

The Hybrid Theory of Time

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Time passes; sometimes swiftly, sometimes interminably, but always it passes. We see the world change as events emerge from the shroud of the future, clandestinely slinking into the past almost immediately as though they are reluctant to meet our gaze: children are born, old friends and relatives die, governments once full of youthful enthusiasm wane. If the Earth were sentient, it might feel itself being torn apart as tectonic plates diverge, and chuckle as it outlived species upon species of transient parasites. How could anyone possibly deny that time passes?

And yet there is dissent over this issue. Many philosophers believe that there is no objective temporal passage *in the sense just described*; no procession of events passing from the future, through the present and into the past.¹ Rather, the only facts are tenseless ones. We can briefly sketch the *tenseless* theory of time by noting that it commits us to at least the following: no distinction is made with respect to existence between past, present and future entities; these all exist. There is a set of temporal objects and a set of temporal separation relations (e.g. precedence, simultaneity, betweenness), and once we have said which separation relations hold between which pairs, triples, etc., we have given a complete description of the temporal facts “once and for all”. Tenseless theorists generally say that the passing of time just consists in succession—in the fact that some times and events stand in the relation of precedence to others. And if this does not exhaust the intelligible content of “temporal passage”, then the remainder is something subjective—a “side-effect” of our mental life which does not reflect anything mind-independent (see, for example, Grünbaum (1967)). However, there are others who hold that this account of temporal passage is emaciated and that our experience of time as something which seems to pass reflects something more than this account offers. Let us say that these people hold a *tensed theory of time*. According to one tensed theory of time, *presentism*, the only temporal things in existence are those that exist now. Moreover, there is no complete set of temporal facts “once and for all”,

¹Events have been construed in a number of ways in the philosophical literature. It will be convenient here to include both changes and facts or states of affairs (that is, a certain thing’s having a certain property or standing in a certain relation) under the rubric of events.

since different sets of temporal facts characterise the world as time passes and things are generated, or undergo change, or cease to exist.

Straddling the tenseless theory and presentism is a version of the tensed theory which we shall call the *hybrid theory*, since it bears some similarity to each of the other two theories. It resembles the tenseless theory to the extent that it accords existence to all past, present and future entities. But it also resembles presentism insofar as it insists that there is no complete set of temporal facts “once and for all”, since temporal entities change with respect to the monadic properties of pastness, presentness and futurity. Those in favour of the hybrid theory have included Wilfrid Sellars, and more recently, George Schlesinger and John Bigelow.²

It has often been alleged that the tensed theory of time is incoherent, but this broader charge will not be addressed here. Instead, I shall be focussing on the question of the hybrid theory’s coherence. First, the familiar argument that the hybrid theory generates an infinite regress of time series is presented. The charge that such a regress is vicious because it is generated to *analyse* the concept of events undergoing change (hereafter, event-change) is noted (Section 1). Following this, I urge that if the notion of event-change does indeed require analysis, no analysis can be given that avoids the regress. Thus, if analysis is required, the hybrid theory is in trouble (Section 2). Sections 3 and 4 broach attempts to salvage the hybrid theory. The first of these investigates the possibility that the notion of event-change might be taken as primitive. I argue that this line of defence is not promising. The second attempt is more ambitious. I endeavour to show that combining the traditional hybrid theory with presentism in a certain way allows us to halt the regress and resuscitate event-change. In Section 5, I embark

²See Bigelow (1991), Schlesinger (1980) and Sellars (1962). Lately, Bigelow has moved over to the presentist camp (Bigelow, 1996). I should also mention that I harbour some doubts about whether Schlesinger is really a hybrid theorist. He does speak of events gaining and shedding monadic properties of pastness, presentness and futurity, and of their approaching us from the future (1980, pp. 23–4). However, there is some textual evidence to suggest that he may hold something like the presentist view endorsed by Quentin Smith (1993, Section 5.7). According to this view, pastness, presentness and futurity are monadic properties of events, but only those events which are present exist. To hold this view, one must first believe that non-existents can bear properties. And there is evidence to suggest that Schlesinger does have this belief. In his (1985) and (1994, Ch. 2) he claims that what makes it true that Socrates, say, occurs in counterfactual situations, is the fact that Socrates is an aggregate of his this-worldly self and his other-worldly selves. That is to say, Socrates has “cosmic” parts. However, Schlesinger clearly states that other worlds, and hence, Socrates’ other-worldly parts, do not exist (1994, pp. 61–2)). Thus, it would seem that whatever mereological relation binds together the cosmic parts of the full-blown transworld Socrates must hold between his existent this-worldly cosmic part and each of his non-existent other-worldly cosmic parts. And if non-existents can stand in relations, why not allow that they can instantiate monadic properties? Given his views on modality, it would not be entirely surprising should Schlesinger, if pressed, claim to be a Smith-style presentist.

