

On Times and Contents¹

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Abstract

This paper presents a theory of utterance content that deals with some of the key issues in the debate about the proper semantics of tense. Elaborating on some ideas from Korta & Perry (2011), we defend a proposal according to which utterances of temporally unspecific sentences have a systematic variety of contents, from utterance-bound to incremental or referential. This analysis will shed some light on the contribution of tense to what is said by an utterance and will allow us to defend an eternalist view, and, therefore to avoid temporal-relativism.

Keywords

Tense, utterances, utterance-bound content, referential content, temporalism, eternalism.

1. Introduction

Utterances of temporally unspecific sentences, such as "Obama is president" or "the girl is laughing" are typically taken to express one of two things: one temporally unspecific (*Obama is president*) or one

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temporally specific (*Obama is president at t*; *t* being interpreted either as the "time of utterance" –token reflexive account– or as a date, say, "April 15th, 2012" –date account). Based on the analysis of cases like this, some authors (e.g., Kaplan (1989), Prior (1967) and, more recently, Recanati (2007)) have defended the existence of temporally neutral propositional contents. Others (e.g., Richard (2003)) have argued against their existence or, rather, against the possibility of their being either the content of speech acts and propositional attitudes (such as assertion and belief) or appropriate truth-bearers. Evidence in support of this second line of thought is supposedly given by the impossibility of explaining diachronic agreement and disagreement on the basis of temporally neutral propositional contents. Evidence in favor of the first is allegedly given by the need to account for the different roles played by utterances of temporally unspecific sentences.

Our aim is to present a theory of utterance content that is basically neutral with respect to the sides taken by the two extremes in the debate about the proper semantics of tense and, at the same time, to offer a natural account of the facts brought to the fore by both parties. Elaborating on some ideas from Korta & Perry (2011), we defend a proposal according to which utterances of temporally unspecific sentences have a systematic variety of contents from reflexive or utterance-bound contents to incremental or referential contents. Building on this, we present some of the main features of these contents and claim that they are all we need to account for the role of tense in communication.

This analysis has, we believe, two main advantages. On the one hand, it will shed light on the contribution of tense to what is said by an utterance, keeping both the metaphysic and semantic commitments of tense (tense markers, tense features, etc.) to a minimum. On the other hand, it will prove to be a very convenient position, not only in that it keeps a desired neutrality concerning the debates between eternalists² and temporalists, but also in that it is capable of accommodating the "best from each camp" without any further ontological burden.

² Eternalism, as we use it in this paper, is a view concerning the semantic status of tense. We are not going to talk about eternalism in the metaphysics of time; i.e. the view according to which past and future times (and events) are just as real as present ones.

Our proposal does not add any additional “ontological weight” to the philosophy of time (broadly conceived), and this, in an already metaphysically loaded area, can be considered as a clear advantage. Our basic idea in this paper is to preserve the metaphysical B-theory intact, that is, the idea that in reality there are only B-facts (tenseless facts), while accommodating the indispensability of tensed linguistic expressions and tensed thoughts. That is, to account for what makes tensed utterances and thoughts true (or false) in terms of tenseless facts (i.e. facts devoid of any irreducible tensed features) and, at the same time, to explain the need for tensed utterances and thoughts in order to account for timely action.

After presenting the problems to be discussed, we will start by introducing the framework of our proposal (essentially, the framework of Critical Pragmatics, as it has been developed by Korta and Perry (2011)). We will also introduce some new terminology, in particular, the distinction among three types of utterances: bare, indexical and dated utterances. In section 4, we will present a short introduction to eternalism and temporalism and in sections 5 and 6 we will show how our view is, not only able to overcome the limitations of these two views, but also to offer a clearer explanation of the cognitive significance of tense and of diachronic disagreements. Finally, in section 7, we will confront Prior’s argument, developed in his famous article “Thank goodness that’s over”. We will sketch a solution to it, a solution that does not require introducing tenses into our ontology.

2. A dog is barking

Suppose that on Wednesday November 7, 2012, at 8 a.m. Paula hears her dog Gretchen barking and tells her partner, Peter,

1. Gretchen is barking.

As uttered at that particular moment, arguably, her message could have been equally conveyed by the following utterance,

2. Gretchen is barking at 8 a.m. on Wednesday November 7, 2012.

After all, as uttered at t , the truth-conditions of (1) and (2) are the same,

(1) and (2) are true, at t , iff GRETCHEN BE BARKING AT 8 A.M. WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2012.³

However, it can hardly be disputed that there is a difference between (1) and (2), a difference that would explain why Paula, in certain contexts, would reasonably use (1) to convey a certain message to Peter and, in other contexts, would opt for (2).

Take, for instance, Gretchen, a very well trained dog, who barks only when she wants to get out of the house. Suppose that on Wednesday November 7, 2012, at 8 a.m. Paula hears Gretchen barking and, being comfortably warm in bed, wants her partner to wake up and take the dog out. In that situation, utterance (1) would be the best candidate to fulfill her intentions. In order for Paula to achieve her goal, it is clearly unnecessary, in that situation, to articulate the time and/or date of Gretchen's barking. It is easy to see why. Paula doesn't need her partner to know the time of the barking to wake up and let the dog out, she just needs him to notice that the dog is barking *at the time of the utterance*, because it is *right then* when she wants him to go out -at the precise moment she is talking and Gretchen is barking.

But there is another, perhaps more important reason why Paula should, and normally does, choose (1) over (2) in situations like the one described. Specifying the time of the barking would be not only unnecessary, but also counterproductive for her. To begin with, Peter might not know what date or time it is (something quite common when one is sleeping and is woken up), so upon hearing (2) he might just nod and keep sleeping; perhaps wondering why his partner is waking him up to give him such useless information. Actually, even if he knows the date and the exact time, he would not be able to grasp Paula's intentions upon hearing (2). At least not immediately. He would probably question her about her mentioning the date

³ We use small capitals to distinguish propositions (i.e., truth-conditions or contents) from utterances of natural language sentences. That is also the reason why we write "be" instead of "is", to stress the tense neutrality of the proposition, even though the present is usually considered to be a neutral tense itself. For simplicity's sake, we will omit all references to worlds and locations in our statements of truth-conditions.

and time. And being questioned, at 8 a.m. and with a dog barking, is most probably not among Paula's aims.

