Models of temporal experience and the structure of perception Roberta Locatelli R.Locatelli@warwick.ac.uk
Conscious experience of time, Berlin School of Mind and Brain, 30 September – 2 October 2014 Handout

0. Two debates:

Temporal experience: experience of temporal properties (duration, change…)
Nature of experience: metaphysics of perceptual experience

- The cinematic model (C) claims that our stream of consciousness is composed of momentary snapshots lacking temporal extension and structure.
- The retentional model (R): our stream of consciousness is composed of momentary states which lack extension but represent temporally extended intervals of time.
- The extensional model (E): the experience of succession and unfolding events is to be explained by appealing to the idea that episodes of perceptual experience unfold over a certain period of time.

- Intentionalism (I): perceptual experiences are accounted for in terms of their representational contents with veridicality/accuracy conditions.
- Sense-datum theory (S): perceptual experiences are accounted for in terms of obtaining of a psychological non-representational relations (relation of acquaintance) with sense-data.
- Naïve realism (N): perceptual experiences are accounted for in terms of the obtaining of a psychological non-representational relation (relation of acquaintance) with the objects or events perceive

Aim:
How do they map onto each other? Combining them help us deciding among models of temporal experience.

Plan:
- Temporal transparency (TT) and three models of temporal experience
- Looking at the debate about nature of experience helps us evaluating how models of temporal experience accommodate TT
- 2 main claims:
  (a) TT favours Relationalism
  (b) Extentionalism embodies relationalism, while retentionalism is hardly compatible with it
- Conclusion: If we consider how the two debates map onto each other, we can see that extentionalism better accommodates TT

1. Temporal transparency (TT)

(GT) General transparency claim: if one introspectively focus on the properties of experience itself, one cannot but be attentive to the aspect of the objects one seems to perceive: the colours of the walls in front of me, the shapes of the tables and so on. Even if my intention is focusing on the character of experience itself, what I am doing is paying closer attention to the objects I am presented with in my experience.

(TT) Temporal transparency claim:
- Positive claim: (TR) Phenomenal Temporal Realism Principle (claim about what we can find when we introspect our experience):
  Introspection of one’s experience seems to require attention to objects of awareness that are distinct from experience itself. Among those items there are unfolding events and temporal properties.
- Negative claim: (IP) Inheritance principle:
  Experience seems to inherit its temporal location and structure from the temporal location and structure of whatever it is perceived.
  “When one perceives an unfolding occurrence (e.g. the movement of an object across space), it seems to one as though one’s perceptual experience has the temporal location and duration of its object, and it seems to one as though the temporal duration and location of each temporal part of one’s experience is transparent to the temporal location and duration of each temporal part of the unfolding occurrence one seems to perceive” (Soteriou 2010: 227)
- Temporal location in perception VS recollection:
“Introspectively, it does not seem to one as though one can mark out the temporal location of one’s perceptual experience as distinct from the temporal location of whatever it is that one seems to be perceptually aware of. Furthermore, it seems to one as though the temporal location of one’s experience depends on, and is determined by, the temporal location of whatever it is that one’s experience is an experience of.” (Soteriou 2010: 227).

- Structure of temporal parts in perception VS judging:

  “In the case of judging, it does not seem to one as though the duration of one’s act of judging depends on, and is determined by, the duration of whatever it is that one’s judgment represents.” (Soteriou 2010: 227).

  “Experience has its own temporal structure. However, when one attends to that structure […] it is rational to judge that one’s experience is temporally determined in some way […] only by taking its temporal structure to mirror the apparent temporal structure of the world experienced, i.e. by making a judgment concerning (and typically perceptually attending to) the apparent temporal structure of the world experienced, and then taking the experience to have that same temporal structure.” (Phillips 2008)

2. Three models of temporal experience and Temporal Realism

(C) can hardly accommodate (TR); (R) and (E) seem both well equipped to account for it. accommodate respectively (TR)?

William James: ‘a succession of feelings, in and of itself, is not a feeling of succession’.

3. Principle of Simultaneous Awareness

Rententionalism goes naturally with intentionalism:

Husserl 1893–1917: Succession or other temporal properties are apprehended in one momentary act of consciousness, albeit one that encompasses not only the instantaneous present, but also the immediate past and the immediate future.

This is possible because the act of consciousness instantiates various intentional properties that represent the past, present, and future under different ‘modes of temporal orientation’: retention, primal impression, and protention.

(N) is a relational view: the subject is directly related to (or acquainted to) its object.

Can we have retentional structure with acquaintance?

One would have to claim that in the same act of consciousness one is simultaneously acquainted with the past and the present (and, maybe, the future). There are several problems with this suggestion.

Problems:

1. The very idea of acquaintance with something in the past is often considered incoherent: how can at a time t one be immediately related with something that occurred at time t-1?

   Maybe not incoherent after all: ex: Russell The Problem of Philosophy (1912), Evans (1982, chapter 5 and 8), Martin (2001)

2. Even if we accept acquaintance with the past, another problem: can we accommodate Principle of simultaneous Awareness (PSA) with relational view?

   PSA: In order to be aware of a temporal structure as such, the whole structure has to be presented to you simultaneously in a single momentary awareness.

- Easily accommodated by representationalism: At time t one’s experience represents different contents. For the intentionalist two successive parts of an event A and B are represented with different modes of presentation: as respectively in the past and in the present.