on an attempt to show that the efforts outlined in Section 4 are in vain. It is argued that the hybrid theory is coherent only if we understand the concepts of pastness, presentness and futurity *as it presents them*. And if we understand these concepts then they must be either primitive or analysable.³ I further claim that they are not analysable. The rest of the paper is devoted to showing that neither can they be primitive. I contend in Section 6 that if the hybrid theory were correct then regardless of whether our experiences were past, present or future, their phenomenal content would not differ. And in Section 7, I argue that this is enough to ensure that the concepts of pastness, presentness and futurity cannot be unanalysable. Hence, it is concluded that these are not genuine concepts. But, since they must be genuine in order for the hybrid theory to be comprehensible, I conclude that the hybrid theory is incoherent.

1 The Infinite Regress of Time Series

Events pass from the future into the brief glare of the present before receding into the past. So says the hybrid theory of time. This view of time is emotionally satisfying, and yet, as has been noted in various places (e.g. Smart (1956) and Williams (1967)), it is also deeply perplexing. A chief point of concern seems to be that according to this way of thinking about time, events change. And this looks ominous since changes always take time to occur. Thus, by saying that events change from being future to being present it seems that we are treating these changes as second-order events, and if we introduce second-order events then it looks as though we are lumbered with a second-order time series. Moreover, it seems that we can't rest here. If it is central to the concept of time that events change, then our second-order events, *qua* events, must themselves change if they are to be worthy of their names. Furthermore, if the second-order events change in this way, then by parity of reasoning there are third-order events. And so it goes. To save the notion of time-flow we will have to postulate an infinite hierarchy of unobservable events. If time passes in this way, there is a lot of passing going on.

Of course, there are senses in which events may be said to change that do not of themselves require commitment to higher-order time series. For instance, we may speak of a football game becoming progressively more heated. And this would be

³It might be suggested that I am setting up a false dichotomy here. After all, it might be thought, there are many concepts which are (i) not completely specifiable in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and (ii) nevertheless stand in certain conceptual relationships that partly constitute their meanings. Such concepts, it might be thought, are plausibly neither analysable nor primitive. In response, I would say that those concepts which satisfy (i) and (ii) count as *partially* analysable. When I speak of a concept as being analysable, I mean just that it is *at least* partially analysable.

the case if, generally speaking, later temporal parts of the game were more heated than earlier ones. In fact, this sort of change is of a kind with ordinary changes in things (although more or less so, depending on whether we think of ordinary things like cars as having temporal parts). But it is easy enough to see that this innocuous sort of change can't be what hybrid theorists have in mind when they talk of events changing with respect to pastness, presentness and futurity. For hybrid theorists maintain that it is possible for a *whole* event to be past, while *having been* future. Now, if pastness and futurity were *dyadic*, so that being past, for instance, happened to be a property that an event has relative to other times or events, then there would be no need for higher-order time series. But such an account clearly analyses pastness and futurity purely in terms of precedence relations, and thus, this would be a *tenseless* account of what it is for events to change from being wholly future to wholly past. However, the hybrid theorist wants to say that pastness and futurity are *monadic*. And for a whole event to change with respect to its monadic properties seems to require higher-order time with respect to which the change can occur.⁴ So it really does appear that the hybrid theorist needs higher-order time series.⁵

Yet, it is not altogether clear that we can save the hybrid theory by introducing an infinite hierarchy of time series. It might plausibly be thought that our perplexity about the notion of event-change, and the ensuing regress, result from our trying to do a bit of conceptual analysis: we are trying to *explain* what it is for events to change (Oaklander, 1983, p. 396). However, in order to provide an "explanation" we must appeal to a second order time series and thus we are launched on the regress. And under these conditions, the regress looks vicious because the notion of event-change is ungrounded. Given that the notion of event-

⁴Throughout the remainder of the paper, when I speak of "event-change" I mean events changing with respect to monadic pastness, presentness and futurity.

