

Becky Clay
Dr. David Woodruff Smith
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Metaphysics of Time, Process and Consciousness

In this essay I will present three areas of metaphysics along with what is believed to be the most fundamental issue concerning each. I will then present a philosopher's solution to each of these problems, and why such an approach seems probable. To start, I will present Marcello Fiocco's metaphysical account of time and present the two generic views that he believes address the most fundamental issue. Next I will present Alfred Whitehead's metaphysical account of process and explain how his philosophy not only differs from that of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, but also why each of their views seem inadequate. Finally, I will present John Searle's metaphysical account of consciousness and how his new "conceptual revision" seems to solve the highly contentious mind-body problem.

Time is often understood to be a timeline of events in which moments move from the future to the present, the present to past, and then from the past into the increasingly distant past. This interpretation, however, fails to differentiate between time and temporal reality, that is, the difference between time and events in time. Time is objective; a thing in itself, and it is in virtue of this thing that temporal reality exists. Temporal reality is not a substance but is subjective, a collection of the independent events that occur within time. In other words, it is the existence of time that makes temporal reality possible.

The fundamental issue concerning the metaphysics of time, according to Marcello Fiocco, is whether temporal reality is *ontologically homogeneous* or *ontologically*

heterogeneous. To claim that temporal reality is homogeneous is to say that all moments in time have the same ontological status, meaning that there are no distinctive temporal properties that distinguish one moment from another. To claim that temporal reality is heterogeneous is to say that there are in fact distinctive temporal properties that distinguish one moment from another (such as the properties of pastness, presentness, and futurity).

A-theorists, also known as *tensed theorists*, hold the view that temporal reality is ontologically heterogeneous and that there are intrinsic temporal properties that distinguish one moment from another. *B-theorists*, on the other hand, also known as *tenseless theorists*, hold the view that temporal reality is ontologically homogeneous and that there are no intrinsic temporal properties that ontologically distinguish one moment from another. The moments in a B-series structure hold permanent temporal relations while the moments in an A-series structure hold permanent temporal relations in addition to possessing intrinsic temporal properties.

It is important to note that although the A-theorists and B-theorists disagree on the ontological status of temporal reality, they do not disagree about the sequence of events that occur within it. For example, for the A-theorist, a future moment is future because it possesses the temporary temporal property of futurity. For the B-theorist, a “future” moment is future not because it possesses the temporary temporal property of futurity, but rather, it is “future” merely because it occurs later than this current moment. Some B-theorists may agree with A-theorists that there are such things as temporal properties, but they will disagree that such properties determine a moment’s basic ontological status.

Similar to how time is what makes temporal reality possible (according to Fiocco), *Becoming* is what makes *Existence* possible in the metaphysics of process, according to philosopher Alfred Whitehead. Whitehead believes that the most fundamentally basic category of reality is Becoming, and therefore believes that Becoming is what drives the constitution of every other entity in the world whatsoever. Three key categories of Existence that derive from the category of Becoming are 1) *actual occasion*, 2) *prehension* and 3) *form*. Although each of these entities is its own distinct category of Existence, each is a derivative of the Becoming category and is therefore dependent on Becoming for its existence.

For example, imagine that a 60-foot wave is rolling into Waimea Bay. The wave passes through the mouth of the bay and continues rolling in for another five seconds before crashing onto the shore. An actual occasion, for Whitehead, is the wave at every moment as it travels through the bay, crashes on the shore, and recedes back into the ocean. The wave at T1 is an actual occasion, the wave at T2 is another actual occasion, and so on.

Prehension is the process by which the wave prehends or “seizes” the wave or waves prior to it (or the process of how actual occasions prehend or “seize” previous actual occasions). In other words, the wave at T2 encompasses some (if not all) of the aspects of the wave at T1 from a particular spatiotemporal location, and the wave at T3 encompasses some (if not all) of the aspects of the wave at T2 and T1 from another particular spatiotemporal location.