- But how can one combine relationalism (and the idea of acquaintance that goes with it) with PSA?

   If we want an act of acquaintance to present A and B as respectively past and present, this difference depends on either two things:

   (a) the temporal location of the objects, or
   (b) the nature of the relation of acquaintance.

   (a)? The location in the past of the object perceived cannot, alone, determine the fact that something is presented as past.

   Ex: star and bat.

   The different temporal locations of the stars and the bat don’t make any phenomenological difference in the way they are respectively presented: they are not presented as successive, but as co-occurrence.

   Hence Not (a)
(b)? How can the very same act of awareness have a two-fold nature, adopting a certain structure when it relates to something presented as present and another when related to something presented as past?

Russellian option: memory as acquaintance with the past model:

at, certain times, one can entertain two different acts of consciousness — a relation of acquaintance with the present and a relation of acquaintance with the past.

But This is a simple memory theory (anti-realism). Not (b).

> (R) goes naturally with (I). Hardly with (SD) and (N).

4. Extensionalism and relationalism

Extensionalism rejects PSA.


Phillips:

“When it comes to experience, it is significant stretches, not instants, that are explanatorily and metaphysically fundamental. In other words, the key claim required to make sense of temporal experience is not merely that experience is extended through time, but rather that there are certain durations of experience which are explanatorily or metaphysically prior to their temporal subparts. […] The most basic facts about our experiential lives are facts about extended stretches of the stream of consciousness, and what is true at an instant is true only in virtue of that instant being an instant during such a period of experience.” (Phillips, forthcoming)

Denial of PSA goes naturally with relationalism. If the perceptual state occurs only if a relation to the object obtains, it seems natural to think that if the relation is a relation to an event, this of awareness extends over that period of time as well. Hence, experience shouldn’t be analysed in terms of instantaneous temporal sub-parts (contra PSA). Hence, (E) goes naturally relationalism: (N) - or (SD) depending on the specific view on sense-data one has.

Can we combine (E) with (I)?

Hypothesis: Acceptance of PSA by retentionalists is partly motivated by their intentionalism.

Geach (1957): representational contents are “non-successive unity”:

When I believe “John is tall”, my belief is composed by parts that can be figure in other beliefs. I can believe, for instance, that “John is blond” and that “Amy is tall”. However I cannot think any of its component independently, I cannot believe “John”.

Beliefs have truth conditions, and “John” alone has none.

In order to grasp a thought the whole complex content must be simultaneously grasped. Conclusion: representational contents of beliefs are complex and possess parts and a logical structure, but NOT temporal parts.

Intentionalism. Basic claims:

- Perception has representational content with veridical or accuracy conditions.
- The phenomenal character of experience is determined by the representational content.
- How do you account of experience of a moving ball?
- Most natural option: if one experiences a ball moving, the change in the phenomenal character of the experience as the ball moves captured by successive representational contents representing the ball at different locations.
- But this hardly counts as a version of temporal realism: each content represent only an instant (similar to cinematic view).
- Alternative view: the content can represent temporally extended events or temporal parts of events. However, the extended laps of time must be represented within an instantaneous representational act of awareness (in accordance with PSA).
- Hence: it’s difficult to combine (E) – which denies PSA – with (I).

> How can an instantaneous representational act of awareness represent a laps of time?
- Laps of time represented in representational content through the indexical ‘now’.
- Any event E represented by the content will have successive temporal parts, say E₁ and E₂ occurring at different times.
- How can the indexical ‘now’ pick up different times?
  (a) ‘now’ picks out an interval of time that includes E₁ and E₂.
This doesn’t accommodate (IP): ‘now’ would pick out the interval of time that is occupied by the experience that represents the event, not of the event itself, even less so the time of each successive parts of the event and their temporal order and structure.

“If one holds a view according to which the indexical ‘now’ that is contained within the content of experience picks out an interval of time that merely includes the time at which the experience occurs, then one does not capture the fact that the experience seems to have the temporal location and duration of the occurrence it represents, for one allows that the experience does not seem to one to have the duration of the occurrence it represents. By analogy, consider a judgment with a content that contains the indexical ‘today’. The episode of judging does not seem to one to have the temporal duration of the day one thereby refers to. This suggests that in the case of the content of experience, the interval of time picked out by the indexical ‘now’ just is the interval of time that is occupied by the experience that represents it.” (Soteriou 2010: 231).

Naïve realism does better in accommodating (IP):
When a subject perceives an event, the experience seems to be a relation to that event. Given that the relation in question is one that seems to the subject to obtain only when the event occurs, the phenomenal character of experience will seem to the subject to have the temporal location and structure of the event one perceives.

“Given that the obtaining of the subject’s phenomenally conscious state seems to him to depend on the obtaining of the relation of awareness of, and given that the relation obtains only if the event occurs, the obtaining of the subject’s phenomenally conscious state seems to him to depend on the occurrence of the event. Given that the event in question is something that takes an interval of time to occur, the obtaining of the phenomenally conscious state over that interval of time seems to the subject to depend on the occurrence of something that takes that interval of time to occur.” (Soteriou 2010: 235).

Conclusion: Since naïve realism is not –at least prima facie– compatible with retentionalism, while it fits naturally with extentionalism, the account that best accommodates both aspects of the phenomenology of temporal transparency is extentionalism.

References: