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Replies to Giuliano Torrengo, Dan Zeman and Vasilis Tsompanidis

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1 Reply to Giuliano Torrengo

I would like to start by thanking my commentators for their insightful comments, suggestions and objections. Their insights will no doubt help further discussion of temporalism and eternalism in the future and have already helped me make my own thoughts more precise. I will reply to their objections in the order that seemed most natural to me. Torrengo addresses the issue of whether temporalism has metaphysical implications, Zeman sets forth concerns of a methodological type and Tsompanidis raises objections to the book's main positive arguments. I will reply to my commentators in this order.

Torrengo addresses the interesting and very current question of whether the debate about temporalism versus eternalism has any bearing on the debate about presentism versus metaphysical eternalism. In the book I address this issue in a couple of places. One thing I say is that semantic eternalism seems inconsistent with presentism, a particular version of the A-theory. The argument is this. Presentism holds that only present things exist. But according to the standard version of semantic eternalism, all propositions include a timestamp (e.g., the sentence 'Mary is hungry' may express the proposition that Mary is hungry at 2:05 pm on October 1, 2013 CST). Most of these timestamps are past and future times. So, if presentism is true, then the vast majority of these propositions do not exist. The presentist could construe times as ersatz times (sets of propositions) (Brogaard 2013a). But on pain of circularity, this requires granting that there are temporal propositions (without a timestamp). So, presentism is at odds with semantic eternalism.

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Torrengo replies that the argument doesn't work, because the view I argue for in the book is one that holds that there are some eternal propositions, for example, the propositions that there are wholly past objects and that I am giving a talk in L.A. on the 14th of November. Yet, Torrengo argues, 'it is the thesis that *some* eternal propositions exist that is at odds with presentism'.

This is a nice point. However, I disagree with Torrengo that presentism is at odds with the thesis that there are some eternal propositions. As he himself points out, it is the stronger view that there are no temporal propositions (i.e., semantic eternalism) that prevents the presentists from construing times as ersatz times. The weaker view defended in the book leaves us with all the resources (i.e., temporal propositions) needed to construe times as sets of propositions non-circularly. That said, Torrengo is perfectly right that if presentism is true, then the temporalist cannot accept all of the eternal propositions ordinary language appears to commit us to. In the book I argue (while bracketing metaphysical issues) that there are eternal propositions that make explicit reference to times, for instance, the proposition that I am giving a talk in L.A. on the 14th of November. If presentism is true, then that proposition does not currently exist. Presentists must, therefore, reject the existence of these kinds of propositions. (They can, of course, accept the existence of metaphysical propositions such as *there are wholly past objects*, as these types of propositions do not have times as constituents). The thought that sentences, such as 'I am giving a talk in L.A. on the 14th of November', do not express a proposition at all and therefore are false is not entirely unmotivated. It could be argued that while an utterance of the sentence 'I am giving a talk in L.A. on the 14th of November' may seem true, this kind of speech is, in fact, idiomatic much like 'the sun is rising'. Idiomatic speech is literally false (or untrue) but conveys something true.

Torrengo also raises an objection to my argument in Chapter 7 that if metaphysical eternalists adopt the quantifier account of the tenses (that is, the semantic eternalist's common account of the tenses), then they will have difficulties making certain metaphysical claims. The argument is too long to repeat here but the gist of it runs as follows. The metaphysical eternalist wants to say that past and future objects exist simplicer. Consider:

(1) Socrates exists.

Socrates existed in the past but does not presently exist. So, the metaphysical eternalist holds that (1) is true on one reading but false on another. Now combine metaphysical eternalism with the quantifier account of the tenses. On the quantifier account, all propositions are indexed to a time. So, where t* is the time of speech, (1) is equivalent to the proposition expressed by (2):

(2) Socrates exists at t*.

But here is the problem. If (2) specifies a false proposition expressed by (1), then what is the nature of the true proposition expressed by (1), according to the metaphysical eternalist?

Torrengo makes numerous very good points with respect to this argument. I will respond to what I take to be the main ones here (though in a different order). In response to my argument above, Torrengo argues that 'once we accept the distinction between a temporally restricted and a temporally unrestricted reading of quantification (and something analogous for predication), the worry is spurious'. However, this misses the point of the argument. The argument is that if the metaphysical eternalist accepts a quantificational account of the tenses, then she cannot account for the unrestricted reading of (1). (1) can, of course, be read as follows (as Torrengo suggests):

(3) $\exists x(x = \text{Socrates})$, where the domain of values is temporally unrestricted.
(4) $\exists x(x = \text{Socrates})$, where the domain of values is restricted to the present.

