

The Reality of Tense

Is reality somehow tensed? Or is tense a feature of how we represent reality and not properly a feature of reality itself? Although this question is often raised, it is very hard to say what it comes to. For both sides to the debate can agree to certain tensed claims. They can agree that I am sitting right now, for example, or that Queen Ann is dead. So in a clear and obvious sense there are tensed facts. And so how can it sensibly be denied that reality is tensed?

My own view is that the question can only be made clear by drawing a distinction between how things are (*mere* reality) and how things are in reality (*metaphysical* reality). Thus what the antirealist about tense wishes to dispute is not how things are, which should be common ground between him and his opponent, but how things are in reality. Of course, he will say, Queen Ann is dead but this representation of the facts is not faithful to how things are in reality; and this is so, not because of the reference to Queen Ann or to her being dead, but because of the tense. In a faithful representation of how things are in reality, there will be nothing that corresponds to our use of tense.¹

But when the dispute is put in this form, it is now the realist's position that seems open to objection. For there is a powerful argument that appears to show that his position is at odds with any reasonable view of how reality might be configured. This argument, which can be loosely

¹ I have in mind that there is a sentential operator 'in reality, ___' by means of which the various realist claims are to be made (Fine [2000]). This paper should be regarded as a summary of views which are elaborated at much greater length in Fine [2005] and I have made no attempt to engage with the extensive literature on the topic.

traced to McTaggart [1908], rests upon the following four assumptions:

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, of course, is just the realist's position; and the other assumptions appear to state very reasonable constraints on the general nature of reality: it should not be oriented towards one temporal standpoint as opposed to another (Neutrality); it should not be relative to a temporal standpoint (Absolutism); and it should not be tolerant of contradictions (Coherence). However, these assumptions, when taken together, lead to inconsistency, thereby suggesting that Realism should be rejected. For 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. But this means, as long as temporal reality is sufficiently variegated, that some of these facts will have incompatible contents. If reality is constituted by the present fact that I am sitting, for example, then it may well be constituted by the subsequent fact that I am standing. And this is then contrary to Coherence.

Under the standard realist position it is the assumption of Neutrality that would be

disputed. It will be claimed that there is indeed a particular time, the present, which is privileged; and the tensed facts which constitute reality are then those that obtain at the present time. Thus the fact that I am sitting may well belong to reality even though the fact that I am standing does not.²

Perhaps part of what has made this response seem so attractive is the analogy with the case of modality. For the counterpart to Neutrality seems very implausible in this case. What corresponds to the tensed facts are the ‘worldly’ facts, those that are capable of obtaining at different possible worlds; and what corresponds to Neutrality is the assumption that the worldly facts which constitute reality are not oriented towards one possible world as opposed to another. Thus if reality is constituted by the actual fact that donkeys bray then it should also be constituted by the possible fact that donkeys meow; and to most of us, this has seemed absurd. Surely reality is oriented towards how things *actually* stand; and similarly, it has been supposed by the realist, for how things *presently* stand.

However, it has to be admitted that the analogy on this point is very strained. For there is not the same metaphysical distance, intuitively speaking, between the present time and other times as there is between the actual world and other worlds. The entirety of what goes on at the present time and at other times is somehow part of the same all-encompassing reality in a way in which what goes in the actual worlds and in other possible worlds is not. Moreover, other analogies, which might appear to be closer to the case at hand, suggest a quite different view. Suppose one were a first-personal realist, one thought that reality was constituted by first-

²Arthur Prior who was one of the principal exponents of this view; and it is discussed at some length in the papers from Prior & Fine [1969].

personal facts, such as the fact that *I* am in pain.³ Then it would appear to be quite absurd to suppose that a particular person, myself, was privileged and that reality was somehow oriented towards the first-personal facts that held for me, though not for you. But then why should it be any different in the case of tense? Are not the tensed facts indifferently distributed across time in much the same way as the first-personal facts are indifferently distributed across people?