⁵These issues bring to mind an interesting question which I shall briefly outline here but leave unanswered. Suppose that the hybrid theorist really is committed to an infinite hierarchy of time-series; then it is natural to assume that the same story is to be given about the ontological status of higher-order times and events as is given of first-order times and events. Therefore, just as all past, present and future first order times and events exist, so too do all past, present and future higher order times and events. Now, it has just been noted that the hybrid theorist does not construe pastness, presentness, and futurity as relations between events/times and other events/times (of the same order), as this would be to adopt a tenseless rendering of these properties. The question is, can the hybrid theorist retain the view that pastness, presentness and futurity are monadic properties of n -order events and times while *also* saying that they are had by these events and times at, or relative to, $n+1$ -order times? It certainly seems that a *prima facie* case could be mounted for saying that on this picture, pastness, presentness and futurity must be relations between n -order events/times and $n+1$ -order times. If these properties must be treated in this way, then it might be asked whether the hybrid theory is committed to treating them tenselessly. An affirmative answer here would naturally constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of the hybrid theory.

change really does require analysis, it becomes imperative for the hybrid theorist to provide an analysis which shows that event-change does not entail higher-order time. I shall now argue that the prospects for such an analysis are grim.

2 The River of Time

How might the hybrid theorist begin the task of finding a satisfactory analysis of event-change? A good way to start is by keeping in mind the following constraint: *an adequate analysis must clarify the similarities and differences between (i) ordinary changes, that is, those changes which take time to occur, and (ii) event-changes, which the hybrid theorist is claiming do not take time to occur.*

Exactly where the hybrid theorist can go next is not easy to determine. I suggest the following as the most promising path. As is well known, time is apt to figure in metaphor. And metaphor, conceived as an attempt to draw *similes*—however vaguely and imprecisely—involves conceptual connections. Might there not be a kernel in some metaphorical treatment of time that could lead to a regimented analysis of event-change? Of particular interest here is the famous metaphor of time as a river and its associated notion of *time-flow*. A discussion of this metaphor will serve to emphasise the difficulty of the task that confronts the hybrid theorist.

It is easy to think of time as something that flows like a river. Events are like debris (twigs and leaves, perhaps) pulled along by the flow of the river of time from the future (upstream), and passing momentarily into the present before making their way into the past (downstream). From the perspective of the hybrid theorist, it might be thought that the river metaphor embodies a vague, embryonic explanation of how it is that events change—a groping attempt to say how it is that they are “carried” from the future, to the present and into the past. In the case of the river, the flow of its waters can be cited to explain the change in position of the twigs and leaves from upstream to downstream. Likewise, it might be thought, a notion of time-flow can be called upon to explain how it is that events change from being future, to present, to past.⁶

⁶This portrayal of the river metaphor is the most usual one (see, for instance, Smart (1956, p. 104) and Williams (1967, p. 213)) and probably the most apt to be of assistance to the hybrid theorist. Another way in which we might depict the metaphor is by leaving the debris out of the picture and allowing the body of water itself to stand for the totality of events. But in that case, the water-flow would itself stand for event-change, and so the ontological distinction between event-change and time-flow would collapse. And thus, it is clear from the outset that this depiction offers us no resources with which to frame an *explanation* of event-change.

Unfortunately for the hybrid theorist, it is difficult to see how this helps. An analysis of event-change needs to sharpen the points of contact and divergence between event-change and ordinary change, and it was suggested that the notion of time-flow might be useful in this regard. However, the same problem now confronts us with respect to time-flow. If this notion is to fulfil its task, we need to understand how time-flow resembles and differs from water-flow. For example, the flowing of water is an instance of ordinary change; it takes time for water to flow. If the notion of time-flow is to fulfil its task then it must be clear that time-flow doesn't take time. But this is not clear, as I will now explain.

The problem seems to be that there is one element of the river metaphor which does not correspond to anything that we can get a grasp on. We can say that the points along the river correspond to degrees of pastness, presentness and futurity. And we can say that the twigs and leaves floating downstream correspond to events. But what can be said of the water? The flowing waters are a crucial part of the metaphor of time as a river—they give the twigs and leaves their impetus. Where is the temporal analogue of the water? What is it that “pushes” events along? And how does it manage to do so in a way that does not involve higher-order time? We cannot say. Speaking of time as a river seems to be a desperate attempt to express in ordinary causal terms whatever this thing might be. If we understood what this thing might be, then *perhaps* we could see how its “flow” differs from the flow of a river. Then we could say how the “motion” of events differs from the motion of twigs and leaves. But we have no inkling as to what this mysterious substance could be like. Although we may have some idea of how time-flow might be like water-flow—hence the availability of the metaphor—it turns out that we don't have a sharp enough sense of how the two differ for the notion of time-flow to be useful.

The picture of time as a river is perhaps the most satisfying metaphysical metaphor of time. If this metaphor doesn't point to an adequate analysis of event-change, then the project of satisfactorily analysing event-change via the procedure of clarifying a pre-existing metaphorical treatment of time does not look promising. More generally, we can say that a satisfactory analysis of event-change seems to require more resources than we possess. How we might find these resources is difficult to fathom.

3 Primitive Event-Change?

The problems that have arisen for the hybrid theory are grave. As long as the notion of event-change requires analysis, the hybrid theory seems doomed. At this

point, it might well occur to the hybrid theorist that we should stop trying to analyse event-change. Perhaps it can be taken as a primitive notion.⁷

Suppose that the notion of event-change can be taken as primitive. Then, the following question comes to mind: does this remove the need for a hierarchy of time series? This would be to suggest that event-change is a primitive notion which is clearly understood to be unlike other changes in that it does not take time to occur. This is too much to ask. If we say of event-change that it does not require time to occur *and regard this fact as inexplicable*, then we lose any grip that we might have had on this concept. The fact that we use ordinary temporal language to describe what the hybrid theorist calls event-changes (e.g. the meal *was* present and *then* it became past) is telling. If we really did have a primitive concept of event-change according to which event-change did not take time to occur then this would most probably have been reflected in our language.

It seems that hybrid theorists should admit to the regress. Although they could then say that the regress does not arise from a need to explain the concept of event-change, they still ought to admit that it does arise: they should admit that event-change, *being a species of change*, requires time to occur. This is not to suggest that event-change is to be *understood* in terms of any other sort of change, just that it shares with all varieties of change the characteristic of occurring over a temporal interval. (Note that if we take event-change as primitive then we may in turn define an overall notion of the passage of time as the simultaneous (relative to meta-time) event-change of all events.)

If the notion of event-change may be taken as primitive then it can be argued that this notion is not incoherent, but merely a little ontologically extravagant. If so, the regress that the hybrid theory commits us to is not actually vicious, but just a little nasty! Unfortunately for the hybrid theorist, the prospects for taking event-change as primitive look bleak. We might begin by noting that the procedure of declaring a concept to be primitive once it becomes involved in difficulties is often a dubious enterprise. But this sort of comment, however sincere it may be, is not dialectically helpful; the hybrid theorist may believe with equal conviction that in this case the difficulties are manufactured rather than genuine. However, as will now be argued, we can do more than just cast suspicious glances at the hybrid theorist who treads this path.

Consider a case of ordinary change—say, the event of a door’s creaking slowly open. According to the hybrid theorist, ordinary changes supervene on event-

⁷It is worth noting here that if our conceptual schemes are holistic (as many people now think—see Fodor & Lepore (1992)) then this option is closed to the hybrid theorist. For, if this is how our conceptual networks are, then there will be no conceptual primitives: no concept in a certain network will be understood without reference to the other concepts in that network. But we shall be charitable here and assume that such views are wide of the mark.

changes: a world stripped of events changing with respect to the monadic properties of pastness, presentness and futurity is a world stripped of ordinary change. This suggests that ordinary change is at least in part analysed by event-change. So far everything seems to be in order. But now the hybrid theorist strikes an unyielding problem. It turns out that event-changes *just are* ordinary changes. As we have seen, a (first-order) event-change is a change with respect to second-order time.⁸ However, with respect to second-order time, a (first-order) event-change is an ordinary change. In second-order time, the door's creaking open is future at one time and past at another. From the perspective of second-order time, this is an ordinary change in the door's creaking open, just as the door's creaking open is an ordinary change in the door from the perspective of first-order time. To use an old philosophical cliché, the distinction between ordinary change and event-change is a distinction without a difference. And so the hybrid theorist continues down the regress, blindly slapping on layer after layer of ordinary time! In short, a primitive notion of event-change cannot itself successfully undertake the task of supporting the notion of ordinary change, a task that the hybrid theory requires of it, since all event-changes are themselves ordinary changes.