Paula knows all this; what she wants Peter to grasp is not the date and time of Gretchen's barking, but the *presentness* of it. The fact that Gretchen *is* barking *now*. Also, and precisely because of this, she wants him to grasp the message as quickly as possible: it is *now* when she wants him to wake up to let the dog out. Hence she uses utterance (1), the best and quickest way to communicate her intentions to her partner and thus, or so she hopes, to achieve her goals.⁴

On the other hand, an utterance like (2) seems perfectly justified in other contexts. Suppose that, as times goes by, Gretchen develops some behavioral issues, and has now the annoying habit of barking constantly and for no apparent reason. Suppose further that she is under psychological treatment in order to control her "barking disorders", and that as part of her treatment her owners have to make a "barking-diary", writing down all the times in which she barks. In this context, Paula, upon hearing Gretchen barking, would wake Peter up not to let the dog out, but to write down in the diary the date and exact time of the dog's barking. So it seems completely reasonable to make explicit mention of the time and date of the barking in her utterance in order to achieve her goals. In other words, her communicative intention is Peter's grasping of the time and date and so it seems only reasonable to make them explicit in her utterance. (2) would be the best option for Paula.

None of this, of course, is particularly surprising. This is just another example of the traditional problem of determining what is said by an utterance. Another example, also, of the different roles that two utterances with, seemingly, the same truth-conditions can play in communication (Perry (1979)). What is more, the reasons why Paula utters (1) or (2) in the described situations are pretty obvious. We all constantly go through similar situations and we all generally choose the right utterances

⁴ Of course, she could also have said "Gretchen is barking now". We will briefly discuss this possibility, the role and implications of adding a temporal indexical, further on (see sections 3 and 5) but developing a proper analysis of it is out of the scope of this paper. (We address this issue in Korta and Ponte (forthcoming)). Thus, for the most part, we will leave this issue aside. For an account of "now" within the framework used here, see Perry (2003).

to achieve our communicative goals (at least most of us and most of the time; admittedly, things might get a bit trickier in real life). Still, explaining the differences between (1) and (2) turns out not to be a simple task. At least not if we want to keep the -apparently obvious- claim that they both have the same truth-conditions.

One way to start is by considering our intuitions regarding what is said by the utterances. When confronting (1) and (2), it seems we can differentiate two seemingly incompatible intuitions. On the one hand, we are inclined to say that, uttering one or the other in the imagined circumstances, Paula would say the same thing (or express the same proposition or her utterances would have the same content), namely, that Gretchen is barking at the moment of the utterance (8 a.m. on Wednesday November 7, 2012). On the other hand, we are inclined to say that the utterances differ in that they play different cognitive roles; they are used (in different contexts) following different intentions by the speakers (they are different in cognitive motivation) and eliciting different reactions from the hearer (they are different in cognitive impact).

Two philosophical theories about semantic content have been traditionally confronted on this issue: eternalism and temporalism (Richard (1981)). Each explains one of the intuitions, but none is capable of accommodating both. In order to avoid this, many intermediate positions have been proposed, most of them accepting a certain level of relativization (Recanati (2007), Salmon (2003)). We do not believe relativization is necessary. We claim that by modifying some basic assumptions about the nature and content of utterances, the apparent conflict dissolves and we can explain the difference in cognitive significance between utterances like (1) and (2) while at the same time keeping the main idea behind eternalism: the stable nature of utterance-truth (i.e. respecting the fact that both utterances, in some -fully truth-conditional- sense, say the same thing). But, before going into the details of our proposal, let's begin by clarifying the terms of the debate, and our position with regard to some basic issues concerning tense and time.

3. The present, utterances and tense

The problems that arise from trying to equate (1) and (2) are well discussed in the literature and the solutions proposed are numerous and multifarious. Even so, or perhaps because of this, some common misunderstandings remain, misunderstandings that often blur our grasp of otherwise simple notions. It is worth clarifying some basic notions and our position regarding them. One common source of confusion is with the very notion of tense (and hence, with the idea of "de-tensing"). Tense might designate both a linguistic or mental phenomenon and a metaphysical one. On the first sense, tense designates those linguistic expressions, or mental states, that are sensitive to the time of their occurrence. These include temporal indexicals, temporal operators, verbal tenses, etc., and their mental counterparts. On the second sense, tense designates features of reality, that is, the fact, or alleged fact, that, for instance, a certain event is future or past. The philosophical discussions in both areas are closely related but significantly different. The debate in the philosophy of language on tense has focused on whether or not tensed expressions can be reduced to tenseless ones, whereas, traditionally, discussions on the metaphysics of time address the issue of whether the world is tensed or tenseless.

It doesn't take much to realize that conclusions in the philosophy of language will potentially have consequences in the metaphysics of time (and, although perhaps more problematically, the other way round). However, the two debates are not strictly parallel. The claim that there are tensed facts is a highly controversial one. After McTaggart's "The unreality of time" (1908), those in favor of it are known as A-theorists and those against as B-theorists. But this metaphysical discussion can be safely ignored when analyzing language. The existence of tensed expressions and tensed thoughts and the impossibility of reducing them to tenseless ones, that is, to eliminate them from our discourse, is pretty much accepted by all. Even those who want to claim that there are no tensed facts have accepted the evidence in favor of tensed expressions.

All this was brought about by work in the semantics of indexical expressions. Arguments by Prior (1967), Castañeda (1968), Perry (1979) and others have shown that certain thoughts are essentially tensed and, thus, cannot be adequately characterized in tenseless terms. Of course that

does not entail that there must be (irreducible) tensed facts, but rather, that some kind of explanation of the role of tensed talk and tensed thought is in order.