According to the metaphysical eternalist, (3) then is true and (4) false. However, this proposal is compatible with a version of temporalism that utilizes quantifier restriction. My own proposal was similar. On the view I prefer, (1) has a reading that determines a function from worlds to extensions and another reading that determines a function from world-time pairs to extensions. The first reading is the "unrestricted" reading, whereas the second is the "restricted" reading.

Notice, however, that neither of these proposals utilizes a quantifier account of the tenses. In fact, they are inconsistent with the standard version of semantic eternalism, which requires that all propositions are indexed to a time. And that was just the point of the argument in Chapter 7, which was not an argument against metaphysical eternalism but one in favor of temporalism (on the assumption that metaphysical eternalism is true).

A second worry that Torrengo raises is that the presentist cannot coherently claim that (1) is false, on an unrestricted reading. The reason for this, he says, is that I hold that an eternal proposition such as *Socrates exists* is 'evaluable as true or false *simpliciter* only in context in which either Socrates is a instantaneous object, or Socrates always (or never) exists (150). However, this is not my view. What I said was:

> 'I think that one *could* use 'John has a straight shape' to mean the eternal proposition that John has a straight shape. But such an eternal claim is truth-evaluable at a world *w* only if (i) John is an instantaneous object at *w*, (ii) John always has a straight shape at *w*, (iii) John never has a straight shape at *w*, or (iv) Lewis is right that the *eternal* proposition *John has a straight shape* is true at *w* iff John has a temporal part that has a straight shape' (Brogaard 2012: 150).

I made this remark in the context of discussing Lewis's problem of temporary intrinsics. The reason 'John has a straight shape' cannot be evaluated except under these conditions is that if John sometimes has a straight shape and sometimes has a bent shape, then relative to the world as a whole the proposition is neither true nor false (or both true and false). The same point does not apply to the proposition that Socrates exists (as existence does not come and go).

A third concern that Torrengo raises also concerns the unrestricted reading of sentences like (1). He argues that my view implies that the unrestricted readings of sentences are never true for the presentist, not even when the entity in question is present. This has the consequence, he says, that 'the presentist and the eternalist necessarily disagree on what *presently* exist', which seems odd.

I agree with Torrengo that that would be odd. However, I don't think I am committed to this view. Consider:

(5) Obama exists.

If presentism is true, then (5) is true when read restrictedly and unrestrictedly. On the restricted reading, 'Obama' determines a function from world-time pairs to extensions. Since the extension is non-empty, (5) is true on this reading. On the unrestricted reading, 'Obama' determines a function from worlds to extensions. Since this extension is also non-empty, (5) is true on this reading. Torrengo thinks I cannot say this, because I argue that on the unrestricted reading, (5) entails that it will be the case that Obama exists. However, even if we bracket Obama's future existence, there is no problem here, because this kind of tensed sentence is innocuous. It is the result of affixing a tense operator to a sentence given an unrestricted reading. But when tense operators are affixed to an operand sentence that expresses an eternal proposition, the tense operators will be redundant (150). So, the presentist can agree with the metaphysical eternalist that (5) is true on both its restricted and unrestricted reading.

Torrengo is right that if the presentist holds that Obama is not fully present but is unfolding in time, then it would seem that she should reject (5). After all, if only some of Obama's parts exist, how could (5) be literally true? I think this is a genuine puzzle but not one that is specifically about the unrestricted reading of (5). It appears to be equally problematic on the restricted (ordinary) reading of (5). However, the puzzle is not a consequence of accepting presentism or temporalism. Anyone who holds that ordinary material objects are four-dimensional spacetime worms needs a way to talk about the properties the present parts instantiate. This is a familiar issue from the metaphysical literature (see e.g., Sider 2001). It is true that Obama is speaking even if it's only his present part that is speaking. Yet how can this be if he is extended four-dimensionally? One standard reply is that proper names ordinarily refer only to stages of objects. Whether this is the best reply to the worry is not something I can address here. But let me point out that most three-dimensionalists who take ordinary material objects to endure are faced with a version of this problem. It is commonly agreed upon that events perdure: they have temporal parts located at different times. Yet even if a soccer match takes a considerable amount of time, it can nonetheless still be true to say that you are currently watching one. So, the problem of how to correctly predicate properties of four-

dimensional entities may arise regardless of one's particular view of how ordinary material objects persist through time.