4 Presentism and the Hybrid Theory

Are there any more throws of the dice for the hybrid theorist? I think that there are. I shall now present a version of the hybrid theory which promises to avoid the regress and the associated charges of incoherence. This version is, loosely speaking, a marriage of the hybrid theory with the variety of presentism endorsed by A.N. Prior. Indeed, the potential it has for avoiding the regress comes chiefly as a result of its presentism-inspired aspects. Let us first see how this variety of presentism avoids the regress.

As was noted earlier, the presentist holds that only present temporal items exist. Moreover, the present has no temporal extension, so it is also the case that those temporal items which exist are strictly simultaneous with each other. This means that the only events (in the sense in which we are understanding events [see footnote 1]) which the presentist takes to exist are states of affairs. In particular, the presentist does not hold that changes *exist*. Certainly, things change, but there exist no particulars which *are* changes. To think otherwise, the presentist says, is to reify changes. And if there are no changes, then a door's creaking open, for instance, cannot be said to change. What account, then, can the presentist give of statements whose surface structure suggests that there are changes, and that these changes change? Prior writes instructively:

⁸More generally, an n -order event-change is an $n+1$ -order ordinary change.

What I am suggesting is that what looks like talk about events is really at bottom talk about things, and that what looks like talk about changes in events is really just slightly more complicated talk about changes in things (1968, pp. 10–11).

Thus, when we say that the door’s creaking open has receded five minutes into the past, we are saying no more than, “It is five minutes since the door creaked open”. Or to put things more metaphysically, “The door has the property of *having creaked open five minutes ago*.” And we can give similar construals of statements that seem to predicate change of states of affairs. Thus, “Humphrey’s sadness is now a day past” can be rendered, “It has been a day since Humphrey was sad”. Here it is important to notice that by refusing to treat changes as entities, and restricting all change to ordinary change, any obvious reasons for thinking that there must be a regress of higher-order times evaporate. Indeed, for the presentist, there is no more to the passing of time than ordinary change.⁹

How does any of this bear on the matter at hand? My suggestion is that the hybrid theorist can think of ordinary time as being embedded in a presentist second-order time. And for the reasons cited above, the regress is halted at this level. Let’s look at this approach in a little more detail.

The series of ordinary events and times, and the possession of the various monadic properties of pastness, presentness and futurity by these events and times, constitute the sum-total of temporal existence. The basic idea is to treat ordinary events and times as the “things” of the presentist second-order time. Then, we can say that in the presentist second-order time, various states of affairs involving the possession of pastness, presentness and futurity by ordinary times and events pass in and out of existence. Thus, the statement, “The door’s creaking open has gone from being future to being past” can be expressed thus: “The door’s creaking open has the monadic property of being past and has the property of *having had the monadic property of futurity*.” This statement expresses a change in an event, but since our second-order time is a presentist one, we say that the event changes, but not that there exists a (second-order) event which is that change.

The view that has just been outlined may, I think, be seen as a means of implementing a recent defence of the hybrid theory offered independently by George Schlesinger (1994, Ch. 3) and John Bigelow (1991). They wisely prefer not to relativise an event’s possession of pastness, presentness and futurity to coexistent second-order times. Instead, they relativise the possession of these properties to different possible worlds. Event-change may then be construed as the passing in

⁹For the presentist, ordinary change just involves things undergoing changes, or coming into existence, or ceasing to exist.

and out of actuality of states of affairs involving the possession of monadic pastness, presentness and futurity. And the overall notion of the passage of time may be thought of as the passing in and out of actuality of entire possible worlds. This mirrors very closely Prior's presentism. For Prior, every change is a change in what is *actual*. Indeed, we could express the presentist's changes in the terminology of possible worlds if we so desired. In short, the Schlesinger/Bigelow strategy appears to be the Priorean strategy applied to events rather than things—in other words, it appears in essence to be the strategy outlined earlier in this section.

One important reason for noting this connection is that it offers Schlesinger and Bigelow a chance to legitimise the notion of event-change. I argued in Section 3 that it was not acceptable for the hybrid theorist to take event-change as primitive while claiming that it did not require time to occur. By viewing the spread of events as being embedded in a presentist second-order time, the hybrid theorist can, without risking a regress, comply with the requirement that event-change takes time to occur. Moreover, the sense in which second-order time is required is quite ontologically benign: according to this fusion of the hybrid theory and presentism, there exist neither second-order events nor second-order times.

