

# Must an Appearance of Succession Involve a Succession of Appearances?

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A conscious experience – or, as I shall also call it, an *appearance* – as of a round blue object could exist in the absence of anything round or blue. An appearance as of an hour-long walk need not last more than several minutes – the appearance might be generated over the course of a brief period of REM sleep. Arguably, an appearance as of things arrayed in three-dimensional space could occur in a two-dimensional being, assuming that such a being could have the same functional organization as a normally operating human nervous system, and that having this functional organization is empirically sufficient for having the sort of conscious experience that humans normally have. Could an appearance as of events unfolding in succession exist in a being in which there occurred no succession of events?

I do not know the answer to this question. But in what follows, I am going to argue for a claim that, if true, removes one of the main obstacles to answering it in the affirmative. This is the objection that an appearance as of succession must at least involve a succession of *appearances* – that, in order for me to have a conscious experience as of an earlier state of affairs followed by a later state of affairs, there must at least occur in me a temporal succession of conscious experiences, one corresponding to the apparently earlier state of affairs, another to the apparently later. Against this, I am going to argue that it is possible for a subject who has an experience as of succession to have this experience at a time, or over a period of time, during which there occurs in him no succession of conscious mental states at all.

If this is correct, then it could appear to someone as if events were occurring in succession, one after another, even while his conscious state of mind remained entirely unchanged, with no gain or loss of phenomenal properties. But from this it does not obviously or

automatically follow that an appearance as of succession could exist in the absence of any succession whatsoever. For it may be that appearances are themselves essentially sequences of events. In particular, it may be that an appearance that does not consist of a temporal series of appearances *does* nonetheless consist of a temporal series of states that are *not* appearances, somewhat as a game of chess consists of a series of moves that are not themselves chess games.

So we need to separate two questions, the one I intend to answer here:

Q1 Does the existence of an appearance as of successive states of affairs logically necessitate the existence of a succession of phenomenal states (states of phenomenal consciousness)?

and another which I do not intend to answer:

Q2 Does the existence of an appearance as of successive states of affairs logically necessitate the existence of a succession of states of affairs?

The latter question is closely connected to the challenging doctrine of the ideality of time; indeed, to a first approximation, this doctrine might be defined as the position that the answer to Q2 is “No.” Certainly anyone who wants to answer no to Q2 must also answer no to Q1. Anyhow, my principal goal is to argue for a “No” to Q1. (I return to the ideality of time briefly in the last section of the paper.)

My argument, in a nutshell, is this: out of all of the appearances I have ever had, one of them (or, several of them collectively) was the first. But *every* appearance of which I am capable is an appearance as of succession – a conscious experience as of a state of affairs preceded by a state of affairs. Therefore, at least one appearance (my first one) was an appearance as of succession that did not involve a succession of appearances. More slowly:

- (1) Every appearance is an appearance as of succession – an appearance as of a state of affairs preceded by a state of affairs.
- (2) Out of all of the appearances I have had, one was the first.
- (3) My first appearance was an appearance as of succession. (1, 2)
- (4) At the time I had my first conscious experience, there had never occurred in me any succession of appearances – any temporal sequence of phenomenal states.

- (5) My first appearance was an appearance as of succession that occurred before there had occurred in me any succession of appearances. (3, 4)
- (6) If my first appearance was an appearance as of succession that occurred before there had occurred in me any succession of appearances, then my first appearance was an appearance as of succession that did not involve any succession of appearances.
- (7) So, at least one appearance (my first one) was an appearance as of succession that did not involve a succession of appearances. (5, 6)

Premise (6) is a truism, but (1), (2), and (4) each require some defense, or at least clarification.

