

Perspectives on Time

23-24 February 2024

University of Geneva

Espace Colladon, rue Jean-Daniel-Colladon 2

Much everyday thinking involves representing the world from a particular perspective in time. What is the nature of temporally perspectival thinking? And what demands, if any, does this kind of thinking put on the metaphysics of time?

The Geneva Conference 'Perspectives on Time' aims to investigate these and other issues in the philosophy of time and temporal experience – including psychological tense, temporally indexical modes of presentation, timely action, time-biased emotions and preferences, and the relevance of these for the A- vs. B-theory of time debate.

This conference is part of the SNSF funded project 'The Privileged Present: from Phenomenology to Metaphysics' (Project number: PZ00P1_186148).

Speakers

Julian Bacharach (Antwerp)

Daniel Deasy (University College Dublin)

María de Ponte (Basque Country)

Carla Merino-Rajme (North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

Giovanni Merlo (Geneva)

Daniel Morgan (York)

Dilip Ninan (Tufts)

Stephan Torre (Aberdeen)

Discussants

Bahadir Eker (Tübingen)

Emanuele Tullio (CEU)

Matheus Valente (Valencia / Barcelona)

Organizer: **Giovanni Merlo** – giovanni.merlo@unige.ch

Schedule

Friday February 23rd

9-10h30: Carla Merino-Rajme, "Experiencing the Passage of Time"

10h45-12.15: Daniel Morgan, "Temporal experience and metaphysics"

14h30-16: Daniel Deasy, "Propositional temporalism"

16h15-17h45: Dilip Ninan, "Assertion and the Passage of Time"

Saturday February 24th

9-10h30: María de Ponte, "Ephemeral episodes, durable contents. Believing and talking in time"

10h45-12.15: Giovanni Merlo, "On feeling relieved that something is over"

14h30-16: Stephan Torre, "*Will*-Believing is Counterfactual Believing"

16h15-17h45: Julian Bacharach, "On the Very Idea of a Temporal Perspective"

20: Conference dinner (location TBC)

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order, by author)

On the Very Idea of a Temporal Perspective

Julian Bacharach (Antwerp)

Work in cognitive psychology on 'temporal decentring' and 'mental time travel' suggests that a range of adult temporal cognition capacities—from episodic recall to competence with grammatical tense—depend on an understanding of temporal perspectives, and the ability to imaginatively occupy a temporal perspective different from that of the present. Yet in what sense, if any, does our experience of the world appear to be from a particular temporal perspective? There is a clear sense in which sense experience—paradigmatically, visual experience—seems to present us with what is happening around us as perceived from a particular spatial location, distinct from that of the perceived object. An understanding of spatial perspectives can thus build up from the observation that the course of one's experience is determined not simply by how things are in a perceived scene, but by the perspective from which they are viewed. By contrast, in the temporal case, perceptual experience alone does not provide for any parallel contrast between a change in one's temporal perspective on a situation, and a change in the situation itself. To find a foothold for the idea of a temporal perspective, I suggest, we need to look beyond sense experience narrowly construed, to the complex of desire, agency and affect that constitutes one's take on the world around one at any point in time. I conclude the discussion with some suggestions about how this understanding of temporal perspectives bears on metaphysical questions about the possibility and status of an absolute, or perspective-free, conception of time.

Propositional Temporalism

Daniel Deasy (University College Dublin)

Frege and Russell both defended the view that the facts do not change; for instance, Frege writes that 'complete thoughts' are 'true not only today or tomorrow but timelessly'. However, some contemporary philosophers are attracted to the view that the facts change, or in other words, that some truths are only temporarily true. (I call this view Propositional Temporalism, and its negation Propositional Eternalism.) But how exactly should we understand the thesis of Propositional Temporalism? For instance, is it compatible with contextualism about tense, and with relativism about the present (the 'B-theory')? And what are the reasons for and against accepting it? In this paper, I try to address these questions.

Ephemeral episodes, durable contents. Believing and talking in time

María de Ponte (University of the Basque Country)

In this paper, I discuss two classic examples: Arthur Prior's "thank goodness that's over" (1959) and Perry's "tardy professor" (1979). These cases have many things in common. Embedded within them are claims about the object of emotional reactions, utterances, and thoughts; and both serve to show that there are some deep and important roles indexicals play in thought and action. Also, both cases have often been interpreted as leading to strong ontological conclusions; a defense of A-theory of time, in Prior's case, and of the existence of intrinsically indexical thoughts (or *de se*), in Perry's. I do not think these ontological claims follow from these or other similar cases, and I offer an alternative account of them, closer, I believe, to both Perry's and Prior's original proposals. I defend and develop the reflexive-referential theory, focusing on temporal indexicals and tense. I take utterances and beliefs to be cognitive episodes: Things or events that occur in space and time, that have cognitive contents, and have causes and effects (Perry, 2019, de Ponte, Korta and Perry, 2023). The reflexive-referential theory, which combine a direct reference theory of singular terms with a token-reflexive theory of indexicals, inherits a key insight of Kaplan's theory, and of John Perry's earlier views: the distinction between different ways in which information can be discovered, believed and conveyed. But the inclusion of episodes has several advantages. First, it has advantages for understanding the relation between the content of cognitive episodes, their causal roles and their cognitive significance. Second, it accounts for—and makes use of—the fact that episodes have many other properties in addition to having speakers, locations, and times, that can be relevant to understanding their cognitive significance.

Experiencing the Passage of Time

Carla Merino-Rajme (North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

We experience time as passing, but does time really pass? According to the A-theorist, time passes. Indeed, many A-theorists argue that the best explanation for our experiences as of time passing is that time indeed passes. Traditionally, the B-theorist has resisted this conclusion by claiming that these experiences are illusory. Recently, however, this reply has been challenged by arguing that the B-theorist cannot make it intelligible how such illusions are possible. A number of views have emerged in response. I argue that none fares better than the traditional view. Instead, I propose that 'passage' is a primitive, a priori, and intelligible notion that is best understood as a form of transcendental change, i.e., as the feature of time that allows us to experience change. Unlike the alternatives, this view allows the B-theorist to vindicate our experiences as of time passing while providing a more compelling account of the phenomenology of change.

On feeling relieved that something is over

Giovanni Merlo (Geneva)

Arthur Prior's 'Thank Goodness That's Over' (TGTO) argument can be interpreted as making a case for tense realism in two steps: tensed relief requires tensed propositions, and tensed propositions require tensed facts, hence the reality of tensed relief presupposes the reality of tensed facts. Relativists (like Lewis) resist this argument at the second step: they think we can admit tensed propositions without admitting tensed facts. Absolutists (like Perry) get off the boat at the first step: they think we can admit tensed relief without admitting tensed propositions. In this paper, I will use a thought experiment to argue that Absolutism is problematic in a way that has not, so far, been fully appreciated: while this approach may allow us to make intelligible sense of our ways of expressing tensed relief, it does not allow us to make intelligible sense of tensed relief itself.

Temporal experience and metaphysics

Daniel Morgan (York)

Abstract: In this talk, I try to adjudicate whether temporal experience can provide us with evidence relevant to the correct metaphysics of time. For example, is temporal experience evidentially relevant to whether A- or B- theory is correct? I argue that answering this question requires us first to tackle the question of how to determine what the contents of temporal experience are. I motivate Susanna Siegel's way of doing this, and argue that it yields the verdict that temporal experience is metaphysically neutral.

Assertion and the Passage of Time

Dilip Ninan (Tufts)

There seem to be cases in which one loses one's standing to assert something simply by moving through time. These are cases in which one can say, at an initial time T_1 , that something will happen, but in which one cannot say, at a later time T_2 , that the event in question did happen, even though one's relevant evidence doesn't change between T_1 and T_2 . I will examine two approaches to this observation. The first says that what happens in these cases is that one loses knowledge as one moves through time (despite not losing evidence). The second says that the phenomenon arises because future operators are in fact modal operators with evidential effects. I will consider a number of arguments that bear on these two approaches, and suggest that the bulk of the considerations favor the first approach.

Will-Believing is Counterfactual Believing

Stephan Torre (Aberdeen)

I begin by presenting and motivating what I call the Simple View of will-beliefs: that, roughly, to believe that some event will occur is to believe that there exists a later time at which it occurs. I then raise some challenges to the Simple View stemming from the role of will-beliefs in our practical reasoning and our attitudes towards actuality. I then propose an account of will-beliefs as believing a kind of counterfactual. I argue that this account better fits with the role of will-beliefs in our practical reasoning and our attitudes towards actuality. Towards the end, I argue that the proposed account of will-beliefs provides a cognitive framework of the openness of the future that fits well with the metaphysical framework of openness in terms of counterfactual dependence.