The wave rolling into the bay and crashing on the shore is what Whitehead would call a *process*. Each actual occasion of the wave (the wave at T1, T2, etc.) is a process of prehendng previous actual occasions, and the wave as a totality of actual occasions is a process as well. It is

by virtue of the ultimate category of Becoming that the wave prehends previous waves which lead into new waves, and this entire event occurs in temporal reality. The only entity that does not occur in temporal reality is Whitehead's primary category of Becoming, which occurs atemporally, and is what every other entity in the world is dependent.

In addition to actual occasions prehending other actual occasions, each actual occasion is characterized by a form, and every form is comprised of two characteristics: 1) each form constrains the way in which an actual occasion can become, and 2) each form exists only in virtue of being instantiated in actual occasions. For example, a form that constrains an actual occasion, such as a scar, is much more specific than a form that constrains the actual occasion of, say, the Pythagorean theorem. The Pythagorean theorem's form constrains it from being the type of thing that can get orprehend aspects of an actual occasion such as a scar: the form prevents it from being that type of thing.

Whitehead's process ontology differs from both Aristotle's and Wittgenstein's metaphysics in that Aristotle believed primary substances to be most ontologically basic and Wittgenstein believed existing states of affairs (objects plus properties in relation) to be most ontologically basic. While Whitehead's category of prehension is similar to that of Wittgenstein's determinant relations, neither Wittgenstein nor Aristotle explained how a sequence of events, such as a wave, seem to be of the same entity, which makes both of their views seem inadequate.

In John Searle's philosophy of consciousness, he presents a conceptual revision of the mind-body problem, calling it *biological naturalism*, in an attempt to move beyond dualism and materialism: "'naturalism' because, on this view, the mind is part of nature, and 'biological'

because the mode of explanation of the existence of mental phenomena is biological—as opposed to, for example, computational, behavioral, social, or linguistic” (Searle 54). In other words, at every step of the way, one can understand biological naturalism to be rejecting some part of dualism or some part of materialism. On the one hand, biological naturalism opposes dualism by holding that the brain produces consciousness (therefore rejecting that there are two distinct worlds: mental and physical). On the other hand, biological naturalism opposes reductive materialism by holding that there are, in fact, irreducible phenomenological properties (rejecting that all phenomenological properties are reducible to physical properties).

Searle believes that the brain, although it is a part of the physical world, is what produces consciousness. Consciousness, then, is the entity that is capable of relating us, by means of intentionality, to the world in which we are in touch. Searle writes, “the primary evolutionary role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people... ‘Intentionality,’ to repeat, is the general term for all the various forms by which the mind can be directed at, or be about, or of, objects and states of affairs in the world” (Searle 85).

Some of the key features of consciousness and its intentionality, according to Searle, are that it is inner, subjective and qualitative. To say that conscious states are “inner” is to say that they happen inside the body, that is, inside a conscious life. “Subjective” conscious states are those that are experienced by a human or animal subject. They are not subjective in the sense that they are illusory, but rather, they are subjective in the sense that a subject experiences them. Finally, to say that conscious states are “qualitative” is to say that there is a character about them that is what it is like to experience the world in a particular sort of way. In

summary, because biological processes produce the mind, and mind is consciousness, consciousness is able to fit into the world of nature, enabling us to be in touch with the world in which we live by means of intentionality.

In summary, although the metaphysical discussions of time, process and consciousness have fundamental issues that have yet to be fully resolved, the attempts made by Fiocco, Whitehead and Searle seem to have moved these discussions closer to a conclusion. By distinguishing time from temporal reality, Fiocco was able to narrow the discussion of time and present a more focused account of what our experience of time is really like. Similarly, Whitehead's move of how processes are ontologically basic, as opposed to Aristotle and Wittgenstein's primary substances, has helped better explain how it is that entities come about in the world. And finally, Searle's account of consciousness and intentionality has helped to provide a more plausible account of how we, as humans, are able to refer to things in the world of which we live.

Works Cited

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