

Disputatio's Symposium on Berit Brogaard's *Transient Truths*
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Critiques: Giuliano Torrenco, Dan Zeman and Vasilis Tsompanidis

Précis

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Transient Truths is a part of a larger philosophical project that I have been interested in since I first started thinking about philosophical issues, viz. the reality of time and tense. One issue having to do with the reality of time and tense is metaphysical. Some hold that tense is a feature of language but not of propositions, mental content or the world. On this B-theoretical view, the present moment is so-called, not because it is special, but because we perceptually experience only present entities. Others think that tense can be a feature of all of these entities. If the world is tensed, then the present has a different ontological status than the past and the future. I fall into the latter camp of 'serious tensers'. In previous work I have defended presentism, a form of serious tensism that implies that only present entities exist (e.g. Brogaard 2013a).

The main goal of *Transient Truths*, however, was not to defend the view that the present moment is special but to provide a book-length defense of a particular theory of propositions known as 'temporalism'. To a first approximation, temporalism is the view that there are propositions that can change their truth-values across time. There is no straightforward argumentative route from this view to A-theoretical views about time and tense. In fact, as I argue in Chapter 7, there is some reason to think that a B-theorist cannot adequately express her views if she rejects the temporalist approach to language. Although temporalism does not imply that the A-theory is correct, I do think that the debate has potential metaphysical implications. (Semantic) eternalism, the opponent view to the effect that all propositions have their truth-values eternally, together with some widely held assumptions, appears to have B-theoretical implications. One argument may run as follows. Propositions that are eternally true are not tensed. For any true fact there is at least one corresponding true

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proposition that correctly represents the fact. As eternalism holds that there are no tensed propositions, the world cannot be tensed if eternalism is true. So, if the A-theory is true, then temporalism is true.

Temporalism is also of interest to me on grounds that are independent of metaphysics. I found the view intuitively appealing long before I started working on the book. But as I was exploring the literature I soon realized that where eternalism was widely held to be true by a long list of philosophers (e.g. Frege 1979; Stalnaker 1970; Lewis 1980; Richard 1981), temporalism was a minority position defended only by a few authors (Arthur Prior, David Kaplan, Peter Ludlow, among others). This was the ultimate factor motivating me to write a book-length defense of the position.

The argumentative strategy of the book is to provide a functional account of propositions and then show that temporal content can play the functional role. Propositions are standardly held to be the semantic values of truth-evaluable sentences, the object of propositional attitudes, the objects of agreement and disagreement, the contents that are passed on in successful communication, and the contents that intensional operators operate on. On the functional approach, entities that best satisfy these descriptions count as propositions. In the book I present a wide range of arguments for believing that temporal propositions can play this role and reply to a number of traditional arguments for thinking that they do not function in this way. Since temporalism does not say that all propositions are temporal, showing that temporal contents sometimes play the proposition role suffices to establish the truth of the doctrine.

Though there are authors who have argued that all propositions are temporal, I offer some reasons in Chapter 7 for thinking that this is not so. While temporal contents can, and often do, play the role of propositions, eternal contents can also play this role. So, on the view I defend, there are both eternal and temporal propositions. Eternal propositions are, for example, expressed by language that serves the purpose of describing metaphysical positions. For instance, we cannot confirm or deny the view that only present things exist or that only present events are happening without using language that expresses tenseless propositions. However, there is no reason to think that this type of language, even if true, is made true by tenseless facts

in the world. So, while I think that some form of the correspondence theory of truth is correct, I reject the traditional, structural correspondence theory, according to which true propositions completely mirror reality.

A word about the book's structure: After clarifying some conceptual issues in the book's first chapter I argue that temporal contents are the main objects of belief and other propositional attitudes in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I offer arguments for the view that temporal contents are the main objects of agreement and disagreement. The two subsequent chapters argue that the eternalism/temporalism debate is directly related to the debate about whether the tenses function as sentential 'index-shifting' operators, and I provide an outline of a operator theory of tense. In chapter 6 I argue against a version of eternalism that grants that tense operators operate on temporal contents but denies that temporal contents are propositions. I then consider the question of whether there are eternal propositions. In the final chapter I extend some of the considerations of the previous chapters to the case of perceptual experience.

Though a lot can be said in the course of a whole book, there is much more to be said about these issues than I was able to fit in. I am happy to have the opportunity here to engage with three bright thinkers in further debate about these issues. The points they bring up contribute in significant ways to the debate about eternalism and temporalism as well as the larger picture about the metaphysics of time.

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