### **Every appearance is an appearance as of succession**

That is, every conscious experience is an experience as of a state of affairs preceded by a state of affairs. Here is how Barry Dainton argues the point:

Think of what it is like to hear an unvarying auditory tone. Even though the tone does not vary in pitch, timbre or volume, we directly experience the tone *continuing on*. It is as though, from moment to moment, there is a continual renewal of the same auditory content, a renewal which is directly experienced. Or think of an unvarying yet enduring pain sensation; for as long as the pain is felt, it is felt as a continuous presence; this presence is not static but dynamic, it is an enduring presence. This experienced flow or passage is common to all sensation; indeed a sensation lacking this characteristic seems inconceivable...<sup>1</sup>

Dainton's point is that it seems to be a necessary truth about human experience that it is always experience as of things happening – or, as the case may be, not happening – over some period of time. However steady it may be, the tonal experience must be phenomenally

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<sup>1</sup> (Dainton, 2000, 114). Dainton continues: “–perhaps this is why a strictly duration-less sensory experience, existing all by itself, seems impossible to conceive.” I suspect that there is a non sequitur lurking in this final remark. From the fact that every conscious experience is necessarily *as of* things existing or happening over time, it does not obviously or automatically follow that every conscious experience must itself exist or occur over time. Perhaps it is true that conscious experiences must have duration, but it seems to me this is something that stands in need of separate argument, and cannot be read off directly from the phenomenology. (I return to the question of objective duration towards the end of the paper.)

decomposable, such that it is as of *something* succeeding *something*. Maybe we can make sense of the idea of an objectively durationless experience; that question so far remains open. But we cannot make sense of, or even remotely conceive of, an experience *as of* a durationless state of affairs. For us, at least, all appearances must be appearances as of states of affairs obtaining over time – *over* time, not just *at* a moment of time.

Let's call any experience as of succession – any appearance as of a situation with earlier and later parts or phases – a *subjectively dynamic* experience. Premise (1) of my main argument says that every one of my experiences is subjectively dynamic. The key point in support of the premise is that every experience I have is as of some enduring state of affairs, and that in order for a conscious experience to be as of an enduring state of affairs, it must be subjectively dynamic. This is because any appearance as of its being the case that *p* over some period of time is an appearance as of its being the case that *p* at more than one time, and any appearance as of its being the case that *p* at more than one time – say, at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  – is an appearance as of its being the case that *p* at  $t_1$  and being the case that *p* at  $t_2$ . It is, therefore, an appearance as of one state of affairs (that of its being the case that *p* at  $t_2$ ) succeeding another state of affairs (that of its being the case that *p* at  $t_1$ ). In this way, even an appearance as of a continuing-on is, like all appearances of which we can conceive, an experience as of a situation with earlier and later parts or phases, and therefore a subjectively dynamic experience.

The point is widely granted, but its implications are not always fully appreciated. As we have seen, Dainton too holds that our experience is subjectively dynamic. Yet this very pervasiveness of subjective dynamism poses a problem for Dainton's own account of it. By this account, having a subjectively dynamic experience is tantamount to having a number of brief experiences in rapid (objective) succession, where these successive experiences are related in such a way as to constitute a single experience as of succession or change. On this view, a single experience can have as parts briefer experiences that do not all exist at the same time. The nature of the relation that some sequential experiences bear to one another so as to constitute a unified appearance as of succession – Dainton calls it “co-consciousness” – is somewhat mysterious, but this is to be expected if, as Dainton recommends, we treat co-consciousness as a primitive term of analysis. The real problem with Dainton's account is one of circularity. If *all* experiences are subjectively dynamic, it is no use trying to understand a subjectively dynamic experience as a sequence of suitably related experiences, since each of the related experiences must itself already be subjectively

dynamic. One might as well define a line segment as a sequence of suitably related shorter segments.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the fact that we cannot conceive of a subjectively static experience may not place (1) beyond all doubt. (I use “subjectively static” as a synonym for “not subjectively dynamic.”) Evidently I had my first conscious experience as an infant. But infants are in many respects phenomenal aliens. Presumably they have some sensations associated with the five familiar senses, but how, if at all, are these primitive sensations integrated into an overall experience? What’s going on in there? Hard to say. Maybe my first, infantile appearance was not even an appearance as of succession. True, I cannot conceive of such an appearance – now. But that does not prove that I was never subject to such an appearance in the past. There might be an insurmountable cognitive barrier between infancy and adulthood that makes it impossible for the adult mind to access or replicate the experiences of its infantile precursor; but that would not be a reason to deny that the infant had such experiences.

