past* or will be *future* [sic]. But if we try to convert it into a tenseless explanation, we end up with a triviality. We must say something like: it is always the case that some time is present, that all earlier times were present and all later times will be present. And this is something that even the anti-realist can accept.⁵

He is right to say that anti-realists, i.e. B-theorists, can accept this, because they can hold that presentness, pastness and futurity are perspectival properties: each time is present from its own perspective, and past/future from other perspectives. The resulting view is one according to which times succeed one another, with no difference in metaphysical (e.g. ontological) status between them. What is questionable is whether the resulting view should be thought of as static. Why not think that this succession of times is all that is needed for passage? After all, the B-theory is as much an account of change as of time; B-theorists are to some extent

⁵ Fine, 'Tense and Reality', p. 287.

motivated by the wish to offer a perspicuous, comprehensive, and consistent account of change. And change is not a static phenomenon.

So what, according to Fine, is wrong with an anti-realist view of temporal passage? Beyond the familiar charge that it trivialises passage, we are not offered any reason to think it amiss. This is perhaps because it is a presupposition of the A versus B-debate, as usually conducted, that A-theorists alone are in a position to account for real passage. And the reason for that is not hard to discern: we tend to think of time's passing in terms that suggest A-theoretic views. We think of times as becoming present successively, or as coming into (and perhaps going out of) existence. I will refer to this as 'our intuitive picture' of time's passing.

Let's examine this picture more closely. One element of it is an intuition about the present, namely a tendency, at each time, to think of that time as metaphysically privileged in some way. What I have in mind here is the tendency, at each time, to think of it as the only, or the most, or the latest, real time, or to think of it as the time that bears the special monadic property of presentness, or more generally to think of one's temporal vantage point, the time of belief, as itself pointing to something objective, something that should be explicitly included in a complete conception of time.

But there is more to the picture. At each time, we tend to think of that time as metaphysically privileged. But, at each time, we also remember and anticipate other times seeming special in just the same way. That is, at any given time, that time seems special, but we also remember thinking of many previous times in just the same way. So we ask how this time got to be 'it', i.e. how the privilege got transferred, from the previous time(s) to this one. What is essential to this process is that it affects each time equally. Each time, once special, loses that privilege, and each time eventually gains it. That element of our intuitive picture does not reinforce our intuition about the present; rather, it is in tension with it. At each time, we are inclined not only to posit a fundamental lack of parity between times, by assigning metaphysical privilege to that time, but also to posit a fundamental parity between times. Our intuitive picture of passage is the product of two essentially opposed elements.

In my view, what Fine's argument implies is that this second element of our intuitive picture, which suggests a fundamental parity between times with respect to passage, is left out of the standard realist view. While our intuition about a metaphysically

privileged present inclines us towards Realism, and Realism naturally combines with a rejection of Neutrality, this second element of our intuitive picture of passage requires Neutrality. And since the reason standard realism is usually thought of as more dynamic than anti-realism is that it is associated with our intuitive picture of passage, this shortcoming, if it exists, is significant. The standard realist view then falls far short of the dynamicity of the intuitive picture that inspires it.

So the question is: *does* standard realism, with its rejection of Neutrality, deliver less dynamicity than our intuitive picture of passage? And, is standard realism an accurate representation of (any) existing A-theoretic account(s) of passage? In the rest of this section, I am concerned with the first question; I return to the second question in section 4.

The answer to the first question should be 'yes'. Think of the standard realist as positing a collection of tensed facts that together privilege a particular time picked out by name, *t*. In a way, standard realism really amounts to a multitude of different views, each privileging a different time. Each of its versions implies that certain times will be present and other times were. The reason this is not quite satisfactory is that the passage of time manifests itself more in a change between descriptions of temporal reality, than in the content of the descriptions themselves.

Note how this relates to our intuitive picture of passage, as a change in which time is present, or in which tensed facts obtain. When we picture this kind of process, we imagine more than the tensed facts that obtain at present, to the effect that certain other times were present and others will be. The act of imagination itself unfolds over time; first we imagine a certain time being present and certain others being past and future, *but then we also imagine the next time being present and certain others being past or future*. That is, first we imagine just one set of tensed facts holding, but shortly after that, we also imagine a different set of tensed facts holding, which privilege a different time. And it is this next collection of tensed facts that is left out of any given standard realist description. (Note, incidentally, that we do not seem to have the corresponding habit when we think of B-theoretic succession. Thinking of succession, too, unfolds over time, so the act of imagining a succession of times, one might think, should involve first thinking of one time, and a moment later consciously thinking of another time succeeding it. Instead one tends to imagine the succession of times before one's mind's eye at a single moment.)

