Uniform grounding of truth and the Growing Block theory: a reply to Heathwood

PETER FORREST

Chris Heathwood requires the sentence 'Caesar was conscious when he crossed the Rubicon' to be made true in much the same way as 'Caesar was wet when he crossed the Rubicon' (2005: 250). Yet because the Growing Block theorist is committed to the zombiedom of the past, the former is not made true by past objects, although the latter is.

Heathwood demands a uniform account of the grounding of truths and he will be given a uniform account. But we should exercise care in deciding just what sort of uniformity is appropriate. As Russell (1905) so famously pointed out a century ago the subject/predicate form of a sentence can be misleading. Likewise although the two sentences 'Caesar is conscious' and 'Caesar is wet' have similar subject/predicate forms they have, I say, different kinds of truth-conditions and hence their past tense transformations also have different kinds of truth-conditions. The uniformity I

endorse is that in both cases the grounds for the past tense transformation are the same as the grounds the present tense versions used to have when they were true.

Heathwood suggests that the Dead Past defence requires 'some of the semantic and metaphysical gymnastics presentists train for but Growing Block Theorists thought they could avoid' (2005: 250–51). He is not quite right. Admittedly I require a highly controversial thesis, but it is quite different from anything appealed to by presentists. I require that consciousness supervene on the occurrence of suitable causes without the occurrence of their effects. Given that thesis, consciousness ceases to be real as soon as the effect has come into existence. An example might help to illustrate this theory of consciousness, but I am not committed to the correctness of this example, only to something or other like the example. Suppose that the conscious awareness of a previously unconscious mental state supervenes upon the incompleteness of an act of recording that state in the memory. Then once that act has been completed there is no longer the cause without the effect, and hence no longer conscious awareness of that state.

The thesis that consciousness supervenes upon incomplete causal processes would be even more controversial if it implied a temporal gap between cause and effect. Fortunately it does not, for the cause could occupy an interval of time and the effect an interval immediately after.

Now consider a causal process $Cause(c, E)$, in which a particular event c is bringing about an event of very precise type E, precise enough for there to be only one instance in normal circumstances. The causal process is incomplete if the E has not yet occurred. The grounds for the truth of '$Cause(c, E)$ is occurring' is the combination of: (1) a positive part, namely whatever grounds the truth of 'Event c happens at some time or other and has the tendency to cause an E' – the ground might be c itself – with: (2) a negative part, whatever grounds the truth of 'There is no E'. By the thesis that consciousness supervenes upon incomplete causal processes 'Caesar is conscious' had, when it was true, just such a positive/negative hybrid grounds for its truth, unlike 'Caesar is wet', which had straightforward positive grounds.

Now consider a past causal process, $Cause(c, E)$, which was occurring in a region of Space-time R, containing c but no E. The grounds for the truth of the past tense '$Cause(c, E)$ was occurring in R' is the combination of the positive part, namely whatever used to ground the truth of 'c occurs in R *and* has the tendency to cause an E' and the negative part, whatever used to ground the truth of 'There is no E'. That last sentence is no longer true but its old truth-grounds still exist, namely whatever now grounds the truth of 'There is (omnitemporally) no E within either region R or any region no later than R'. Thus we have the entirely satisfactory result that the grounds for the truth of a statement about the past are precisely the

same as the grounds that its present tense variant used to have when true. That is the uniformity condition I uphold. And the same uniformity holds, of course, for the rather simpler grounds of the truth of 'Caesar was wet.'

School of Social Science
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia
pforrest@une.edu.au

References

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