In other words, the original project of reducing all tensed or A-expressions (both linguistic expressions and thoughts) to tenseless or B-expressions, eliminating tense completely from language and thought, has been replaced by the so-called "new B-theory", according to which there are tensed linguistic expressions and thoughts, but not tensed facts. The "new B-theorists" avoid ontological commitments to tense, not by attempting to translate - without any loss of meaning- all tensed sentences into tenseless ones, as the "old B-theorists" claimed could be done; rather, they aim at giving a tenseless or token-reflexive analysis of the truth-conditions of tensed sentences. Defenders of the "old B-theory" include Reichenbach (1947) and Russell (1938). Defenders of the "new B-theory" include Mellor (1981) and Oaklander (1991).

Our proposal could be considered a modified version of the "new B-theory". And this is part of our aim here. We will be concerned with utterances like (1) and (2). Their interest, at least for our purposes, lies in the fact that (2) is what has been called a de-tensing of (1), i.e. an utterance that expresses the same proposition as (1) but does so via a "tenseless-sentence". Consider another utterance Paula could have also chosen in the first of the situations described:

3. Gretchen is barking now

(3) has the same truth-conditions as (1) and (2) but, again, it could hardly be disputed that it carries a different cognitive import, if compared with (2). The comparison with (1) is more controversial. The role of "now" in utterances such as (3) is problematic, as it is the present tense, which has sometimes been considered as a "zero-time". Tense is mandatory in most languages, it certainly is in English, and so there is a sense in which the present can be considered a "neutral" tense or, rather, not a tense at all. Hence the claim often made, and mentioned above, that the sentence in (2) is tenseless. The role of "now", in cases like (3) could perhaps be seen as

redundant or, at most, as a tool to emphasize the "presentness" of the event.⁵

However this may be, it is important to distinguish the different kinds of utterances we will be considering, with respect to the way they refer to time. We call them,

- a. *Bare* utterances, in which the only reference to time is done via verbal inflection (e.g. (1))
- b. *Indexical* utterances, which include a temporal indexical like 'now', 'tomorrow' or 'yesterday' (e.g. (3))
- c. *Dated* utterances, which include explicit dates or times (e.g. (2)).

Now, we shall argue that all these three types of utterances express a tenseless proposition. More precisely, that the 'official' content⁶ of all of them is a proposition that does not include tense (or any indexical element). Moments of time thus are reduced to tenseless locations on a B-series.

The difference between our proposal and the "old B-theorists" and the "new B-theorists", is our adoption of an account that makes room for a variety of contents or truth-conditions. This is also the difference between our proposal and traditional eternalism. And this is what is needed, we believe, to overcome the much criticized limitation of B-theorists and eternalists alike: their inability to account for the cognitive significance of tense.

Notice, however, that bare utterances, indexical utterances and dated utterances have, in our account, tenseless official truth-conditions. That distinguishes us from A-theorists and temporalists. It allows us to avoid relativization, to give a simple explanation of diachronic disagreements and to keep a healthy metaphysical minimalism.

⁵ See section 5 for a short discussion of our view on the present and on the idea of *presentness*. See also Korta and Ponte (forthcoming).

⁶ Following Perry (2001), by 'official content' we refer to the 'referential content' or the incremental content that typically corresponds to philosophers' traditional notion of *what is said* or *the proposition expressed* by the utterance.

Now, at least three different questions arise when considering these utterances,

1. How is it that what is said by someone who utters a bare utterance (say, (1)), differs so radically from what is said by a dated utterance (say, (2)), if both utterances have the same truth-conditions?⁷
2. Why does the cognitive role differ so much from a bare (or indexical) utterance to a dated utterance and how can we account for this?
3. Finally, is it possible to maintain that what it is said by these two utterances is the same without jeopardizing the differences in cognitive role? In other words, can we have our cake and eat it too?

We believe we can indeed have it all, and the theoretical apparatus for it is already contained in the treatment of utterances containing indexicals given by Critical Pragmatics (CP from now on) (Korta and Perry (2006), (2007), (2011), (2013)).

Generally speaking, traditional approaches to the issue of tensed utterances share a common element, mono-propositionalism, according to which each utterance is associated with a single proposition (setting presuppositions and implicatures aside). This content is said to fulfill a number of roles; it is taken to be the bearer of truth-value and cognitive significance and also 'what is said' by the utterance.

It is one of the tenets of CP that every utterance is always associated with a variety of contents that derive from a combination of elements: the circumstances of the utterance (time, in this case) being one of them, but also the intentions and beliefs of the speaker and the conventions (sentence meaning) exploited.

Thus, each utterance has a variety of contents. The reflexive or utterance-bound content, which is determined by the meaning of the uttered sentence and the fact the utterance has been produced, is one of them. This is the minimal content that any hearer would grasp with no other information than the fact that a particular utterance have

⁷ A related question, which we will discuss but only briefly, is, about the metaphysical consequences of this. Does this difference imply that there is a "real" difference; that is, that tenses really exist?

occurred and a knowledge of the language of the utterance, the syntax of the sentence used and the meaning of its words.

Building from this, there are various 'intermediate' contents, each including a further element and thus requiring the hearer to have a certain further piece of knowledge to grasp them. On the other side of the spectrum, so to speak, we find the referential content. This is basically the proposition expressed by the utterance, what is said, the content we get once we have made explicit all the relevant information from the context.

4. Eternalism vs. temporalism

The debate between eternalism and temporalism is, roughly, an instance of the classical debate about what is said by an utterance and, initially at least, it seems related to the position one adopts about the bearer of truth-conditions and true-values. Following the semantic tradition, one can assume that the bearers of truth-conditions and truth-values are sentences of natural language; that sentences express propositions or have contents. Of course, one would accept that for indexical sentences (that is, sentences containing pure indexicals like 'I', 'here', 'now', demonstratives like 'he', 'she', 'it', 'this' or 'that') the truth-value of the sentence is relative to a context, which is taken as a tuple of speaker, time, space and world. And, thus, including tense morphemes among the indexical expressions would be a natural follow-up (Bar-Hillel (1954)).

