

1 In defense of standard eternalism

"I am not to contend now for the reality of the manifold, however, but against the extra *weirdness* alleged for time ... that it is not the whole story ... that the temporal dimension is not "real time," not "the genuine creative flux" ... that over and above the sheer spread of events, with their several qualities, along the time axis, which is analogous enough to the spread of space, there is something extra, something active and dynamic, which is often and perhaps best described as "passage." This something extra, I am going to plead, is a myth ..." (Williams, 151)

Williams defends the standard 4D Theory: eternalism + four-dimensionalism + perdurantism (?).

- He takes seriously the idea that time "moves" like a road "moves."
- That is, persistence through time involves nothing more than being located at more than one time.
- The term "present" just refers to the time-slice which is simultaneous with its utterance.

Against time's passage:

- No figurative language describing the passage of time is literally true in an adequate theory.
- If the timeline itself passes, then it must pass in a different timeline.
 - Prior had a response to this: time passes at a rate of 1s/s, that is, relative to itself and not a distinct timeline.
- All the temporal facts can be explained by 4D Theory, so any metaphysical addition corresponding to passage is superfluous.
 - The "occurrence" of events
 - ""Taking place" is not a formality to which an event incidentally submits - it is the event's very being. World history consists of actual concrete happenings in a temporal sequence; it is not necessary or possible that happening should happen to them all over again." (Williams, 153)
 - That is, the very presence of an event across a certain span of time in the 4D manifold *is* its occurrence - we don't need to add a "glow" on top.
 - The "sense" of direction of time
 - There is an intrinsic asymmetry in the occurrence of events that explains direction. (Second law of thermodynamics?)
 - The "irrevocability of the past" (154-5)

Because time really is just like another spatial dimension, Williams admits the possibility of “Benjamin Button” cases, where a person appears to age backwards. (We can imagine the case as even more radical than the Button story, with speech going backwards as well.) What of this?

- East-West case

2 The presentist’s reply

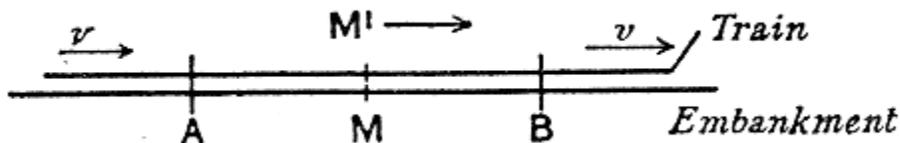
“All attempts to deny the reality of time founder, so far as I can see, on the problem of explaining the *appearance* of time’s passage: for appearing is itself something that occurs in time. Eddington once said that events don’t happen, we merely come across them; but what is *coming across* an event but a happening? ... I believe in the reality of the distinction between past, present, and future. I believe that what we see as a progress of events *is* a progress of events, a *coming to pass* of one thing after another, and not just a timeless tapestry with everything stuck there for good and all.” (Prior, 161)

“I have a very good friend and colleague in Australia, Professor Smart of Adelaide, with whom I often have arguments about this. He’s an advocate of the tapestry view of time, and says that when we say ‘X is now past’ we just mean ‘The latest part of X is earlier than this utterance.’ But, when at the end of some ordeal I say ‘Thank goodness that’s over’, do I mean ‘Thank goodness the latest part of that is earlier than this utterance’? I certainly do not; I’m not thinking about the utterance at all, it’s the *overness*, the *now-endedness*, the *pastness* of the thing that I’m thankful for, and nothing else.”

Prior’s argument:

1. On eternalism, when we think “Thank goodness that’s over,” we’re thinking of utterances.
2. But we aren’t.
3. So eternalism is false.

The “lightning” problem of relativity ...



Prior accepts that there is a fact of the matter about which lightning beam struck first, and that one observer is simply wrong.