This is all very conjectural, but even if we grant that infants have inconceivable (to us) experiences that are not as of succession, it would not affect the main argument of this paper. It is enough for my purposes if a full-fledged adult mind could spring into existence complete with normal adult experience.<sup>3</sup> For instance, we can imagine a possible being that begins its life as an adult, and whose first experience is as of a continuously descending tone like that produced by a slide trombone (rather than a fast arpeggio on the harp, for example). This experience, like any other, must be as of some temporally extended stretch of reality. But, since the experience is as of a continuously descending tone, it must also be throughout as of some *change* taking place. And if it is an experience as of change, it must be an experience as of succession. The possibility of a being whose first experience is as of some continuous change would therefore be enough to establish that an appearance as of succession need not involve a succession of appearances.

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<sup>2</sup> For Dainton’s account of subjective dynamism, see (Dainton, 2000, 113–35).

<sup>3</sup> Some proponents of teleological theories of the mind hold that intentional and even phenomenal states are essentially selectional, in such a way that it is logically impossible for a being without selectional history to be in such states; see, for instance, (Davidson, 1987) and (Papineau, 2001). This seems false to me, but even if it were true, it would not affect the present point. Even a teleologist can grant that an adult consciousness could spring into existence, provided that it is brought into existence according to a plan conceived by other intelligences with their own selectional histories. An android has a selectional history, just not one that is grounded directly in standard evolutionary and pedagogical mechanisms.

### One of my appearances was the first

So far I have argued that conscious experience is by its very nature subjectively dynamic, and that even if this is not granted, the conclusion I am aiming for – that an appearance as of succession does not necessarily involve a succession of appearances – would be established by the possibility of a being whose first experience was as of some continuous change. But the question remains whether we are entitled to speak of a conscious being’s “first” experience at all.

Common sense would suggest that there is no problem here. Indeed, it is hard to see how a conscious being could *fail* to have a first experience (or, a collection of experiences tied for first). If it were otherwise – if none of my experiences (or collections of experiences) was the first – it would seem that I would have had to exist infinitely into the past.

But at this point it may be suggested that I *have* existed infinitely into the past. This seems to be Kant’s view, judging from a comment he makes in the Second Analogy:

For an event which should follow upon an empty time, that is, a coming to be preceded by no state of things, is as little capable of being apprehended as empty time itself. Every apprehension of an event is therefore a perception that follows upon another perception.<sup>4</sup>

Here Kant appears to be saying that every conscious experience is actually preceded by another conscious experience. The first sentence of the quote suggests that he may have been led to this extraordinary conclusion by a fallacious inference from the truth (as I consider it) that every conscious experience is essentially *as of* a succession of states of affairs. Anyway, if Kant is saying what he appears to be saying here, then I think he must be wrong. Not every perception follows upon another perception, since my first perception did not follow upon another perception.

Actually, for the purposes of defending (2), it probably doesn’t matter very much whether Kant is right. Even if my own conscious experience has extended infinitely into the past, as Kant seems to imply, there is no apparent contradiction in the idea of a conscious being very much like me with a finite history of experience. Now, perhaps even a being of finite duration could contain an infinite succession of appearances: its past appearances might constitute a temporally convergent infinite series of appearances of ever decreasing duration. But even if

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<sup>4</sup> (Kant, 1781/1965, A192/B237). It may be that Kant here intends to speak only of “as of” rather than “real” or objective following-upon; at the risk of being uncharitable, I am just going with what seems to be the most obvious and natural interpretation of his words.

this is possible for some hypothetical being, it is not possible for a being each of whose experiences must be of at least some minimum duration (objective duration, not “as of” duration). As long as it is possible for there to exist a being that has not always existed, and whose appearances do not have arbitrarily short duration, it is possible for there to be a being one of whose appearances is his first appearance. In fact, it takes no great effort to imagine such a being, since to the best of our knowledge we are such beings ourselves.