For a traditional semanticist, then, a (bare) sentence like "it is sunny" would change its truth-value from context to context, both through time and as applied to different locations. That is, it might be true at 8 a.m. but not at 9 a.m. on a given day and at a given location. The sentence says the same thing (it expresses the same proposition), but its truth-value changes through time.

The traditional semantic view that takes sentences as bearers of contents, truth-conditions and truth-values leads naturally to the temporalist view of tensed utterances like (1). The truth-value of the proposition

expressed by (1) is context-relative; relative to the time in the context of utterance.⁸

Now, if one adopts a pragmatic stand and takes the utterance as the bearer of content or truth-conditions, and the speaker as the agent who says things and expresses propositions, the intuitions might be different. Consider two distinct bare utterances of the same sentence uttered by Paula at different times:

4. It is sunny (uttered at 8 a.m.)

5. It is sunny (uttered at 9 a.m.)

Does Paula *say the same thing* twice? Again, we face two intuitions here. On the one hand, we might be tempted to say that Paula does indeed *say the same thing*, i.e. that it is sunny. And that the utterance is true whenever it is sunny and false otherwise.⁹ On the other hand, when talking about utterances, we want to claim that an utterance in order to say something at all, must say something involving a moment of time *t*. Eternalism gives us precisely this. According to eternalism, every proposition, for the sake of being so, is 'eternal', that is, it has, in any possible world, a fixed truth-value that does not change. A proposition is true or false, and never ceases to be so. Time is considered as part of the content expressed and thus eternalists would claim that (4) and (5) expressed two different propositions, that is, they do not say the same thing.

Going back to our original example, we find that a similar conclusion is reached. Both utterances took place at the same time, the difference was that in (2) time was explicitly articulated in the sentence, whereas in (1) it was not. In our terms, (1) was a bare utterance and (2) a dated one. Here again, defenders of eternalism claim not only that (1), at that particular time, has the same truth-value as (2), but also that they both express the same proposition, namely: GRETCHEN IS BARKING AT 8 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 7, 2012.

⁸ Needless to say, even if the traditional semantic view can be seen to naturally lead to temporalism, there is no necessary connection between these two positions, as is clearly shown by Frege's case: the founder of semantics was a clear eternalist.

⁹For simplicity's sake, we will omit all references to worlds and locations in our statements of truth conditions, as well as considerations of differences in time zones.

Regardless of whether the moment of time is explicitly articulated in the sentence uttered or not, eternalists claim that it is part of the content of the utterance. Without it, we cannot assign any truth-value and so, they claim, we do not have a proposition. This is a central element of the very nature of what a proposition is supposed to be, according to eternalists. Following Frege (1918), for instance, the idea of a proposition that is true at some times and not others is incoherent. Temporal propositions (thoughts) are incomplete under this view.

Now is a thought changeable or is it timeless? The thought we express by the Pythagorean theorem is surely timeless, eternal, unchangeable. But are there not thoughts which are true today but false in six months time? The thought, for example, that the tree there is covered with green leaves, will surely be false in six months time. No, for it is not the same thought at all. The words 'this tree is covered with green leaves' are not sufficient by themselves for the utterance, the time of utterance is involved as well. Without the time-indication this gives we have no complete thought, *i.e.* no thought at all. Only a sentence supplemented by a time-indication and complete in every respect expresses a thought. But this, if it is true, is true not only today or tomorrow but timelessly. (Frege 1918: 309)

Applying this to our example, one conclusion we might reach is that, even if Paula decided not to articulate the time, her utterance's truth-conditions include it.

Temporalists of course agree with eternalists that (2), relative to any time, expresses an eternal proposition. But they claim that (1) does not. (1), they claim, expresses a proposition ("THAT GRETCHEN IS BARKING") that might change its truth-value over time: it might for instance be true on the 7th of November of 2012 at 8 a.m., but not on the 24th of November of 2012 at 8 a.m. The idea is that, in utterances of sentences where time is not articulated, *i.e.* bare utterances, time is not part of the content. So, in utterances like (1), (4) or (5), where the utterance time is not explicitly articulated, time is not part of the proposition expressed, but rather part of the circumstances of evaluation.

Temporalism, in its traditional forms, shares with eternalism the mono-propositional assumption. Recently, however, there have been various attempts to reject or, at least, qualify this assumption.

Of particular interest for our present purposes is Recanati's (2007) rejection of mono-propositionalism and his claim that at least one of the various propositions expressed by an utterance is a temporal proposition. Recanati's position is a modified ("moderate", as he labels it) form of temporalism (for a discussion see also Korta (2008) and Ponte & Vazquez (2012)). Our view, in contrast, rejects the idea of temporal propositions. Or better, it shows they are not needed to account for the roles that tensed expressions and tensed thoughts play in our life.

5. Cognitive significance

Consider the following example. At 4 p.m. Matteo is at Donostia train station and he utters either of these utterances (but not both).

6. The train is leaving.

7. The train is leaving at 4 p.m.

According to eternalism, what is said by these two utterances would be the same and thus their truth-conditions would coincide,

(6) and (7) would be true, at t , iff THE TRAIN BE LEAVING AT T 4 P.M.

But it seems clear that there is a difference between (6) and (7). Imagine that Inku is leaving on that train to Barcelona, but she lost her watch and doesn't know that it is indeed 4 p.m. at the moment of Matteo's utterance. Then (7) would not alter her actions, that is, it would not make her stand up and run to catch the train.