Thus, standard realism delivers substantially less dynamicity than the picture associated with it leads one to expect. In Fine's terminology, the problem is that Realism forces one to reject Neutrality, whereas the picture requires an adherence to both. When we imagine times becoming present successively, we treat times as on a par in a stronger sense than standard realism allows: not only do we imagine that one time is present while others were or will be, but we also for a moment imagine other times (i.e. the next one) being present instead. This is what gives the picture the 'whoosh and whiz' that is commonly associated with A-theories.

3. Against Fine's Non-Standard Realism

Fine's own proposed theory, non-standard realism, is intended to remedy this problem by combining Realism with Neutrality. This third way involves positing tensed facts from many different times: it is a fact both that it is 2012, and that it is 2013. Both facts partly compose reality.

Non-standard realism manages to uphold both Realism and Neutrality by rejecting either one of the remaining two principles of Fine's McTaggart. One version rejects Coherence. The resulting view is called 'fragmentalism'. The idea is that all tensed facts from all times obtain equally, and since these are not all compatible (2012 is present, 2013 is present), reality must be taken to be irreducibly contradictory.

The other version is 'external relativism'. The external relativist too posits all tensed facts from all times, but even though some of these are incompatible, he manages to uphold Coherence, by rejecting Absolutism. External relativism says that tensed facts obtain (or 'compose reality') relative to times. At first sight, this seems quite intuitive, and a likely candidate for what many A-theorists had in mind all along (see section 4.2). However, on closer inspection, external relativism turns out to be rather problematic; and so does fragmentalism.

Suppose t_1 is present, and suppose we ask the relativist about the status of tensed facts from other times. For the relativist, it is a fact that t_2 is (objectively, non-perspectivally) present, but only relative to t_2 ; and it is a fact that t_0 is present, but only relative to t_0 . But what does that mean? These tensed facts from other times are not the relativised tenseless facts that t_0 is present at t_0 and t_2 at t_2 ; they are not 'facets of reality', as the anti-realist would think.

Nor are they the facts that earlier and later times will be present; they are also not ‘hypothetical realities’, as standard realists would have it. Instead, they are ‘alternate realities’. Fine himself calls this ‘a difficult, perhaps even an unintelligible, idea’.⁶ It is not appropriate, Fine says, to think of these alternate realities as perspectives on some more fundamental reality, nor is it appropriate to think of them as parts of a bigger reality, nor are they alternate possibilities for reality. Instead,

... the differential manifestation of how things are is in itself integral to the very character of reality ... [R]eality as a whole “manifests” itself in these different ways, ... it becomes “alive” or “vivid” through certain realities holding rather than others.⁷

It seems to me that these remarks do not succeed in giving any positive, literal content to the position in question. At best, they gesture in the direction of a view that can perhaps only be gestured at, and that must be understood metaphorically. In effect, they amount to a kind of prohibition to search for an understanding of temporal reality in the usual ways. What we are told is how not to think, rather than what to think, about time.

Fragmentalism is no less problematic. Whenever it seems intelligible, it is very likely being mistaken for the B-theoretic view that temporally relativised (i.e. tenseless) facts from all times obtain equally. Fragmentalism, we are told, is not the strange view that there are true contradictions, since it does not say (does it not?) that t_1 is both present and past. It is ‘a *different* strange view’ which says that both facts compose reality absolutely (i.e. not relatively to times) even though they are not themselves temporally relativised (i.e. tenseless) facts.⁸ But it is hard to see how this avoids the contradiction between incompatible tensed facts; in fact, that contradiction seems part and parcel of fragmentalism, which after all is characterised by the thesis that reality is irreducibly contradictory. The idea that the facts ‘arrange themselves’ into coherent fragments is of no help, since we are not told what it is that stops the fragments from interacting, i.e. what it is that effects the ‘arrangement’.

⁶ Fine, ‘The Reality of Tense’, p. 403.

⁷ Fine, ‘The Reality of Tense’, p. 403.

⁸ Fine, ‘The Reality of Tense’, p. 402.

It would seem, then, that non-standard realism does not constitute a genuine alternative. It is the conceptual gesture that results from trying to do full justice to our intuitive picture of passage. That picture is composed of incompatible elements which together deprive it of literal content.

4. The Argument Applied to Existing A-theories

4.1 Presentism

Perhaps the most popular kind of A-theoretic approach to passage is presentism. What could be more dynamic than a view according to which only the present exists, so that times continuously come into and go out of existence?