There is one more objection to consider in relation to (2). This is that conscious experience is a vague phenomenon, admitting of borderline cases. Suppose you start with a single grain of sand, and successively add one grain at a time until you have accumulated a heap of sand containing one million grains. At the beginning of this process you do not have a heap, at the end of it you do. The number of heaps you generate by the successive additions is, moreover, finite (the last heap you create contains a million grains, the next-to-last 999,999, and so on). Yet, arguably, there is no *first* heap in the succession of heaps that you create. Rather, the heaps “vague into” existence out of borderline aggregates that are neither clearly heaps nor clearly non-heaps.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, one might argue, conscious experience vagues into existence out of borderline states of consciousness – states that are neither clearly conscious experiences, nor clearly not conscious experiences. In that case, one might further argue, there is no such thing as one’s first conscious experience, despite the fact that one has had only a finite number of conscious experiences.

My reply to this is that consciousness, unlike heaphood, is not a vague affair. It does not admit of borderline cases. At least, as far as I can tell, I am never aware of being in a borderline conscious state; the only states I am ever introspectively aware of are definite cases of conscious states (although some of these are weak, amorphous, or characterized by a feeling of grogginess or confusion).<sup>6</sup>

Could one argue that borderline conscious states are characterized in part by borderline states of introspective awareness? On this view, borderline states of consciousness would exist, but could never clearly be the focus of one’s attention or awareness – the only possible attention to or awareness of a borderline conscious experience would, on this

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<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, one could argue that the number of heaps generated is neither finite nor infinite, but indefinite, in such a way that there is no such thing as the first heap created. For present purposes, this comes to the same as the objection raised in the text.

<sup>6</sup> One might also reply that there *is* a first heap, notwithstanding our inability to say which one it is. This is the position of epistemicists about vagueness; see, for instance, (Williamson, 1994, 185–247).

view, be a borderline case of attention or awareness. But then it follows that we do not clearly know that borderline conscious states exist, unless it is by means of some indirect inference (rather than direct observation). What then is the inference? One could, of course, affirm the existence of borderline states of consciousness on the grounds that they are the only way to avoid the conclusion that an appearance of succession does not presuppose a succession of appearances. But that would be question-begging, in the present context.

To clarify: I do not deny that there are vague phenomenal predicates – that, for example, there are borderline cases of bluishness or loudishness (taken as phenomenal properties of appearances). What I am denying is just that the terms “conscious,” “conscious experience,” and “appearance” are vague (these terms taken with their phenomenal senses). So, even if all of a given experience’s first-order phenomenal properties are vague (or expressible only by means of vague predicates), I maintain that the property of being a conscious experience, or the second-order property of having phenomenal properties (some phenomenal property or other) is not vague, but sharp.

### **My first appearance preceded any succession of appearances in me**

This is actually a truism, but it might seem doubtful if misunderstood. The claim is not that my first appearance occurred before there had occurred in me any succession of any sort at all. It is just that it was not until sometime after I had my first appearance that I could be truly said to have had a series or succession of *appearances*. For all I have argued, it may be that appearances are not static states, but processes. It could be that my first appearance was a neural process that took some time to complete. Supposing that is true, there may be a temptation to argue that this first appearance did *not* occur before there had occurred in me any succession of appearances, on the grounds that the appearance was already in progress before it was completed. But if I had some appearance before this ostensibly first appearance was completed, then this ostensibly first appearance was not really my first appearance after all. My first appearance was rather an appearance constituted by a process whose completion was part of and prior to the completion of the appearance that we were erroneously supposing to have been my first.

We should draw a distinction between existence *at* a moment and existence *for* a moment – a moment here being taken to be a dimensionless point of time. Anything that has duration, including any enduring experience, exists *at* a moment – indeed, on the standard assumption that time is infinitely divisible, any enduring experience



exists at an infinite number of moments. But we need not say that *different* experiences exist at all these different moments. The battle of Gettysburg lasted for many milliseconds, but that does not imply that it involved the fighting of myriad one-millisecond mini-battles. No more need the occurrence of an enduring experience require the occurrence of many experiences, even though it does require the existence of a multitude of moments at which the experience exists.