2 Reply to Dan Zeman

Though temporalism is not formulated as a view about how to treat the tenses in English, I argue in the book that on the most natural understanding of temporalism, the debate between temporalism and eternalism is not orthogonal to the debate about how to treat the tenses. Standard versions of eternalism require that the time of speech is a constituent of all propositions. As the time of speech is variable, sentences that express eternal propositions must have a hidden variable in the sentence structure that takes times of speech as its values. This type of sentence structure follows as a natural consequence of a treatment of the tenses as quantifiers. Where 't*' is a variable that takes times of speech as its values, 'John is a firefighter' is of the form 'John is firefighter at t*', 'John was a firefighter' is of the form 'there is a time t such that t is earlier than t*, and John is a firefighter at t', and 'John will be a firefighter' is of the form 'there is a time t such that t is later than t*, and John is a firefighter at t'.

Temporalism, by contrast, must treat the tenses as sentential operators, at least given standard semantics. It may be thought that it is possible to combine temporalism with a quantificational account of the tenses. For example, it may be thought that 'John was a firefighter' could be treated as having the following underlying form:

(6) $\exists t(t < t_n$ & John is a firefighter at t),

where t_n is an unarticulated constituent that takes different values across time. If (6) expresses a proposition with an unbound variable, then that proposition will have different truth-values at different times. The problem with this view is that a content that contains an unbound variable isn't a complete proposition, given standard semantics. In standard semantics sentences, relative to context, express complete propositions that to not require further satisfaction by context. So, unless we adopt some special semantics, (6) expresses an eternal proposition, viz. the proposition that results from substituting the time of speech for t_n. It thus seems that within a

fairly standard semantic framework, temporalism is committed to a treatment of the tenses as sentential operators, whereas eternalism is committed to a treatment of the tenses as quantifiers over times or some similar view (e.g., a treatment of the tenses as quantifiers over events or as discourse variables).

As Zeman points out in his commentary, a treatment of the tenses as quantifiers is a minority view among linguists (philosophers have been far more more sympathetic to it). In the book I reply to a number of the arguments that linguists and philosophers, like Jeff King 2003, have offered against the operator account. Zeman raises several novel, worries about the temporalist's suggestion that we treat the tenses as operators. He grants that it may be the case that one can come up with an operator account of the tenses that can accommodate most, if not all, of the phenomena that normally are cited in support of the quantificational account. However, he believes that true supporters of temporalism might want 'positive, decisive arguments for the view that tenses are to be interpreted as circumstance-shifting sentential operators, rather than, say, quantifiers over temporal variables verbs come endowed with'.

Zeman then suggests that in the absence of any such positive arguments that show that the tenses are best treated as operators rather than as, say, quantifiers, a different argumentative strategy may be more efficient. The different argumentative strategy Zeman proposes is to provide compelling, independent support for temporalism and then show that temporalism requires a treatment of the tenses as operators.

I agree with Zeman that there are very few empirical data concerning the semantics of tense that cannot be accommodated by both operator accounts and quantificational theories of the tenses (as well as many other theories of the tenses). So, my reply is not going to be to become up with a range of new empirical data supporting the operator account. In fact, I completely agree that the second strategy is the only strategy that is going to work for the temporalist. However, I also took that to be the strategy of the book. I think temporalism offers a better account than eternalism of belief retention (Chapter 2), agreement and disagreement across time (Chapter 3) and the phenomenology of perceptual experience (Chapter 8). Here I will provide a quick overview of the argument from the phenomenol-

ogy of perceptual experience with some emphasis on the argumentative strategy that Zeman and I both agree is the best strategy for the temporalist. Tsompanidis offers some independent objections to this argument. I will revisit those below.