Here is what ersatzist presentist Ned Markosian says about passage:

[T]he time ten years from now can be identified with a certain maximal, consistent proposition. Call that proposition "T". T is false right now, but will be true ten years hence . . . T will go from instantiating *will-be-true-in-ten-years* to instantiating *will-be-true-in-nine-years* and then *will-be-true-in-eight-years*, and so on. And the process by which T goes from instantiating *will-be-true-in-ten-years* to instantiating *will-be-true-in-nine-years*, and so on, can be identified with the process by which that time – T – becomes less and less future.⁹

In other words, T now instantiates all of the following:

is-false-now
 will-be-true-in-ten-years
 will-in-one-year-be-such-that-it-will-be-true-in-nine-years
 and so on.

As Markosian points out in 'How Fast Does Time Pass?', claims about the changing truth-values of propositions are merely the natural accompaniment of metaphysical views involving passage; they do not serve as the metaphysical basis for the claim that time

⁹ Ned Markosian, 'A Defense of Presentism', in Dean Zimmerman (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 47–82, at p. 78.

passes.¹⁰ But it is straightforward to turn the above into a metaphysical explanation. The following tensed facts obtain, making the corresponding propositions true:

It is not the case that T now;
 It will be the case that T in ten years;
 It will in one year be the case that it will be the case that T in nine years; and so on.

These tensed facts are about the successive becoming present of times. But is the resulting view more dynamic than the B-theory with its tenseless facts about the successive happening of times? It seems to me that Fine's objection to standard realism applies here. These facts are present facts. Unlike what our intuitive picture leads us to imagine, they do not include the tensed facts that will take their place once time actually 'moves on'. What we have is lots of abstract times only one of which is true, while others were true or will be true; the phrase 'continual coming and ceasing to be' seemed to suggest more.

What I am suggesting is that once we look past the pictures, the contrast in dynamicity between eternalism and presentism vanishes. It is not the case that the latter paints a more dynamic picture, or does a better job capturing passage, than the former, provided eternalists acknowledge that time passes – i.e. that there is more than one time and that they succeed one another. It takes an act of imagination to set the presentist account of passage in motion, so to speak; and there is no good reason why we shouldn't also do this in the case of eternalism.

Ersatzist presentist Thomas Crisp says that his account of passage is 'nearly vacuous'. 'Such', he says rightly, 'is the nature of temporal becoming: it admits of no very informative explanation'.¹¹ His account says that the ersatz series of abstract times is such that

... (i) one and only one of its members t_α has the property *being present*, (ii) for every time t_1 in the series such that t_1 is earlier than t_α , WAS[t_1 has *being present*], and (iii) for every time

¹⁰ Ned Markosian, 'How Fast Does Time Pass?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (4) (1993), pp. 829–844.

¹¹ Thomas Crisp, 'Review of "The Ontology of Time", by L. Nathan Oaklander', *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2005).

t_2 in the series such that t_2 is later than t_α , WILL[t_2 has *being present*].¹²

This effectively says that one and only one time is (tenselessly) true; that every 'earlier' time is such that some 'earlier' time (namely, presumably it itself) entails that it is (tenselessly) true; and every 'later' time is such that some 'later' time (likewise here) entails that it is (tenselessly) true. Of course this does not pick out one time by name, so it is not standard realism. Instead it quantifies over times and says that one is privileged. But Fine's criticism still applies. The process of passage is whatever makes it the case at each time that the quantified claim is (still) true; and the account does not capture that process better, and therefore is no more dynamic, than is a B-theoretic account that says that there is a succession of times because time passes.¹³

It is hard not to read more into the presentist account. But I suggest that we tend to misjudge how much of this is due to a literal difference in dynamicity between presentism and eternalism, and how much of it is due to the non-literal content of the former, such as the images it evokes. Of course, even if I am right about this, presentists and eternalists may still have a substantial disagreement. They may, for example, differ about the openness of the future, and about the ontological status of space-time. But they do not substantially differ over whether time is dynamic, i.e. over whether time passes.

4.2 *The Growing Block View*

The best developed version of the view, by Michael Tooley, has been discussed extensively in the literature, and I won't enter the debate here.¹⁴ Nathan Oaklander has forcefully argued that either

¹² Crisp, 'Review of "The Ontology of Time", by L. Nathan Oaklander'.

¹³ Perhaps it will be objected that there is a difference between claiming, as Savitt and Oaklander do, that the passage of time just consists in a succession of times, and claiming that there is a succession of times because time passes. I am not so sure. But if there is (in which case the kind of B-theoretic account of passage I am defending is perhaps closer to that found in Tim Maudlin, *The Metaphysics within Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), the point remains that a B-theoretic account of passage, i.e. a dynamic version of the B-theory, is as adequate an account of passage as is any A-theoretic account.