### Whence subjective dynamism?

I have argued that each of us has experiences that, while not in themselves successive, are nonetheless *as of* succession. This means that an objective succession of conscious states is unnecessary for subjectively dynamic experience (succession and change at the level of appearance). But if subjective dynamism does not reduce to the occurrence of suitably related mental states in objective succession, to what does it reduce?

I have already criticized one account of subjective dynamism – Dainton's – on the grounds that it attempts to analyze subjectively dynamic appearances into subjectively static ones, which are (in my view) impossible, or at least inconceivable. (Even if subjectively static appearances were possible, I have argued that they would not be able to explain the subjective dynamism of an appearance as of some continuous change.) The main alternative to Dainton's account is a theory based on memory. The idea here is that I can divide all of the experiences of my life into stages, each stage containing all the experiences that I have at this or that time. According to the memory theory, each stage contains some ordinary, occurrent sensory experiences together with some memories or memory-like experiences. It is the presence of these memory-like experiences alongside the sensory experiences that accounts for the appearance as of temporal depth and flow at each moment of one's conscious life.<sup>7</sup>

If the memory theory is correct, it explains how a single experience (or collection of strictly simultaneous experiences) can be an experience as of succession. But there are two reasons to doubt its correctness.

One is that it seems to over-intellectualize having a conscious experience. Must I be constantly remembering things (or, seeming to remember things) in order for it to appear to me that later states or events succeed earlier ones? That seems doubtful.<sup>8</sup>

The other problem with the memory theory is that on closer inspection, it appears to undergo a kind of logical implosion. I now close my

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<sup>7</sup> The classic source of the memory theory is (Augustine, c. 398/1991, 11.20.26).

<sup>8</sup> This is Dainton's main objection to the memory theory: (Dainton, 2000, 127).

eyes – all is dark. I open them: a visual field full of light. Somewhere in all of this I have an experience as of darkness followed by light. According to the memory theory, for me to have this darkness-then-light experience is for me to have a bright sensory experience simultaneously with a memory of dark experience. Earlier on, I had dark sensory experience coupled with a memory of some other, previous experience; etc. On this view, my conscious life consists of a temporal sequence of packets or pulses of experience, each pulse containing some memory-like experiences, and some ordinary sensory experiences.

But what are these sensory experiences? Surely they too are subjectively dynamic. I can break down the experiences that I am having now into visual, auditory, tactual, olfactory, and gustatory components (and perhaps others). To some extent, I can even break the visual component into experiences as of shape, as of size, as of color, etc. But no matter how far I go with this analysis, I'm still left with appearances as of succession – an experience as of color is, essentially, an experience as of some color property being instantiated over time.

So it looks as if the memory theory cannot appeal to sensory experience at all, if it is to avoid circularity while remaining true to the intuition that all experience is subjectively dynamic. Ultimately, it must reduce appearances as of succession to simultaneously occurring memory experiences. Conscious experience must then really be just a tissue of memories, or memory-like states of consciousness.

But there is worse to come. For these memory-like experiences must themselves be subjectively dynamic, if they are really conscious states. So in the end Memory swallows everything, including itself. This is the logical implosion that I alluded to earlier.

The moral of the story should now be clear: given that every appearance is an appearance as of succession, it is hopeless to try to understand subjective dynamism in terms of a relation among appearances, whether these are taken as successive (Dainton) or simultaneous (the memory theory). Maybe subjective dynamism is a fundamental and inexplicable feature of conscious experience; I have some sympathy with this view. In any case, *if* we are to achieve a deeper understanding of temporal succession and flow at the level of appearance, it seems this can only be through an analysis of subjectively dynamic experience – and so experience in general – into non-experiential terms.

### **The life of the mind: pulsing, streaming, or standing?**

The many conscious experiences that I have are not, so to speak, scattered in the void. Somehow, they connect up to form a whole life's worth of conscious experience. What is the nature of this connection?