Many philosophers have been led by considerations of this sort to give up realism. But one might also be led, given the intrinsic plausibility of a realist position, to consider the possibility of adopting a nonstandard form of realism. The nonstandard position will be characterized by a combination of views, Realism and Neutrality, that are not usually taken together. It will suppose both that reality is tensed and that it is not oriented towards one time, the present, as opposed to another. Thus even though we may stand outside of time, as it were, without adopting any particular temporal standpoint, we may still think of temporal reality as being constituted by tensed facts.

The nonstandard position can take either of two forms depending upon whether Absolutism or Coherence is rejected. If Absolutism is rejected, then one obtains a form of relativism. But this is not relativism of the usual sort, for it is not the facts themselves that are relative but the very constitution of reality. The facts themselves may well be absolute; they may include the unadorned fact that I am sitting, for example, or the unadorned fact that I am standing. But their belonging to reality will be a relative matter. Thus reality will not be absolutely constituted by the fact that I am sitting or the fact that I am standing, but only relative

³A view of this sort has been considered by Arthur Prior [1968].

to a given time.⁴

If Coherence is rejected, then one obtains what I call a ‘fragmentalist’ position. It will be maintained that reality is absolute, that it is not a relative matter how things really are. But it will be denied that the resulting reality is coherent. Reality may be constituted both by the fact that I am sitting, say, and the fact that I am standing, not through being constituted by these facts at different times, but absolutely.

The fragmentalist is not holding the strange view that I can at the same time be both sitting and standing. He is holding a *different* strange view, which is that reality can be absolutely constituted by both facts, even though these facts do not obtain at the same time and even though they are not subject to temporal qualification. His general position is that there is a certain notion of coherence that may or may not hold among the facts that constitute reality (in the temporal case, the facts will cohere when they obtain at the same time). Incompatible facts are incapable of cohering even though they are capable of belonging to the same reality. Thus contradictions *within* a coherent fragment of reality will be avoided, even though one coherent fragment may not be compatible with another.

Each of these nonstandard positions takes there to be many realities where the standard position takes there to be only one. But they differ on how these realities are given. According to the relativist view, there is something beyond the facts themselves by which the different realities are given. The facts belong to different realms of reality, as it were, and these realms

⁴ A view of this sort had been considered by Dummett [1960] and Horwich [1989]. I have been more explicit than them about the role the concept of reality should play in the formulation of the view; and I am disinclined to follow them in thinking of the relativity in terms of a temporal ‘perspective’ or ‘point of view’.

have some kind of independent status as the 'locus' of the facts. According to the fragmentalist view, by contrast, there is nothing beyond the facts themselves by which the different realities are given. The facts arrange themselves, so to speak, into different coherent fragments; and there is nothing beyond their coherence that might account for their belonging to one fragment as opposed to another.

There is an almost irresistible tendency to see these positions as collapsing into views of a more familiar sort. What, it may be asked, is it for reality to be constituted by a tensed fact at a given time (as with the relativist position)? If one is an antirealist, then one will be tempted to say that for reality to be constituted by a tensed fact, say the fact that I am standing, at a given time t is for it to be absolutely constituted by appropriate tenseless facts, such as the fact that I am sitting at t . And if one is a standard realist, one will be tempted to say that for reality to be constituted by the fact that I am standing at a given time t is for it to be absolutely constituted by the appropriate tensed facts, such as the fact that I am standing whenever t is the present time. But all such explanations of the relativity in question will be resisted by the true relativist. For they attempt to account for a relative conception of reality in terms of an absolute conception, whereas his position is that reality is *irreducibly* relative. There is nothing internal to reality by which its relativity to an external standpoint might be understood.