The above response preserves the spirit of the hybrid theory, and it certainly has the appearance of consistency. However, while the mere coherence of this response might be sufficient to uphold the coherence of the hybrid theory, it may be wondered why anyone would adopt this view in preference to presentism. Here is one potential reason. The relativity of simultaneity is often thought to be a compelling objection to tensed views of time.¹⁰ A common reply to this objection involves relativising presentness to reference frames. For the presentist, this seems to involve relativising the *existence* of ordinary things to reference frames. And insofar as the relativisation of existence itself is regarded as dubious, it might be thought that this is a drawback for presentism. On the other hand, the hybrid theorist who relativises presentness to reference frames is committed only to relativising the possession of the property of presentness to reference frames.

5 The Irreducibility of Pastness, Presentness and Futurity

Is the hybrid theory coherent after all? The answer, I think, is no. There are considerations independent of the familiar regress arguments that can still be brought to bear against the hybrid theory. We shall now turn to these considerations.

¹⁰See Putnam (1967) and 'Time, Reality and Relativity', in Sklar (1985) for discussions.

It seems fair to assume that any concept which is comprehensible must be either primitive or analysable. The remainder of the paper is devoted to showing that the notions of pastness, presentness and futurity, as the hybrid theory construes them, can be neither primitive nor analysable. If we can do this, then we can demonstrate that there can be no such concepts. And if there can be no such concepts then the hybrid theory is not coherent, as it is in part formulated in terms of them. Let us now turn to this task.

First, let us ask if there might be an analysis of the concepts of monadic pastness, presentness and futurity. It seems reasonable to assume that an analysis of the concept of a particular property ought to be given in terms of other properties. In the case of monadic pastness, presentness and futurity, we are hard-pressed to find more conceptually fundamental properties, and it seems fairly safe to assume that there is no analysis of these concepts that preserves the spirit of the view that events change. Therefore, it looks as though the concepts of pastness, presentness and futurity, if they are genuine concepts at all, must be unanalysable. The aim of the next section is to show that they cannot be unanalysable. It will be argued that the hybrid theory suffers from certain phenomenal inadequacies which lead to this conclusion.

6 The Phenomenal Problem

Experiences vary in length. Some experiences, like a quick stab of pain or a fleeting glimpse of something, are brief. Others, like watching a cricket match or listening to a song, are (relatively) long. In this section, we are primarily concerned with experiences at the brief end of the spectrum. More specifically, we are interested in those experiences which encompass our fleeting *psychological* present. Phenomenally speaking, the psychological present is very brief; the experiences it encompasses are quite short. Longer experiences are not “wholly present” to the mind, but are amalgams of various shorter experiences which are at one time or another encompassed by the psychological present.

For the tenseless theorist, psychological presentness is a purely perspectival matter. Each person has a sequence of psychological presents stretching from birth to death. And each of these psychological presents has a certain temporal location and from its own temporal perspective each is privileged. Hybrid theorists are not satisfied with this perspectival explanation. They think that the experiences enclosed in the psychological present must be *metaphysically* privileged. According to hybrid theorists, this metaphysical privilege consists in the fact that the experiences encompassed by the psychological present have the monadic property of presentness, while those experiences outside the psychological present exemplify

either monadic pastness or futurity (see Schlesinger (1982, Section 5)). However, as we shall now see, the hybrid theorist’s explanation is glaringly inadequate.

Consider a brief experience—let’s say a sharp pain—that is enclosed by my psychological present. The hybrid theory explains this enclosure by noting that the pain has the metaphysical property of presentness. And it explains the fact that very soon the pain will not be enclosed by my psychological present by noting that the pain will shortly have the metaphysical property of pastness.

There is something suspicious about these explanations. Recall that according to the hybrid theorist, events do not come into existence by acquiring presentness. Nor do they pass out of existence by losing presentness. In short, past and future events are no less existent than present ones. Now, if it is allowed that past and future events exist, then past and future experiences exist. But if this is the case, it is hard to see what is added to the content of an experience by saying that it exemplifies the monadic property of presentness, or what is subtracted from its content by saying that it exemplifies monadic pastness or futurity. Consider again the sharp pain. When it is future and past it is nevertheless an experience of mine, with all its attendant phenomenal properties. Or consider my experience of relief just after the pain has subsided. Irrespective of whether this experience is past, present or future it is nevertheless an experience of relief. So it is not clear why my psychological present should encompass those experiences of mine that are metaphysically present and exclude those which are metaphysically past or future.¹¹ It is fair to conclude, then, that the part of the hybrid theory which involves the monadic properties of pastness, presentness and futurity does not explain the nature of our temporal experience.