One way to conceive of it is as a memory-mediated link between successive pulses of simultaneous experiences. As argued above, each of these pulses is already as of succession – memory cannot explain the subjectively dynamic character of experience. But it might still explain how successive pulses of subjectively dynamic experience constitute a more extended conscious episode. For example, each pulse might contain memories of some of the experiences contained in the preceding pulse, or if not actual memories, perhaps phenomenal qualities of the sort that memories typically exhibit.

Dainton proposes a different account of how individual experiences (or, collections of simultaneous experiences) combine to form greater stretches of conscious life. This eschews memory in favor of “overlap.” By this account, a temporal sequence of brief “basic” experiences constitutes a further, longer, but still brief experience. For the sake of illustration, consider a succession of thirty basic experiences, each one-tenth of a second long. Experiences 1 through 10 of this series together constitute a single, one-second-long experience. So do experiences 11–20 and 21–30. But, in addition to these three complex experiences, the thirty successive basic experiences also yield complex experiences consisting of basic experiences 2–11, 3–12, 4–13, and so on. On this picture, an extended conscious episode consists of an interlocking series of complex experiences, each of which has most of its simpler components in common with the complex experiences that precede and follow it. In the example, the basic experiences have a duration of a tenth of a second; if we let this duration shrink arbitrarily close to zero, the picture of a series of interlocking conscious states yields to that of a smooth stream of consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

The memory and overlap accounts both have their advantages and disadvantages, which I do not propose to weigh here. Instead, I briefly want to consider a third account, based on a radicalization of the main point of this paper, that an appearance as of succession does not have to involve a succession of appearances.

By this third account, *all* of my experiences exist in me simultaneously. It is true that many of my experiences are ones that I would ordinarily describe as ones that I have had in the past, others ones I would ordinarily describe as the experiences I am having now, and still others ones that I would ordinarily describe as experiences that I am going to have in the future. But, given that I can have a conscious experience as of succession at a time at which there occurs in me no succession of experiences, it may be that the experiences that I would

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<sup>9</sup> See (Dainton, 2000, 162–69).

ordinarily describe as variously past, present, and future are in fact all present.

This proposal is not intended as a skeptical hypothesis. The idea is not that my whole conscious life consists of a collection of simultaneous experiences that includes only a small number of sensory experiences combined with enough memory-like experience to create the illusion of an ordinary life's worth of experience. I am not suggesting that it is an illusion that my conscious life includes the various experiences that I ordinarily think of as having occurred in me in the past. The suggestion is just that it is an illusion that these experiences occurred in the *past*. All (or at least, very many) of the conscious experiences that I ordinarily take to have occurred in me (or to be going to occur in me) do occur in me; it is just that they occur in me all at once.

The obvious objection to this proposal is that it implies an impossible mash-up of conscious mental states. I close my eyes again – all dark. I open them: a visual field suffused with light. How can I have both of these visual experiences at once? Isn't this as impossible as for a surface to be simultaneously black and white all over?

If so, we probably have to give up on the more radical forms of idealism. Small sacrifice, some will say. But, on reflection, it is not after all so obvious that I must be in an impossibly mashed-up state of mind in order to have an experience as of total darkness at the same time I have an experience as of total light. All that is *obviously* impossible is for me to have an experience as of simultaneous total darkness and light. But this does not rule out the possibility for an appearance as of total darkness to coexist in me simultaneously with an appearance as of light.

How can we make sense of such coexistence without running into the mash-up problem? Perhaps by regarding the simultaneous experiences as standing to one another in an asymmetric relation of dependence. It could be that all of my conscious experience – a whole life's worth – consists of a structure of simultaneously co-existing experiences standing to one another in simultaneous relations of dependence. This structure will include memory-like experiences, but it will not be the inclusion of these that gives the structure its overall unity.

Consider a stack of coins. What prevents the coins from collapsing into a single, impossibly dense coin? It is the fact that coins higher up in the stack are supported by the coins beneath them, on which they depend for their relatively elevated position. Letting the coins represent collections of experiences that I would normally describe as the ones I have (or had, or will have) at this or that time, we can think of the ones higher up in the stack as the “later” experiences, and the ones lower down (on which the higher ones depend) as the “earlier” experiences.