My argument for temporalism based on the phenomenology of perceptual experience made a couple of assumptions that some may find controversial, viz. the assumptions that (i) visual experiences have propositions as their content, and (ii) the content of visual experience supervenes on the phenomenology. However, a version of the argument can be made without these assumptions in place. The original argument went as follows. Two subjects could, in principle, have phenomenally identical experiences at different times. If the phenomenology of visual experience determines the content, then two subjects could, in principle, have experiences with the same content at different times. It follows that times are not constituents of the contents of experiences. Given the assumption that the content of experience is a proposition, there are propositions that do not have times among their constituents. So, there are temporal propositions.

While the argument, as formulated, will only be compelling to those who already accept the two assumptions about the content and phenomenology of experience, a version of the argument establishes the same conclusion without these two assumptions in place. Qualia theorists reject the view that the phenomenology of experience supervenes on the content but not the converse (Block 2010). The main, current view that will reject the assumptions I originally made is naive realism. However, there is a different argument for the same conclusion that assumes naive realism. Naive realists normally hold that the external object that triggered the experience and its visually perceivable property instances fully constitute the phenomenal character of experience (Martin 2002; Campbell 2002; Brewer 2007; Kennedy 2009). As times (such as 2 pm today) are not normally visually perceivable properties, there could be two phenomenally identical experiences that are temporally distinct. For example, an experience of one and the same red tomato on two different occasions. Moreover, if the subjects of those experiences were to describe as sincerely as possible what their experiences convey, their descriptions would not make any reference to times. If they did, there would be more accurate descriptions not making any reference

to times. The descriptions convey propositions, despite making no reference to times. Hence, there are temporal propositions.

Returning to Zeman's point, I agree with him that the temporalist needs to rest her case on considerations that are independent of arguments about the correct semantics of tense. I also think considerations like the one above about visual experience make temporalism seem more appealing than eternalism. But temporalism requires that one treats the tenses as operators. So, if the operator account and the quantifier account of tense can both accommodate the empirical data about tense, which appears to be the case, then we should favor the operator account.

3 Reply to Vasilis Tsompanidis

Tsompanidis raises some interesting objections to two of the book's main positive arguments for temporalism. His first point of contention is with my argument that temporalism is better suited as a semantics of agreement and disagreement. As Tsompanidis points out, the argument rests on cases of the following kind:

> [FIRED FIREFIGHTER]
> A: … *John is a firefighter*
> (Behind John's closed office door his superior is shouting 'You are fired!')
> B: I guess you are right. But John is not a firefighter. He was just fired.

B's claim 'you are right' sounds odd, but the eternalist translation of the conversation is perfectly fine. So, the eternalist translation is mistaken.

Tsompanidis raises several objections to this type of argument. I will briefly review the two main ones here and then offer a reply to the first. The first point is that the eternalist could turn to interval semantics to account for agreement and disagreement. For example, 'John is a firefighter' might mean 'John is a firefighter *at least up to* and *including* the time of *the entire conversation*'. This type of account may be able to explain what is wrong with dialogues like the one presented in [FIRED FIREFIGHTER]. The second point is

that 'to be' in the present tense is polysemous and hence may yield different contents in different linguistic contexts. Tsompanidis notes that it may be that polysemy is 'why the debate between eternalists and temporalists is puzzling, why we agree or disagree in specific examples, and why the eternalist 'translations' sometimes fail and other times sound incredibly obvious'.

Tsompanidis makes many very good points, and unfortunately I cannot reply to all of them here. However, let me consider the first point that eternalism could take the present tense to refer to intervals. As Tsompanidis notes, I do consider this kind of reply at length in the book but let me address the specific account he proposes. One major problem for defenders of this type of proposal is to give precise truth-conditions for sentences, given that conversations do not have clear boundaries. A further, related, problem is that the time of the entire conversation cannot always serve as a reference time. Consider the following sentences:

(7) (a) Mary is falling down from the tree.
(b) Afghanistan is at war.
(c) I am alive.

If 7(a) is uttered during an extended conversation that may continue for hours while Mary is taken to the hospital, the relevant time interval cannot be one that includes the entire conversation. In this case, it may be suggested that the time interval is determined by the duration of the event. However, this suggestion cannot be right. I might utter 7(a) because I believe that Mary is falling down from the tree, even though she is not. In that case, there is no event to determine the relevant time interval. While there are many other proposals that could be considered, the sentences in 7(a)-(c) suggest that it will be difficult to give a systematic account of the time intervals that the present tense is supposed to make reference to. Though I agree with Tsompanidis that there are very many points that need to be settled about how language makes reference to time, I think that the problems the eternalist encounters with respect to agreement and disagreement give us a strong reason to prefer temporalism to eternalism.