¹⁴ Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

it is incoherent, or it collapses into the B-theory.¹⁵ If (as I believe) Oaklander is right, Tooley's view, too, fails to represent a genuine alternative to traditional approaches to passage.

A slightly different version of the view is defended by Tim Button.¹⁶ It is a tensed fact that (say) Monday is (tensedly) the latest time. As of today, Monday, earlier times are (tensedly) real; but as of previous times, Monday was/is (tensedly) not real. What is real, i.e. which time is the latest time, changes as time passes, and this is where the dynamicity lies.

This view is either standard realism, or an external relativist version of non-standard realism. Button says that 'different answers must be given at different times to the question "what is (tensedly) real"'.¹⁷ That's standard realism. This is a natural interpretation, since it is of the essence of Button's view that the tensed facts change: it won't always be a tensed fact that Monday is the latest time, nor has it always been so. But then the dynamicity manifests itself rather in the change between answers than in any of the answers. Our intuitive picture of passage suggests more, because it includes the change from one set of tensed facts holding to the next. As we've seen, this element of the picture requires Neutrality, which, when combined with the realist's commitment to tensed facts, leads to non-standard realism. Indeed, some of Button's comments suggest that he would be sympathetic to an external relativist version of non-standard realism. He quotes with approval Michael Dummett's suggestion that we give up the prejudice that there is a non-temporally-relative description of temporal reality.¹⁸ This suggestion of Dummett's represents one of the distant ancestors of Fine's external relativism.¹⁹ However, as I have argued, external relativism amounts to no more than a conceptual gesture. It cannot function as a literal account of temporal reality.

¹⁵ L. Nathan Oaklander, 'Tooley on Time and Tense', in L. Nathan Oaklander (ed.) *The Importance of Time* (Proceedings of the Philosophy of Time Society, 1995–2000) (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 3–12.

¹⁶ Tim Button, 'There's no time like the present', *Analysis* 66 (290) (2006), pp. 130–135; Tim Button, 'Every Now and Then, No-Futurism Faces no Sceptical Problems', *Analysis* 67 (296) (2007), pp. 325–332.

¹⁷ Button, 'There's no time like the present', p. 133/134.

¹⁸ Button, 'Every Now and Then, No-Futurism Faces no Sceptical Problems', p. 331.

¹⁹ Fine, 'Tense and Reality', p. 279; see also Michael Dummett, 'A Defense of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time', *Philosophical Review* 69 (4) (1960), pp. 497–504.

Concluding Remarks

I have offered an interpretation and a partial defense of Fine's 'Argument from Passage' for the claim that existing A-theoretic approaches to passage are no more dynamic, i.e. capture passage no better, than the B-theory. I have also argued against Fine's non-standard realism, and examined two prominent A-theoretic approaches to passage. Such approaches are susceptible either to Fine's argument, or to my criticism of Fine's non-standard realism.

The traditional conclusion of McTaggartian arguments is that time does not pass. Another conclusion one might draw is that an adequate theory of passage is not to be had. But both of these conclusions seem somewhat over-dramatic. As regards the latter, if no coherent account of passage can do full justice to our intuitive picture of passage, why should we insist on being guided by that picture when theorising about passage? As regards the former, it seems that there is something odd about claiming that time does not pass merely on the basis of McTaggartian arguments: those arguments are much more plausibly taken to concern the limits of metaphysical theorising than a substantial insight into temporal reality. Disregarding this point can lead to a certain tension. For example, Huw Price argues both that it turns out, strikingly and counterintuitively, that time does not pass (recommending a 'Copernican shift' to 'the atemporal perspective') *and* that the view that time passes is 'not so much false, as doubtfully coherent'.²⁰ But how can the view that time does not pass be *both* a default position which we have no reason to give up because no sense can be made of its opposite, *and* radically revisionary? The culprit here, it seems to me, is the assumption that theories of time which acknowledge passage must make *non-trivial* sense of that process (Price's entire project is to uncover a non-trivial

²⁰ Huw Price, 'The Flow of Time', in Craig Callender (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), see also <http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/4829/1/flow-for-archive.pdf> (page references are to the online version), p. 2. Admittedly, Price does not argue for his (Boltzmannian block) view *merely* on the basis of his McTaggartian argument. He also argues that there are good empirical reasons to deny that there is a global objective direction of time. But he concedes that this result by itself would not suffice to show that time does not pass (as opposed to, say, that it passes in different directions in different regions of space-time). See Price 'The Flow of Time', p. 32.

notion of passage). If I am right, then not much can be said about passage. But surely we should not deny a thesis because it seems trivially true.²¹

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