This conclusion is, for my purposes, an important one. So, we shall now consider a response that the hybrid theorist might make to the preceding argumentation. The hybrid theorist might concede that if there are past and future experiences as well as present ones then an experience’s being present does distinguish it phenomenally from past and future experiences. But, the hybrid theorist might say, “Perhaps there are no past and future experiences, but only present ones.

¹¹This is really just an extension of a point that David Lewis makes while discussing his version of modal realism. According to Lewis, non-actual people (among other things) exist. But he thinks actuality is not some special property that some entities have and others lack, for “How could we ever know? Unactualised dollars buy no less unactualised bread, and so forth.” (Lewis, 1986, p. 93). If actuality were a special property, it would nevertheless be true that there are non-actual people living lives that are qualitatively just like ours. Such a “special” property seems theoretically idle. Thus, he opts for an indexical theory of actuality. The comparison with the hybrid theory is obvious. According to the hybrid theory, some people are having experiences which exemplify the “special” property of presentness while there exist non-present people having non-present experiences.

I'm not being a presentist, mind you; I still believe that there are past and future entities that are not experiences."

The following example should help to elucidate this view. Consider the following sequence of events: my getting up from my chair, my walking across the room to the bookshelf, and my picking up a book. Regardless of whether they are past, present or future, each of these events exists. But, when, and only when, one of these events is present does its corresponding group of experiences exist. So, for instance, when my walking across the room is present, the feeling of having my legs swinging exists and is present. But when my selecting a book is present, I am no longer walking. Although my walking across the room exists and is past, the corresponding group of experiences have ceased to exist, having been replaced by the group of experiences that correspond to my picking up a book. According to this picture only our present experiences exist: there are no past or future experiences to mess things up. Therefore, the phenomenal problem which besets the standard version of the hybrid theory is successfully negotiated.

Disregarding concerns about *ad hocness*, it remains far from clear that pastness, presentness and futurity influence our phenomenal content on this revised version of the hybrid theory; a strong suspicion remains that it is not the presentness of our experiences that accounts for their psychological "nowness", but their *existence* that is doing the work.

We may conclude, then, that the hybrid theory lacks explanatory power. Saying that it is incoherent is another matter, but this is something we are now in a position to claim. Recall that we have already concluded that the coherence of the hybrid theory rests on classifying pastness, presentness and futurity as conceptual primitives. I shall now urge that this classification can't be made.

7 The Incoherence of the Hybrid Theory

Here are two extreme positions concerning the genesis of primitive concepts. According to *extreme empiricism*, every primitive concept we possess is formed by experience. On the other hand, *extreme innatism* says that every primitive concept we possess is innate. Between these views is a spectrum of more moderate positions according to which some primitive concepts are formed through experience while others are innate. I take it that this spectrum is exhaustive. Given the background provided by the phenomenal problem, it will now be claimed that it is not consistent with any of the views in this spectrum to hold that monadic pastness, presentness and futurity are conceptually primitive. That is, the concepts of these properties can neither be innate nor formed by experience.

Consideration of the phenomenal problem seems to scuttle the claim that our concepts of these properties are formed by experience. Since the content of our experiences would not differ regardless of whether they possessed pastness, presentness or futurity, our primitive conception of these properties could not originate from the properties themselves. And it is usual to think that if we form a *primitive* concept of *xness* via experience, then that concept is formed by the interaction of instances of *xness* with our senses.

The thought that we are innately endowed with a primitive conception of monadic pastness, presentness and futurity is not much more promising. It is highly plausible to think that any innate concepts we possess, although not formed *by* experience, are nevertheless important factors in our capacity to interact with the world. A good reason for thinking this is that natural selection is responsible for those innate concepts (if any) that we possess. Our concepts of identity and similarity, for example, are sometimes thought to be innate. If these concepts are innate, it would be no surprise that they have been produced by natural selection, since they are crucial to our successful interaction with our environment. However, this is not the case with the concepts of monadic pastness, presentness and futurity; it seems unlikely that our successful interaction with the world requires, or would even be aided, by our having these concepts. This is because we discovered, from the small amount of conceptual work we did in Section 6, that monadic pastness, presentness and futurity can have no influence over our experiential content.

These considerations suggest that we do not have primitive concepts of pastness, presentness and futurity.

The hybrid theory is incoherent.¹²

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