Similarly for the fragmentalist. What, it may be asked, is it for reality to be absolutely constituted both by the fact that I am sitting and by the fact that I am standing? If one is an antirealist, then one will be tempted to say something like: for reality to be constituted by both of these facts is for it to be constituted by an appropriate pair of tenseless facts, say the fact that I am sitting at t , for one time t , and by the fact that I am standing at t' , for some other time t' . And

if one is a standard realist, one will be tempted to say that for reality to be constituted by both of these facts is for it to be constituted by an appropriate pair of tensed facts, such as the fact that I *am* sitting and the fact that I *will* be standing. The apparent incoherence in reality is then explained away. But all such explanations will be resisted by the true fragmentalist. For they attempt to account for an apparently incoherent conception of reality in terms of a coherent conception, whereas his position is that reality is *irredeemably* incoherent. There is nothing internal to reality itself by which the incompatibility in the facts might be seen not to exist.

If the proposed explanations are resisted, then what should take their place? It has to be recognized that we here face a radically new idea. There are to be many alternative realities. But these are not alternative *possibilities* for reality, for no one of them is distinguished as actual. Nor are they alternative *perspectives* on reality, for there is no more fundamental reality upon which they are a perspective. And nor are they incomplete *parts* of a more comprehensive reality, since each of them, on its own, settles all of the facts. We might say, if we like, that reality as a whole ‘manifests’ itself in these different ways, that it becomes ‘alive’ or ‘vivid’ through certain realities holding rather than others. But in saying this we must recognize that there is no underlying reality, of the usual sort, of which these different realities are a manifestation. The differential manifestation of how things are is itself integral to the very character of reality.

This is a difficult, perhaps even an unintelligible, idea. But it is worth remarking that it is very much in conformity with how we naturally think about the matter. For we are naturally drawn to the idea to the idea that the passage of time involves a shift in reality from one moment to the next - now *this* reality is ‘on’, now *that* reality - even though this way of thinking is at

odds with the philosophical conception of reality as unique and unchanging. It is therefore possible that certain philosophical preconceptions of how reality must be have got in the way of our seeing how it is actually is.

Moreover, once this idea is accepted, it becomes possible to sustain a much more viable version of realism, one that is immune to many of the objections that may be raised against the standard position. There are three such objections which we would do well to consider in what follows, one concerning the passage of time, a second concerning the relationship between language and reality, and the third concerning the question of special relativity. In each case, it may be argued that the objections are indeed effective against the standard realist position but not against the nonstandard position. Thus these arguments, if correct, show that the nonstandard position constitutes the only viable form of realism, that if one is going to be a realist about tense then one should adopt the nonstandard rather than the standard position.

One of the most remarkable and puzzling features of time is its passage. Time flows; there is some kind of movement from one time to the next, which appears to have no counterpart in the case of space. But in what does this difference from space consist?

One of the primary motivations for the realist position has been its apparent ability to account for this difference. For it has commonly been supposed by realists that the passage of time can be taken to consist in the successive possession of the absolute property of being PRESENT or NOW. This property passes as it were from one moment to the next and it is in its passage, or in some related tensed phenomenon, that the passage of time can be taken to consist. Moreover, there is no correspondingly absolute property of HERENESS that can be taken to

pass from one point in space to another; and so the relevant difference between space and time is secured.

Now it is true that the realist has the edge over the antirealist in being able to provide an explanation of this sort. For the property of being present, for the antirealist, is relative; it is one possessed *at* a time. But what is it for a time t to be present at a time t' ? It seems that there is essentially nothing more that the antirealist can say than that it is for the two times to be the same. But the successive possession of the property of being present then simply amounts to each time being identical to itself; and so the proposed explanation of the passage of time collapses into triviality. For the realist, on the other hand, there is an absolute property of being present (though no absolute property of being here). So in saying that a given time is present, we are not simply saying that it is identical to itself; and the collapse into triviality is thereby averted.

But although the realist possesses the right concept of the present in terms of which an explanation of the proposed sort might be given, he does not possess the right metaphysics by reference to which an explanation of the proposed sort might actually be sustained. For all that he can properly say is that a particular time t_0 , that which happens to be present, possesses the absolute property of being present. But what we wanted was the *successive* possession of the property of being present, not merely its *current* possession.