However, upon hearing "the train is leaving", she (assuming she has enough trust in Matteo's assessments) would stand up and walk towards the train. There is *something* missing in (7), something essential for Matteo to attain his communicative goal: to ensure that Inku realizes her train is leaving at the moment of their conversation and that she should get moving if she wants to get the train. This *something* is the *presentness*¹⁰ of

¹⁰ By presentness, here, we mean only that the time of the event in question coincides with the time of the utterance. We don't mean to

the event, the fact that the train is leaving *now* or, in perhaps less "controversial" but somehow less "natural" terms, that the leaving of the train is contemporaneous with the speaker talking, i.e. that both events are happening at the same moment of time. But this is not captured by (7) or in the eternalist interpretation of what is said by (6). Eternalism, as we have presented it here, cannot account for this. Remember that even in cases like (6), where the moment of time is not articulated, it is part of the content expressed by the utterance.

The *presentness* element is contained in the verb tense (present), which both utterances have. But whereas in (6), being a bare utterance, the only "time-related" element explicitly included in the utterance is the tense inflection, in (7) the time of the event is also articulated. (7) is what we have called a dated utterance. By fixing the tense to a moment, it eliminates somehow the *presentness* element because it reduces it to being co-temporal with that specific and fixed moment of time. So, even though we still have the verb tense, it ends up tied to the time: 4 p.m.

Take a case in which a temporal indexical features in the first utterance, that is, suppose Matteo utters,

8. The train is leaving now

This is what we have called an indexical utterance. Once again, the role of "now" is controversial and we won't get into the details here. But it seems clear that, in this example, its function is to emphasize the *presentness* of the event, the fact that the train is leaving at precisely the time of the utterance or, perhaps, within a short interval of time which includes the time of utterance and a few other times. And this "mark of the *presentness*", once again, disappears both in (7) and in the eternalist conception of the content of both (6) and (8). In the eternalist reading, "now" is substituted, not by "the time of the utterance" or "a more or less short interval which includes the time of utterance", but rather by the moment of time -4 p.m.- in the proposition expressed.

imply there is any extra element, an A element, to the "present" apart from coinciding with the time of utterance.

Hence, and leaving aside the role of "now", if both (6) and (7) have the same content, how can Inku -assuming she understands perfectly both utterances- react differently to them?

Temporalism, of course, has no difficulties here because, its defenders claim, (6) and (7) do indeed say different things, they express two different propositions (both true at 4 p.m.):

6* THE TRAIN IS LEAVING.

7* THE TRAIN IS LEAVING AT 4 P.M.

Hence, Inku upon hearing (6) would only grasp (6)* and upon hearing (7), (7)*. In other words, Matteo says two different things, expresses two different propositions with (6) and (7).

Our proposal has no difficulties here either. The basic underlying idea is to claim that articulating or making explicit the temporal (non-indexical) element in (7) does not affect the referential content of the utterance, but it affects the reflexive or utterance-bound contents. Again, the choice between (6) or (7) depends on the intentions of the speaker, on what content he wants to make sure the hearer grasps and, finally, on the actions he wants to elicit in the hearer. In a situation like the one described, Matteo is not interested in pointing out to Inku the departure time of the train. Rather he wants her to know that it is leaving *now* (and thus that she should run to catch it). Making the time non-indexically explicit is unnecessary and, again, potentially confusing.

Applying the ideas of CP, we see that although (6) and (7) both have the same referential content, that is

6/7r. **THE TRAIN BE LEAVING AT 4 P.M.**¹¹

the utterances differ in their utterance-bound truth-conditions; that is the truth-conditions determined by the facts that fix the language of the utterance, the words involved, their syntax and their meaning. Accordingly, upon hearing (6) such hearer would grasp:

¹¹ Following Perry (2001), we use roman boldface to mark that it is the referent, and not any of its identifying conditions, which is the constituent of the content. Thus, 6/7r is a singular proposition about a particular train and a particular time, no matter how we refer to them.

6x. **THE TRAIN BE LEAVING AT THE TIME OF (6)**¹²

Whereas, upon hearing (7) he would grasp

7x. **THE TRAIN BE LEAVING AT 4 P.M.**

The utterance-bound contents of (6) and (7) differ because the sentences used, and their meanings, differ. In (7) the time and date are explicitly articulated in the sentence expressed and, thus, any competent hearer would grasp them, even if he didn't have any further knowledge about the context of utterance or the speaker and her intentions.

In terms of its truth-value, if Matteo had chosen (7), he would have done nothing wrong, in the sense that he would not have said anything false. The proposition expressed by (6) and (7) is true (both have the same referential content). We thus agree with eternalist's claim that Matteo would have *said* the same thing with (6) and (7).

(6x) and (7x) do not constitute what is said by Matteo, or what philosophers usually call the 'proposition expressed'. (6x) and (7x) both contain an identifying description of the time referred to by Matteo, but he is saying something about a particular time, not about any identifying condition of it, like being the time of the utterance or being such-and-such date and time. (6x) and (7x) represent contents of the utterances, made available by the speaker in those contexts, that will guide the hearer in understanding the utterance's referential contents and her communicative aims. The referential content of (6) is something like:

6r/7r. **THE TRAIN BE LEAVING 4 P.M.,**

Both utterances would be true only when a certain train is leaving at a particular time.¹³

With (6x), Inku's route to the referential content of (6) is pretty straightforward: the time of (6) is just

¹² Following Perry (2001) again, with italic boldface, we indicate that it is the identifying condition that enters into the truth-conditions and not the object it designates. So, (6x) is a singular proposition with the utterance itself (6) as a constituent, but a general proposition with regard to the time of the utterance.

¹³ Remember that roman boldface indicates that it is the referent and not any of its identifying descriptions which enters into the truth-conditions of the utterance.

now, so *the train* is leaving just now. In contrast, the utterance-bound (or, strictly speaking, the *date-bound*) content of (7) offers no such straightforward way.¹⁴ What is lost here is the *presentness* component, the fact that the train is leaving *at the time of the utterance*.