That our experiences depend on one another in some such way is at least partially borne out by the fact that the quality of the experience that I would ordinarily describe as that which I'm having now is highly predictive of the quality of the experience that I would ordinarily describe as that which I am going to have a moment from now. It would be a mistake to equate the apparent flow of time with any relation of dependence among conscious experiences, for the same reason as it is a mistake to equate it with a relation of co-consciousness or memory among experiences. But a relation of simultaneous dependence might serve as an alternative to memory or overlap as the factor that unites seemingly successive appearances into a single conscious life.

### Conclusion

I have argued that an appearance as of succession need not involve any succession of appearances, and conjectured that even an entire conscious life may not involve any succession of appearances. A stronger claim yet is that an appearance as of succession need not involve any *duration* of appearances. On this most radical view, it might seem to a strictly durationless mind as though time were passing, events unfolding, etc.<sup>10</sup>

To get an argument for this view, we would have to add to the premises already at hand the further claim that durationless existence is possible. That granted, I could reason that every one of my experiences is subjectively dynamic; that there was some first moment in time at which I was conscious; that this first moment of consciousness could, logically possibly, have been my last; and thus that I could, logically possibly, have existed as a durationless entity to whom it seemed as if time were passing (events or states of affairs occurring in temporal succession).

I do not know whether we should grant the possibility of durationless existence. Certainly we do not commit ourselves to it by allowing that anything that exists over time exists *at* many dimensionless points of time. The question is whether there could be a mind that existed not just *at*, but *only for* a moment.

In support of a negative answer, it can be argued that the only thing that can exist only for a moment is a limit of a temporally extended entity, or a boundary between two phases or stages of an enduring thing. On this way of seeing things, it makes sense to speak of a durationless boundary between two phases of a mind, but not a

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<sup>10</sup> This seems to be McTaggart's view: (McTaggart, 1908, 458, 474). McTaggart suggests that it is Hegel's view as well, and there is at least a strong suggestion of it in the doctrines of various Eleatic and classical Indian philosophers.

durationless mind. This is because boundaries, unlike minds, are not the sort of thing capable of independent existence. A boundary can exist only as a boundary of something of higher dimension than the boundary. A world containing nothing but a durationless mind would be like a world containing nothing but the boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan – no Pakistan, no Afghanistan, just the boundary.

While this is an intuitively forceful argument, the supporting intuitions may owe more to our limited powers of imagination than to the clear light of reason. We think that a point-sized object can exist only as a boundary or limit of lines, that a line-shaped object can exist only as a boundary or limit of planes, and that a planar object can exist only as a boundary or limit of solids. But why stop at solids? From the perspective of beings with better imaginations than ours, it may seem that a solid can exist only as a boundary or limit of four-dimensional hyper-solids. If we regard our inability to imagine a four-dimensional object as a mere accident of evolution, rather than as reflecting something deep about the structure of reality, we should probably hesitate to conclude from the fact that a planar object can exist only as a boundary or limit of solids that such an object is less substantial or autonomous than the solids themselves.<sup>11</sup>

There may be a possible point of view from which a planar object appears as substantial and autonomous as solids appear to us. Likewise, there may be a point of view from which durationless entities appear as substantial and autonomous as enduring entities appear to us. But if this much is granted, the question arises whether the point of view in question might not just *be* our point of view. At the heart of the doctrine that time is ideal lies the suspicion that it is.

My discussion has raised more questions than it has answered. But I hope to have shown at least that an appearance of succession need not involve any succession of appearances. If I am right about this, we should be wary about inferring the real temporal structure of conscious experience from its apparent temporal structure – more wary, perhaps, than we are generally prone to be.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> That it is a mere accident is the suggestion of (Abbott, 1884/1952).

<sup>12</sup> Barry Dainton, Mark D’Cruz, Brook Ziporyn, and an anonymous referee for this journal provided valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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