At this point, the realist might appeal to the fact that the other times were present or will be present. Thus the passage of time will be taken to consist in the fact that the particular time t_0 *is* present, that particular times t^- in the past *were* present (or were present so much time ago), and that particular times t^+ in the future *will be* present (or will be present so much time ahead).

But this still will not give us what we want. For given that t_0 is present, the past presentness of t^- amounts to no more than t^- being earlier than t_0 and the future presentness of t^+ amounts to no more than t^+ being later than t_0 (and, similarly, the past or future presentness of a time so much time ago or so much time ahead amounts to no more than its being so much earlier or so much later than t_0). Thus the only distinctive tense-logical content to the claim that each of these times has the tensed status that it does is that the particular time t_0 is present; and so no real progress has been made.

The point is perfectly general. For suppose we ask: given a complete tenseless description of reality, then what does the standard realist need to add to the description to render it complete by his own lights? The answer is that he need add nothing beyond the fact that the given time t_0 is present, since everything else of tense-theoretic interest will follow from this fact and the tenseless facts. Thus all that the realist need add to the anti-realist's 'static' account of the universe is the fact that a given time is present. And how could this solitary 'dynamic' fact be sufficient to account for the passage of time? Indeed, the realist's conception of time is compatible with a view in which reality is frozen on the present, at it were, with there being no genuine passage but merely different static relationships of things in the past and the future to things in the present. His conception of temporal reality, for all that he has said, may be as static or block-like as the antirealist's, the only difference lying in the fact that his block has a privileged 'center'.

The two forms of non-standard realism are not subject to this difficulty since they do not single out any one time as *the* present. For the relativist, each time is absolutely present at that time. This does *not* mean, as for the antirealist, that each time is identical to itself. What it

means is that, at each time t , reality is constituted by the absolute fact that t is present. There is indeed a form of relativity here, but it relates to the constitution of reality and not to the facts themselves. Similarly for the fragmentalist; each time t is such that reality will be constituted by the absolute fact that it is present. Again, the property of being present that figures in the fact is absolute. But, in this case, there is not even an external form of relativity since reality will be absolutely constituted by each of the facts that t is present.

Whichever nonstandard position we adopt, it can be allowed that presentness is both an absolute feature of reality and one that applies, across the board, to each and every time. The previous difficulty does not therefore arise; and there is some hope, at least, of providing an account of the passage of time in terms of tense. The importance of this point is not to be underestimated. For, as I mentioned, one of the primary motivations - perhaps *the* primary motivation - for adopting the realist position was its apparent ability to account for the passage of the time. It therefore seems, if this motivation is to be respected, that we are forced into adopting a nonstandard form of realism.

The second difficulty concerns the connection between language (or thought) and reality. Anyone who has a view as to what is real is under an obligation to explain how what is real accounts for what is true; the facts which he takes to constitute reality must be adequate to account for what we take to be true. The present objection is to the effect that the realist about tense is unable to provide such an account, that there is no reasonable view as to how the tensed truths might relate to the tensed facts.

We may state the objection in the form of an argument from certain assumptions which it

seems clear the realist must accept. It may then be shown that these assumptions lead to a contradiction and that the realist position should therefore be abandoned. For the purposes of the argument, we should imagine that I make two utterances U1 and U2 of the sentence ‘I am sitting’, the first at an earlier time t1 at which I am sitting and the second at a later time t2 at which I am standing. We now make three sets of assumptions about what it is correct to assert at each of the times, two concerning the particular utterances U1 and U2 and one of more general import (the reader may find it helpful to consult the diagram below).

Given the facts, it is correct to assert at t1 that U1 is true and correct to assert at t2 that U2 is false. We write this as:

Truth-value1 U1 is true;

Truth-value2 U2 is false.

It is also correct to assert at t1 that U1 states that I am sitting and correct to assert at t2 that U2 states that I am sitting:

Content1 U1 states that I am sitting;

Content2 U2 states that I am sitting.