Of course, the fact that Inku grasps (6x) is independent of her knowing the particular time of the utterance (4 p.m.), that is, of her capacity to grasp (6r). Even if she knows that it is 4 p.m. at the time of utterance, she would understand the *presentness* element expressed by verb tense. But the same cannot be said with (7), at least not with the present tense. As we said, in this case, the *presentness* element disappears once it gets tied to a date or a fixed moment of time. This is why Matteo would opt for a bare utterance like (6). Producing a dated utterance like (7) would not only be unnecessary, it would be a bad way to attain his goals.

Notice that someone like Prior would say that fixing the happening of the event to a B-element such as a time/date eliminates the "tense" aspect of it: the present/past or future (actually Prior did not believe the present was a "real" tense, but we can safely ignore this here). We do not want to claim this. This leads to temporalism. What we want to claim is that the utterance-bound contents of a bare utterance and a dated utterance are different, and it is *there* where the difference in cognitive significance lies. Also, they are different because in the dated utterance we lose the *presentness* element, which could be stated as: "the event is happening at the same time as the utterance, whenever this might be". In our example, the *presentness* of (6) is enough to elicit a change in Inku's actions; no further information from the context is needed for her to react. In particular, she (or Matteo) didn't need to know *when* the utterance was actually taking place; it was enough for them to know that both events, the utterance and the train leaving, were simultaneous.

6. Diachronic disagreements

¹⁴ We take dates and clock times to be (systematic) descriptions we use to refer to days and times. (7x) includes such a description not the time itself. See Perry (2013).

It has been argued that, regardless of the clear differences between bare and dated utterances, and also, regardless of the difficulties in explaining the role of temporal indexicals within a traditional eternalist framework, there is at least one clear reason to defend this traditional framework against all attempts to relativize it. That is, against the idea of there being temporally neutral propositions. The reason is, briefly, the alleged inability of temporalism to account for belief ascriptions in time and thus for diachronic disagreements.

The argument has been forcefully defended by Mark Richard (1981), (2003) and discussed, among others, by Higginbotham (1995), (2003). We will not get into the details and, particularly, we will not stop to discuss the details of a possible temporalist answer to it. But we do believe eternalism is better positioned to give an explanation of this phenomenon and we will briefly expose the reasons why. Also, we want to claim that our pluralist version of eternalism is able to give us the simplest and most straightforward explanation.

Consider Richard's claim:

The evidence against temporally neuter objects is simply that diachronic agreement or disagreement seems to be, of necessity, a matter of agreement or disagreement about something temporally specific (Richard, 2003: 40)

To see why this is so, imagine that on Saturday noon, Larraitz is on the phone with Joana and tells her,

9. John is happily swimming on the beach

Now suppose that on Monday morning, John thinks the weather is too good to be working and decides to go swimming again at the beach. Meanwhile, Larraitz and Joana are attending a boring talk and feeling envious of John's decision. Somehow, probably because they are bored and feeling bitter, they start arguing about the conversation they had over the phone on Saturday, about whether John went swimming also on Saturday or was rather, say, working at home. Joana, at some point, says something like,

10. I think what you said on Saturday (about John) was wrong.

Larraitz, of course, answers back, insisting that what she said was absolutely true. She will predictably get a bit upset with Joana's predicament and will tell her how wrong it is of her not to believe her. She will insist on the truth of her Saturday's utterance and attempt to give proofs of it (say, phoning John and asking him or searching for witnesses).

Now, of course, in order for all of this to make any sense, a few basic requirements need to be set. Joana and Larraitz must be talking about the "same thing". They must be talking about the same person (John) being or not being happily swimming at a particular date and time. Or, to put it differently, what Joana does not believe and the content of their disagreement has to be something "specific", that is, they need to be disagreeing about whether it is true, or false, that John was happily swimming on the beach *on Saturday at noon*.

It wouldn't make sense to claim that they are disagreeing about "John is happily swimming", even though this is the sentence expressed by Larraitz on Saturday. It wouldn't make sense, because, among other things, Joana knows that John *is* happily swimming when she is talking with Larraitz. What she doesn't believe is, obviously, that John *was* happily swimming on Saturday at midday.

However, this non-sensical claim is precisely the conclusion we reach if we accept temporalism. Or so Richard claims. Temporalists claim, as we said, that time is not to be considered as part of the content of the utterance but rather as part of the circumstances of evaluation. Thus, according to temporalism, "what Larraitz said" on Saturday at midday was, merely

9* THAT JOHN BE HAPPILY SWIMMING ON THE BEACH

And, since both Larraitz and Joana know at the moment of the argument (Monday) that it is true that John is happily swimming on the beach, they cannot be (rightly) disagreeing about this. It seems clear that we need to add the temporal specification to "what is said"; and this is what eternalists do. According to them, what Larraitz said by (9) is equivalent to

9** THAT JOHN BE HAPPILY SWIMMING ON THE BEACH AT NOON, SATURDAY
JULY 16TH

Our proposal finds no problems here for, once again, what is said by an utterance like (9) is, precisely (9)**. And, as in the previous example, the intuitive difference that exists between temporally specific utterances like

11. John is happily swimming on the beach at noon, Saturday July 16th

and temporally unspecific utterances like (9) is registered in the utterance-bound content of (9),

9x. THAT **JOHN** BE HAPPILY SWIMMING ON THE BEACH **AT THE TIME OF (9)**

Any hearer with no information other than the meaning of the words and the syntactic rules of English would grasp (9x) upon hearing Larraitz talking with Joana on the phone. But disagreements, to be *genuine*, need to be about more than just this. That is, in order for two persons to disagree, they must have some further knowledge, besides just the sentence uttered. Unless, of course, they are disagreeing about when or where or who uttered a particular sentence. But this is not the case. Joana is clearly objecting to the idea of John being swimming on Saturday, and in order for her to disagree about this with Larraitz, she needs to have some access, however limited, to the elements of the context. She cannot object to the idea of John ever being swimming, because she knows that he is swimming at the moment she is arguing with Larraitz.¹⁵

In order to grasp what she said thus, the hearer needs to have access to some further information about the context, that is, the time of the utterance (midday, Saturday July 16th). Equally, Joana would need to have this further information in order to be able to disagree with Larraitz, or to claim that she does not believe what Larraitz said (on Saturday). That is, disagreement requires the time to be specified in the content.