Tsompanidis also addresses the argument for temporalism based on the phenomenology of visual experience. His main concerns lie with the second premise, viz. the premise that the phenomenology of perceptual experience does not seem to discriminate among different times. The first of Tsompanidis's reasons for not blindly accepting this premise is anchored in how we report on our visual experiences. Upon seeing a red car I might say:

(8) There is a red car in front of me.

However, as Tsompanidis correctly points out, it would hardly be inaccurate to use (9) as a report of my perceptual experience instead of (8):

(9) There is a red car in front of me right now.

'Now' makes reference to the time of speech, which we can stipulate is also the time of perception. But if (8) and (9) are equally adequate reports of the content of my visual experience, and (9) makes reference to a time, then it might be argued that there are times in the content of perception.

I think that this is a valid point about how we report experiences. However, I think there is reason to believe that (8) is a more adequate way to report the phenomenology of my experience than (9). The main reason to doubt that the phenomenology (and content) of visual experience involves times is that we can have phenomenally indistinguishable experiences across time. If I were to tie you up in front of a blue wall, ensuring that you could not move any part of your body except your eyes, the phenomenology of your visual experience would not change. Although time would pass, you would continue to have an experience with the same phenomenology. So, if the phenomenology of experience determines its content, you continue to have an experience with the same content. But if the phenomenology and content of your experience involved times, then you would not continue to have an experience with the same phenomenology and content. So, it seems that the phenomenology and content of your experience do not involve times. These types of considerations suggest that (8) is a more accurate report of the phenomenology of

the envisaged experience than (9).

I agree with Tsompanidis, of course, that we can perceive many temporal aspects of reality. For example, even if your visual experience doesn't change in the envisaged scenario, it is very likely that you perceive time as passing. We also perceive certain events as occurring before others, and we perceive everything as occurring in the present moment. I wholeheartedly embrace those facts about perceptual experience. My argument only rests on the idea that the phenomenology of visual experience *need not* change, even though time is passing. This suffices to establish the second premise of the argument.

Tsompanidis's second objection to the argument from visual experience is that experience and perceptual beliefs 'often do not seem to explicitly represent *locations* or precise *demonstrative information* either'. But at first glance, at least, it would seem odd to deny that this type of information is conveyed by our perceptual experiences and our perceptual beliefs. For example, if I experience a red object, the content of my experience seems accurately captured using a report like 'that is red'. The demonstrative 'that' refers directly to a concrete particular, which suggests that a concrete particular is a constituent of the content of my visual experience. Indeed, many theorists would argue that particulars (objects and their visually perceptible property instances) exhaust the phenomenology of visual experience. But the point I made about times seems equally applicable to the case of material objects: If the object I happen to be looking at had been replaced by an indistinguishable object, it would introspectively seem as if I had an experience with the very same phenomenology.

The point is well taken. However, unlike many others I doubt that external, material objects are constituents of the contents of our visual experiences. So, the feeling that visual experience makes direct reference to an external object is not indicative of any actual direct reference. In fact, I provide a generalized version of the book's argument elsewhere (Brogaard 2013b). This raises the question of how beliefs sometimes come to refer directly to times, locations and material objects. For example, if I experience something red, then how do I come to believe directly of a particular object that it is red? The quick answer is that I take perceptual contents to involve

self-locating constituents (i.e., constituents that have extensions only relative to centered worlds). Where /that/ is a self-locating constituent that refers to o (the object demonstrated), my visual experience that /that/ is red can be a cause and justifier of my belief of o that it is red.

Although I reject the view that visual experience makes direct reference to external objects, I want to emphasize that one could deny that the phenomenology of visual experience involves times yet nonetheless think that it is exhausted by material objects and their visually perceivable property instances. In my reply to Zeman I presented an argument for the view that the phenomenology of visual experience is not time-involving, on the assumption that naive realism is true: The naive realist holds that the phenomenology of visual experience is exhausted by the external object and the visually perceivable property instances of that object. Times are not normally among the perceivable features of a visual scene. So, the phenomenology of visual experience does not normally involve times. It is thus open to argue that the phenomenology of visual experience involves material bodies (and even locations) and yet deny that it involves times.

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