It is important that these assertions should be taken to relate to what one might call a ‘disengaged’ use of the expression ‘I am sitting’. Thus what U1 should be taken to state is the *tensed* proposition that I am sitting, one that does not itself encode any temporal information concerning the time of utterance; and similarly for U2.

We make two general assumptions concerning the stability of truth-value and content:

Truth-value Stability If it is correct to assert that a given utterance is true (false) at one time, then it is correct to assert this at any later time;

Content Stability If it is correct to assert that an utterance states that such and such at one time, then it correct to assert this at any later time.

Our final general assumption concerns the connection between truth and reality:

Link An utterance is true if and only if what it states is verified by the FACTS.

The facts of interest to us are those that belong to reality. Hence the capitals. And, of course, given that the assumption is true, it may correctly be asserted at any given time.

It may now be shown how these various assumptions lead to contradiction. By Truth-value1, it is correct to assert at t1 that U1 is true; and so by Truth-value Stability, it is correct to assert at t2 that U1 is true. By Content1, it is correct to assert at t1 that U1 states that I am sitting; and so by Content Stability, it is correct to assert at t2 that U1 states that I am sitting. By Truth-value2, it is correct to assert at t2 that U2 is false; and by Content2, it is correct to assert at t2 that U2 states that I am sitting. It is therefore correct to assert at t2 that U1 is true, that U1 states that I am sitting, and that U2 states that I am sitting. But then by Link it is correct to assert at t2 that U2 is true, since the facts that verify what U1 states will also verify what U2 states. Thus it is correct at t2 both to assert that U2 is true and that U1 is false, which is impossible.⁵

t1

t2

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) U1 is true | (2) U1 is true | (from (1) by Truth-value Stability) |
| (3) U1 states that I am sitting | (4) U1 states that I am sitting | (from (3) by Content Stability) |

⁵Considerations of this sort go back to Evans [85], chapter 12. The present argument is akin to one stated by Mellor ([86], [98]), though I have been much more explicit about its assumptions. It is also possible to give a formulation of the argument in the material mode but the present version avoids having to make a decision on whether or not the predicates 'is true' or 'states' are tensed.

(5) U2 is false

(6) U2 states that I am sitting

(7) U2 is true (from (2), (4), (6) and Link)

The antirealist might respond to this argument by rejecting the content assumptions. Of course, even for him there is a notion of content for which the content assumptions will hold, for he might take content to be what is normally called ‘character’. But this is not a notion of content for which he would also be willing to accept Link, since it is not the notion of content through which the connection between truth and a tenseless reality is to be mediated.

The realist, by contrast, cannot very well reject the content assumptions. Reality for him is tensed and so the notion of content relevant to Link will also be tensed. Nor can he very well reject Stability of Content since there is nothing in the content which he might plausibly take to vary with time. This leaves Stability of Truth-value and Link. But Link appears to be a metaphysical truism; and so this suggests that it is the Stability of Truth-value that should be given up. It is indeed correct to assert at t_1 that U1 is true but it is not correct to assert at t_2 that U1 is true, given that I am no longer sitting.

However, I share with others the view that this response is inadequate. In making utterances or in forming beliefs, we aim for a certain standard of correctness or truth; and presumably it is this standard which is relevant to determining how our utterances or beliefs might engage with the FACTS. If there are tensed facts in reality then they will be relevant to verifying the truth or correctness of our utterances or beliefs according to this standard. The difficulty now is that we do not take the application of this standard to be hostage to the

vicissitudes of time. It seems absurd to suppose that the utterances I make or beliefs I form at one time might subsequently be judged to be mistaken simply because they no longer correspond to how things currently are. In making utterances, I aim for a standard of correctness whose status depends upon the time of the utterance rather than upon the time of assessment.

Thus the Stability of Truth-value cannot plausibly be denied for this notion of truth. Of course, it is possible that even if there are tensed FACTS, they are irrelevant to the application of the standards by which we assess the correctness of our utterances and beliefs. But then how can we have been so blind or wilful as to have adopted standards of correctness that prevent our utterances or beliefs from engaging with such a large and significant portion of reality? Clearly, the more plausible hypothesis is that there was no such portion of reality to begin with.