Notice that our proposal has a further advantage, not only with respect to temporalism, in that it respects eternalist intuitions, but also with respect to eternalism itself (classically conceived). Briefly put, our proposal imposes fewer requirements for disagreements to take place (and be coherent). In our view neither Joana nor Larraitz

¹⁵ Unless of course she is just trying to upset Larraitz or has decided, for some reason, to disagree with all of Larraitz's utterances, regardless of their contents.

are required to know the exact time of the event. They don't need to know that the discussion is about whether or not John was swimming on Saturday July 16th at midday. It is enough for them to know the utterance-bound content: whether or not he was swimming at the time of (9). So, once again, it is the admission of multiple contents that does the trick.

7. Thank goodness that's over

One possible objection to the view presented so far is that we've only used and discussed examples of utterances about the present. And the present is after all a "peculiar" tense, so much so indeed, that it is usually not even considered a tense at all. The present tense is something like the "zero-time", a primitive tense from which the others are to be explained. Thus Prior, for instance, included tense operators for the past and the future, but not for the present.¹⁶ And the traditional account for temporal indexicals and demonstratives would explain them all in relation to the present time (the present time being the time of the utterance, "now", or some interval including it, such as "today" or "this year"). Hence, "tomorrow" would be defined as "the day after today" and "yesterday" as "the day before today". That is, all tenses and all moments of time are explained in terms of the time of utterance, or, in other words, in terms of the 'now' (Corazza 2002).

This view takes the present tense as redundant, in the sense that the time of the utterance is always included in the content of the utterance. Prior was perhaps the first to defend a redundancy view of the present; he claimed for instance that,

The presentness of an event, we may say, is simply the occurrence of the event, and that is simply the event itself. But every complete tensed sentence characterises the time of utterance in some way or other, and other times only through their relation to that one. (Prior 1977: 30)

¹⁶ This peculiarity was also reflected in Prior's ontological views, for he claimed that the present is all there is; that neither the past nor the future exist.

Due to the particularities of the present tense, it could be thought that our proposal would be in trouble when confronting "real tenses" (i.e. past and future). Notice that our proposal explains the differences between bare and dated utterances (like (1) and (2), assuming - against Prior- that (1) is tensed) in terms of their utterance-bound or reflexive contents. And in the utterance-bound or reflexive contents tense is reduced to a token reflexive element. That is, we are reducing bare utterances to tenseless contents. And doing so, we claim, is not an impediment to accounting for the differences in cognitive significance between bare tensed and dated tensed utterances; rather, it is through the consideration of the utterance-bound content that we can account for it.

Now the question arises, can we do this also for past or future utterances? In other words, can we always take into account the cognitive role of these "real" tenses via the utterance-bound contents, i.e. via a reduction to token reflexives? Prior believed we cannot. He claimed that tensed expressions, and tensed facts for that matter, are irreducible to tenseless ones. This point was famously made in his paper "Thank goodness that's over",

One says, e.g. "Thank goodness that's over!", and... says something which it is impossible that any use of a tenseless copula with a date should convey. It certainly doesn't mean the same as, e.g. "Thank goodness the date of the conclusion of that thing is Friday, June 15, 1954", even if it be said then. (Nor, for that matter, does it mean "Thank goodness the conclusion of that thing is contemporaneous with this utterance". Why would anyone thank goodness for that?). (Prior 1959: 17)

Notice that Prior introduced a criticism to the reduction of tenses to reflexive tokens. Prior's aim was to defend the non-reducibility of tense. Just as the cognitive import of present-tensed utterances seemed to be connected somehow with action, past bare utterances seem to be connected with feelings of regret or relief that past dated utterances, Prior claims, clearly don't have.

But doesn't our proposal just say that? Take Prior's example and imagine that Kepa says today, December 17, 2012,

12. Thank goodness my root canal is over.

Leaving aside for the moment what being thankful might be, and just assuming that it is a feeling of relief derived from the belief that the event is over, the utterance-bound content would be something like,

12x. THAT **THE SPEAKER OF (12) AT THE TIME OF (12)** BE RELIEVED THAT HIS ROOT CANAL CONCLUDED AT A TIME *T'* EARLIER THAN THE TIME OF (12) and the referential content,

12r. THAT **KEPA** BE RELIEVED BECAUSE HIS ROOT CANAL WAS OVER **BEFORE DECEMBER 17, 2012**

In this case, it is not as straightforward to see how the utterance-bound content can carry the cognitive significance of (12). After all, why should Kepa feel relieved that his root canal concluded at a time earlier than the time of utterance?

Prior, and others, concluded from this that tensed facts are irreducible. That is, that reality is composed of both tensed and tenseless facts, and that the former are not reducible to the latter.¹⁷ We believe this is not only unmotivated, but that it leads to an unnecessary, and certainly undesirable proliferation of facts.

In order to see why, it is worth discussing the analogy with other cases involving indexicals.¹⁸ Consider an example involving space indexicals. Imagine Paula is in Tenerife, but as she has been traveling a lot lately she doesn't really know where she is anymore and she wrongly believes she is in Lanzarote. Suppose Dacil tells her,

13. A volcano just exploded in Tenerife.

Again, as in the train example, utterance (13) would not elicit any particular course of action from Paula (apart from being concerned about her friends in

¹⁷ Actually, Prior held that tenseless facts were reducible to tensed ones. When it comes to metaphysics the problem is that claiming that there are only tenseless facts is equivalent to claiming that whatever temporal fact exists, it exists always (it has always existed, and will always exist). Thus, why should we be glad that an event lies at a moment earlier in time than *t*, if this has no import for its existence?

