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## Language and Temporal Reality

The fundamental issue in the metaphysics of time concerns which view of temporal reality is correct: the homogeneous view or the heterogeneous view. In the heterogeneous view, tensed sentences are used to argue that temporal reality is heterogeneous. In the homogeneous view, tensed sentences are made true by tenseless terms, and as a result, show that temporal reality is not necessarily heterogeneous. But while these tensed sentences and tenseless token-reflexive truth-conditions of tensed sentences have become the subject of so much debate, language does not provide anything conclusive in the end about which view of temporal reality is correct. As a result, new arguments regarding the experience of time are raised and the question of whether temporal reality is heterogeneous or homogeneous is further explored.

A tensed sentence is a sentence type that has some true tokens and some false tokens. For example, the sentence type "It is now 1980" has a true sentence token when it is uttered in 1980, but a false sentence token when it is uttered in any year that is not 1980. "It is now 1980," when uttered in 1980, is true because it has the temporary temporal property of "nowness." "It is now 1980," when uttered in 2011, is false because it has the temporary temporal property of "pastness." In other words, it is the changing of temporary temporal properties that causes some tokens of tensed sentence types to be true and some to be false.

Tensed sentence types have been the focus of so much discussion in the metaphysics of time debate because, as illustrated above, they make reference to temporary temporal properties. If what makes tensed sentences true is the coming and going of these temporary temporal properties (namely, pastness, presentness and futurity), then tensed sentences prove that the nature of temporal reality is heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous. Unless the tenseless theorist, a person who believes that

temporal reality is ontologically homogeneous, can account for the truth conditions of tensed sentences, then the fundamental question of whether or not temporal reality is heterogeneous or homogeneous has been answered by the tensed theorist: temporal reality is heterogeneous.

Tenseless theorists account for the truth conditions of tensed sentences through the use of tenseless token-reflexive truth-conditions. That is, they believe that tensed sentence tokens can be made true by tenseless terms, thereby eliminating the need to posit temporary temporal properties. These truth conditions are considered “token-reflexive” because the token appears in the statement of its truth condition. For example, to the tenseless theorist, what makes a token (uttered today) of “It is now 1980” false is not that 1980 has the property of pastness, but rather, that the token “It is now 1980” occurs later than 1980.

It is for this reason that D. H. Mellor and other tenseless theorists find tenseless token-reflexive truth conditions to be so important: by showing that a tensed sentence can be made true without positing temporary temporal properties, they can show that temporal reality is not necessarily heterogeneous. By speaking truly about the world without tensed language, the tenseless theorists can show that temporary temporal properties are not needed to explain the nature of temporal reality.

Both the homogeneous and the heterogeneous views of temporal reality are considered semantic theories rather than merely metaphysical theories due to the heavy emphasis they each have on language. The tensed theorist uses tensed language in an attempt to show that temporal reality is heterogeneous, and the tenseless theorist uses language to account for the truth conditions of tensed sentences. If the tenseless theorist is successful, then it shows that the world in time could be homogenous, and not necessarily heterogeneous.

In response to a criticism presented by Ned Markosian, Heather Dyke defends the new B-theorists and argues that it is not they who are guilty of moving invalidly from claims about language to claims about reality, but rather, it is the A-theorists and the old B-theorists who do this. She argues that

A-theorists use tensed language to prove temporal reality is heterogeneous and that old B-theorists use tenseless language to show that temporal reality is homogeneous. The new B-theorists, however, simply show that the truth conditions of tensed sentences can be given in tenseless terms; they are not making any claims that temporal reality must therefore be tenseless.

In the end, language proves to be ineffective in revealing the true nature of temporal reality. The tensed theorists hold that tensed sentences are irreducible and indispensable, but the tenseless theorists show that these tensed sentences do not mean that temporal reality must be heterogeneous, given that the truth-conditions of such irreducible, indispensable tensed sentences can be explained in tenseless terms. So the question still remains: which view is the correct account of temporal reality?

In his "Thank goodness that's over!" argument, Arthur Prior depicts an experience that he believes to prove the existence of time passage and temporary temporal properties. He argues that when one is "thanking goodness," they are expressing their relief that an unpleasant experience has moved from the present to the past, which, if this account is true, proves that the world in time is heterogeneous. Mellor, however, disagrees with Prior and argues that when one is "thanking goodness," they are doing so in a general sense, and not directed at any event in particular. He claims that the expression of relief follows the cessation of pain due to a causal connection between the two, and that this causal connection can be explained in tenseless terms: the expression of relief occurs later than the cessation of pain. In other words, the expression of relief is in a permanent temporal relation to the cessation of pain, showing that the homogeneous account of temporal reality is plausible.

While plausible, Mellor's response to Prior's argument seems inadequate. He claims that when one "thanks goodness" they are doing so in a general sense, but it is unconvincing that one's relief wouldn't be directed at some event in particular. It is due to this inadequate response that new arguments regarding the experience of time have been raised, and the question of whether temporal reality is heterogeneous or homogeneous has been further explored.