We appear to have here a formidable objection to tense-theoretic realism. But it is only really effective against the standard form of realism. For it has been a presupposition of the whole discussion that there is a single reality to which the truth of utterances and beliefs should relate. If we give up that presupposition, then we can see how we might have a timeless standard for the truth of our utterances and beliefs even though the facts by which they are made true are tensed. For we may take a tensed utterance or belief to perform two quite distinct tasks. The first is to target a particular reality (usually the one which obtains at the time of the utterance). The second is to impose some content on the reality, whatever it might be. The utterance or belief will then be true if the reality that it targets conforms to its content. Thus Link, as we have stated it, should be abandoned and, in its place, we should adopt a relative version of the principle:

Relative Link An utterance is true if and only if what it states is verified by the FACTS

that obtain at the time of utterance.

According to the relative principle, it is then clear that the facts by which a tensed utterance is verified may well be tensed even though there is a timeless standard for its truth.

As always, our opponents will attempt to collapse the distinctions upon which we wish to build our case. For he will take the genuine content of an utterance to be that the targeted reality conforms to what *we* have taken to be its content. Thus the targeted reality gets incorporated into the very content of the utterance and the relativity of the facts to one reality as opposed to another will disappear.

However, it is worth bearing in mind that the general distinction between target and content is one that anyone should be willing to accept. If I make an ordinary assertion, such as that donkeys bray, then there is a sense in which it targets the actual world. It does not explicitly say that the actual world is one in which donkeys bray but the truth of the assertion, all the same, will be answerable to how things are in the actual world.

Similarly, so the nonstandard realist wants to say, for tensed utterances; there is a tensed reality which it targets but about which it does not explicitly speak. His opponent's mistake is to fail to recognize how the distinction should be drawn in the present case. Because different utterances of the same tensed sentence may differ in their truth-value, he thinks that the difference must be attributable to a difference in content. But what varies with context is not the content itself but the reality to which the content should be referred.

We therefore see that the need to account for the connection between language and reality provides another key respect in which the nonstandard form of realism is to be preferred. .

Our final objection concerns the compatibility of tense-logical realism with special relativity.⁶ Many philosophers have remarked that special relativity (SR) seems to create a special difficulty for presentism, the view that only present objects are real. For if special relativity excludes the absolute property of *being present* as a criterion for being real, then what should be used in its place?

There is a more basic worry, however. For the presentist believes in tensed facts. But what, in the light of SR, should he take a tensed fact to be? Without an answer to this question, he is not even in a good position to state an alternative criterion for being real, since any alternative criterion must presumably be tensed and hence must already presuppose some alternative conception of tense.

The difficulty that SR poses for the conception of tense is simply stated. Under the pre-relativistic conception of tense, a tensed proposition is one whose truth is merely relative to a time. Consider now any two events e and f and the tensed propositions that e obtains and that f obtains. If it makes sense to say that these propositions are true at any given time, then it makes sense to say that they are true at the same time. But for the propositions to be true at the same time is for the events to be simultaneous. Thus the classical pre-relativistic conception of tense presupposes an absolute notion of simultaneity.

What then, in the light of special relativity, should replace times as the standpoint from which the truth of tensed propositions is to be evaluated? There are two main options. Under the first, the truth of a tensed proposition is taken to be relative to a location in space-time. Thus

⁶For a discussion of Prior's views on the topic, see chapter 2.7 of P. Hasle and P. Oehrstroem [1995].

the proposition that a given event is *here-now* may legitimately be regarded as tensed even though the proposition that the event is *now* or that it is *here* cannot be. Under the second option, a tensed proposition is taken to be relative to an (inertial) frame of reference and a time. Each frame gives rise to a framework of times; and a proposition may then be taken to be relative to the frame and one of its times. Thus the proposition that a given event is *now* may legitimately be regarded as tensed, as may the proposition that a given thing is *now at rest*.

However, both of these proposals are open to formidable objection. There is nothing wrong as such with the post-relativistic counterparts to the pre-relativistic notion of tense. The difficulty arises from taking tensed facts in this post-relativistic sense to be constitutive of reality. For if I take reality to be constituted in part by tensed facts, then I should be able to say what those facts are. But the facts will depend upon the standpoint; and so we need to be able to say which of the many alternative standpoints should be taken to be the standpoint from which those facts obtain.

There would appear to be only one possible form of reply. The privileged standpoint is to be the one from which the question is asked. Thus, under the first proposal, it will be the space-time location from which the question is asked; and under the second, it will consist of the frame at which I am at rest when I ask the question and the time, within that frame, at which the question is asked.

But it is clear that these answers can be sustained? Consider the second proposal first; and imagine that you and I are in relative motion and that we coincide at the location at which I ask the question. Then what reason do I have to favor my own standpoint over yours? After all, the only possible relevant difference between us lies in our relative motion. But why should I

think that reality is somehow attuned to my motion as opposed to yours?

A similar point holds in regard to the first proposal. Suppose that you are standing next to me and that you also ask the question. Then why should I favor my standpoint over yours? Now if your question is asked in the absolute past or future of my question, then I do perhaps have a good reason to favor my own standpoint. But what if the events of our asking the questions are space-like separated from one another (as they would be if I took you to be asking the question at the same time as myself)? What then? After all, space-like separation is as close as one can get to a purely spatial difference within the context of SR and so, if anything, it would appear to constitute a reason for admitting your standpoint rather than excluding it. But failing spatial separation, there is nothing about the difference between the two standpoints to which we can appeal in explaining why reality might be attuned to the one as opposed to the other.

The force of the argument can be brought home by means of an analogy with the case of first-personal realism. Suppose I believe that reality is, in part, constituted by first-personal facts and I now ask what those facts are. Then surely I have no good reason to suppose that reality is somehow oriented towards my own standpoint as opposed to yours, that the only first-personal facts are those that concern me as opposed to you. This would appear to be metaphysical chauvinism of the worst sort. But similarly, it may be argued, for the tense-theoretic realist. Some sort of chauvinism about his own standpoint will be unavoidable once his conception of a standpoint is reconceived in the light of special relativity.

The above arguments, however, depend upon taking for granted that standard realism is the only realist option. When it is asked 'how is reality?', it is presupposed that there is a single reality and hence a single standpoint from which the question is to be answered. And this then

leads to the difficulty of saying what the standpoint might reasonably be taken to be. But give up the presupposition and the difficulty disappears. Each standpoint will then give rise to its own reality and no one can be singled out as being *the* standpoint of reality. If it is asked ‘why is your standpoint not also a standpoint of reality?’, then the answer is that it *is* and that there is no basis for preferring the one standpoint to the other.

It therefore appears, in the absence of any other line of solution, that it only by adopting a nonstandard position that one can satisfactorily reconcile tense-theoretic realism with the demands of special relativity.

If I am right, then the only plausible realist position is the nonstandard position, the one that recognizes reality to be tensed but sees all times or temporal standpoints as on a par. Not only is the nonstandard position intrinsically more plausible than the standard position, it is also better able to withstand the many objections that have been leveled against that position. But it comes at a price. For we can only make sense of the view by giving up the idea that there is a single coherent reality. There are many such realities, either indexed to different temporal standpoints or parts of a larger fragmented reality.

For many the price would be too high. For them, it is simply evident that there is but one reality and that it is of a piece. But I do not think that the alternative should be so lightly dismissed. As I have pointed out, the nonstandard view is already in conformity with how we naturally think about time; and the phenomenon of temporal passage is so puzzling and apparently self-contradictory that it would not be surprising if its understanding called for a radical change in how we conceive of reality. Perhaps at the end of the day the view should be

rejected, but only because it fails to prove its worth, not because of any manifest absurdity in its conception of what is real.⁷

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