¹⁸ We do not want to attribute this view concerning spatial indexicals to Prior. Actually, we think he would reject it. We just want to point out that, taken as it was expressed by Prior in his article, and accepting some other facts about indexicals, we might end up having to accept something like this as well (see Sider (2001) for a similar claim).

Tenerife), for she believes she is in another island. However, if Dacil utters

14. A volcano just exploded here,

she would certainly react differently (perhaps she would go to the nearest airport to get out of the island or have a panic attack or simply look for shelter). Equally, her psychological attitude towards those utterances would clearly differ. Believing that she is in Lanzarote, she could answer

15. Thank goodness the volcano exploded in Tenerife,

but she certainly wouldn't utter

16. Thank goodness the volcano exploded here,

even though *here*, in the context of these utterances, is *Tenerife*, and thus (15) and (16) *say the same thing* and thus have the same (referential) truth conditions.

The two examples are not entirely analogous, but they both incorporate psychological attitudes involving indexical expressions such as "now" and "here" and it is this parallel that causes the problem for a proposal like Prior's. For if we follow Prior's reasoning and accept the need to postulate the existence of tensed facts in order to explain the impossibility of accounting for (12) by (12)x. and (12)r., it seems we would need to accept the existence of (irreducible) *here-ness* facts to account for the difference between (15) and (16). And that is certainly not an attractive view.¹⁹ Rather than postulating the existence of these bunches of perspectival, spatial and tensed facts, revising our psychological attitudes seems a better option (Perry (2007)).

After all, what the argument seems to require is the inclusion of some sort of *tensed thought*, or a way to account for the fact that the root canal be *past* to the (present) time of utterance and not only earlier to it. Or, rather, why an event occurring at the time of utterance and the same kind of event occurring at a moment earlier to the time of utterance elicit different attitudes in us. In order to get this, a couple of

¹⁹ We would also need to postulate the existence of *me-ness* facts (for cases involving the indexical "I", as in Perry (1979)), *you-ness* facts, *there-ness* facts, *tomorrow-ness* facts, etc. (Sider (2001))

elements need to be introduced. First, as a preliminary step, we need to have a Self-notion. On the one hand, it seems obvious that, in order for the speaker to feel relief that the root canal is over, she needs to be aware that the root canal was performed on *her*, that it was *her* root canal. On the other hand, and at an even more basic level, the self-notion is essential in order to get the idea of the PAST. In order to grasp the idea that the root canal is in *her* past, which is earlier in time than her *present* (than *now*). In other (perhaps more problematic) words, she needs to be aware that the time of utterance is her *now*, her *present*, and the time of the root canal is in her *past*.

But this awareness does not, as we said, entail substantial metaphysical weight. What is needed is a qualification at the cognitive level. That is, in order to explain why the speaker of (12) feels relief that his root canal is over, it is only required that he be aware of a basic cognitive difference: at the time of the utterance, his root canal is an event that he can only be aware of through memory and not through perception. The pain that (supposedly) accompanied his root canal can no longer be perceived by him, and for that he can understandably feel grateful. It is, for him at the time of utterance, *only* a memory, i.e. it lies in his *past*. Quoting Perry,

Things we are aware of through memory will be associated with our idea of being in the past; things we are perceiving will be associated with our idea of being present (Perry 2007: 519).

That seems to be all that is needed to explain the difference Prior mentions.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, let's go back to our original example. The basic idea is that the differences between a bare utterance like (1) and a dated utterance like (2) lie, not in the referential content, but rather in the utterance-bound content. Both utterances, (1) and (2), differ in their utterance-bound truth-conditions; that is, the truth-conditions determined by the words involved, their syntax and their meaning. Something like the following:

1x. THAT **GRETCHEN** BE BARKING *AT THE TIME OF (1)* .

2x. THAT **GRETCHEN** BE BARKING *AT 8 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2012* .

Their referential content is the same (as uttered at t= 8 a.m. on Wednesday November 7, 2012):

1/2 r. THAT **GRETCHEN** BE BARKING *AT 8 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 7, 2012* .

It is the level of utterance-bound content that gives us an account of the cognitive significance of the utterance. But it is the referential one that keeps the eternalist constraint, and, as we have also argued, what allows us to explain diachronic disagreements and respect the intuition that, uttered at t=8 a.m. on Wednesday, November 7, 2012, both (1) and (2) say the same thing.

In the last section we discussed Prior's example concerning feelings or attitudes about past events. It might be worth making a few remarks about the possible implications of our view. Very briefly, we claimed that it is not only not necessary, but also a bad idea, to claim that tensed facts are necessary in order to explain why somebody could be thankful that a particular event is over. The only things we need, we claimed, are tensed thoughts and not tensed facts. This idea is not new, of course; we already said that whereas the existence of tensed facts was very controversial, the existence of tensed thoughts was not. Almost everybody accepts the need to include them in any reasonable explanation of tense, time and language. But this inclusion has proven not to be simple.

We believe part of the confusion comes from arguments like Prior's, and part of the appeal of this argument comes from a confusion between tensed thoughts and tensed facts. This would require further elaboration to constitute a good argument, but we have contented ourselves with giving a sketch of a proposal to accommodate Prior's cases in our approach. Granting that needless ontological proliferation is to be avoided, this should suffice to prefer the so-called B-theory regarding tensed facts over the A-theory. That is, to reject the existence of tensed-facts. At least on the basis of

arguments concerning tensed expressions and thoughts, like the ones we have considered in this paper.

Whether there is a further metaphysical distinction between, say, "being past" and "being earlier than" does not concern us here. A tenseless or B-theory of time is enough to explain the cognitive significance of utterances both about the present and about the past or future (we haven't talked about the future, but presumably a similar explanation will do the job: claiming that future events are given us through, say, anticipation, hope, desire, fear, etc.).

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