

Fragments of Time (Abstract)

Fragmentalism is a relatively recent and striking addition to the debate between tensed and tenseless theories of time. First introduced by Fine (2005 and 2006) in “Tense and Reality”, it presents a rare instance of both a theoretically intriguing and novel theory of time. Taking its place squarely in the corner of tensed theories, the metaphysics of fragmentalism divides a world that is on the whole incurably incoherent into internally coherent fragments of tensed facts.

One of the professed strengths of orthodox tensed A-theoretic accounts, such as presentism, the moving spotlight theory, and the growing block view, is that they are able to account for the intuitive feeling that time really passes. B-theoretic tenseless accounts, on the other hand, are usually thought to accord better with the science of our world¹ and are typically paired with the much less intuitive view that the passage of time is an illusion². The main challenge facing the proponent of fragmentalism is to demonstrate that the theory offers a plausible description of reality. Providing a passable account of reality might seem like a basic requirement for any theory meant to depict our world. This task, though, is especially important for fragmentalism seeing as one of its core postulates is that reality is composed of incompatible facts. Since most of us would be quite hesitant to grant that reality is inherently conflicted or contradictory, the fragmentalist needs to do a bit of work to even get their view into the realm of credibility.

My aim is to consider if and in what sense fragmentalism can join its tensed compatriots in accounting for genuine temporal passage. There are three parts to my analysis of temporal passage in fragmentalism’s fragmented world. I begin by defending fragmentalism against claims that it presents a hopelessly muddled conception of reality. With a coherent conceptual picture of the basics of fragmentalism in place, I turn to the passage of time and argue that fragmentalism provides an ill-suited environment for the mind-independent passage of time. I conclude that, although fragmentalism is not necessarily in itself an incoherent view, it lacks the advantages of orthodox A-theoretic tensed accounts.

¹ See, for example, Callendar (2017), Dainton (2010), or Silberstein et al. (2018).

² For exceptions to this trend see Maudlin (2007) or Mozerky (2015). Defending the block universe, which incorporates the eternalist ontology of time, Maudlin believes that the passage of time is a real and irreducible part of the block. Along similar lines, Mozerky is a B-theorist who argues that the passage of time is a mind-independent phenomenon that is to be understood in terms of the earlier than relation and its relationship to change.

References

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