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Experiencing Real Time: Husserl and the Debate About Tense

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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I ask how Husserl's phenomenological investigations into time-consciousness can contribute to the contemporary debate within analytic metaphysics about the reality of the passage of time. I contend that Husserl's work, despite its radically different starting point, addresses the same basic problem about the intelligibility of time's flow at issue in the analytic debate. I argue that Husserl's sustained reflections on the *experience* of duration and succession show that the analytic metaphysicians would do well to abandon the strict dichotomy between objective reality and mind-dependence if they want to do justice to the nature of temporal becoming. I also identify shortcomings in Husserl's theory which are revealed in determining its implications for the analytic debate. The result is not only an improved understanding of the contours of the problem of time's flow, but also an appreciation for the surprising confluence of Husserlian phenomenology with a central problem in analytic metaphysics.

Dedication Page

For Anna

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A Brief Introduction

Though the philosophical traditions of Husserlian phenomenology and analytic philosophy have grown in very different directions, they sprang from the same soil. Partly for this reason, and because of their individual richness and overlapping subject matters, there have been a number of works over the years concerned with the connections between the two schools of thought.¹ However, most of these have focused upon issues in logic and theory of meaning, since the overlap in those areas is so clear. In addition, recently, there has been a good deal of writing which seeks to put Husserlian phenomenology into a more naturalistic framework, one which might be more amenable to the scientific realism of most contemporary analytic philosophers.²

There have not, however, been many attempts to relate Husserl's phenomenology to the recent renaissance of metaphysics in analytic philosophy. There is perhaps good reason for this, since there would seem to be very basic disagreements over evidence and philosophical method separating Husserlian phenomenology and an analytic metaphysics which tries to tackle questions of identity, causality, being, and time from a perspective explicitly committed to going beyond our experience.

It is my goal in this work, however, to forge just such a connection when it comes to the philosophy of time. There are a number of reasons to do this. First of all, I do not know of much discussion of how Husserl's work on the phenomenology of time-consciousness might relate to analytic philosophy of time. Secondly, Husserl's writings on time are acknowledged to be some of the most far-reaching and influential in his body of work, if not always the easiest to interpret! Thirdly, there is currently a debate at the center of analytic philosophy of time which lends itself to such a connection.

¹ See, for example, Cobb-Stevens 1990 and Dummett 1993.

² For example, Petitot et. al. 2000, Gallagher and Zahavi 2007, and Thompson 2007.

The debate over the reality of temporal becoming or the mind-independence of tense asks whether time really passes. By this, contemporary analytic metaphysicians usually mean to ask whether past, present, and future are real attributes of times or events, or whether they are merely subjective appearances. Is it really the case that the upcoming U.S. presidential election will go from being future, to being present, to being past (or from not existing to existing, or from being non-actual to actual to non-actual again) or is this only the way that it will seem to us?

This debate lends itself to a phenomenological intervention, first of all, precisely because it deals explicitly with the relation between time and subjectivity, even if it does so from the perspective of a distinction between objective reality and mind-dependence which Husserl would reject. In addition, while participants in the debate have recently turned more and more to a consideration of the details of our temporal experiencing, one philosopher has explicitly noted that traditional phenomenologists such as Husserl never dealt with the question of the mind-independence of tense (Smith 1988/1994, 352). While this may be true superficially, I argue in this work that the most important reason for bringing Husserl and the debate about tense into conversation is that they ultimately deal with the same difficult questions about time.

In Chapter 1, I set out the current terms of the debate about tense, focusing upon three central unsettled issues. I argue that each of these areas of the debate appears to be stuck in a back-and-forth which does not promise imminent resolution. I argue, further, that we can see why each of these areas appears to be stuck for lack of more sustained attention to the nature of our temporal experiences.

In the second two chapters, I develop an interpretation of Husserl's theory of time-consciousness, focusing upon those areas which promise to be most helpful to the issues identified in the first chapter. In developing such an interpretation, I also identify some areas in Husserl's writings which are less than clear either conceptually or phenomenologically.

In the final two chapters, I discuss the ways that the philosophical approaches overlap. I argue that the details of Husserl's phenomenological perspective on temporal becoming show the participants in the debate about tense why it might be necessary to give up the strict identity between reality and mind-independence if they want to understand the flow of time. I conclude, however, that both Husserl and the analytic philosophers ultimately face a similar problem in attempting to make sense of temporal becoming. In trying to understand how time or consciousness itself can appear to flow or pass in a way unlike any other kind of motion or

process, both philosophical approaches to time end up straining the limits of their presuppositions. In this way, Husserl's theory of time is pushed to the edge of metaphysics, while the debate about tense is pushed to the edge of phenomenology.

1.

Impasses in the Debate About Tense

Past, present, and future are pervasive features of our language, our thought, and our experience of the world. Our verbs are tensed. We remember and forget past events, perceive present ones, and anticipate those which lie in the future. Yet, many analytic metaphysicians assert that past, present, and future do not characterize “real time.”³ Real time, they argue, is defined by the “metaphysically tenseless”⁴ relations *earlier than*, *later than*, and *simultaneous with*. Events are in time only in the sense that they can be dated or ordered relative to one another according to these relations. They are not, in themselves, past, present, or future. According to these philosophers, my birth is past and my death future only from my *subjective perspective*. While it is true that my birth and death are separated by a certain number of years, it is not true that my death is approaching and my birth fading into the past.

Other philosophers argue that our experience does not deceive us about tense. For them, events are truly and objectively characterized as past, present, and future. Events really do pass from being future, to being present, to being past. There is nothing mind-dependent about this passage. Temporal becoming is real.

What is apparently at stake in the debate between the so-called detensers and tensors⁵ is the nature of time. Is time dynamic in the sense that what is future, present, and past really changes from moment to moment? Or is time static in that it involves only relations which do

³ This phrase comes from D.H. Mellor’s books *Real Time* and *Real Time II*.

⁴ The terms “tense,” “tensed,” and “tenseless” are commonly used by analytic philosophers of time in a “metaphysical” sense to refer to characteristics of events or other temporal items themselves, rather than to characteristics of language. I will follow this usage, trusting that context will make clear whether these terms are used in a grammatical or metaphysical sense.

⁵ The two sides in this debate are known by a variety of different names. In addition to “tensed” and “tenseless” theories, philosophers speak about “dynamic” as opposed to “static” views of time, as well as presentism vs. eternalism. Tensors are also often referred to as “A-theorists” and detensers as “B-theorists” based on terms used in J.M.E. McTaggart’s seminal 1908 paper “The Unreality of Time.” Though all of these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes distinctions are made. For example, it is arguable that many tensors or dynamic theorists are not presentists since they do not believe that only the present exists. I will generally characterize the positions using terms which derive from “tense” since I find this to be least misleading.

not change? The fact that my birth is earlier than my death holds at all times. But my birth was not always in the past and my death will not always remain in the future. Do the dynamic, changing tenses of my birth and death reflect the real nature of time, or do they rather reflect only the perspective of human experience?

Ultimately, I will argue that these questions are unanswerable as posed. This is not to deny that they are productive questions to ask. First of all, it is undeniable that the debate about the reality of tense has produced important insights and that the issues it raises are relevant to a host of other questions in metaphysics and philosophy in general. But, more than that, it is my conviction that the question of how to understand the relationship between temporal becoming and subjectivity is one of the most difficult, and yet potentially fruitful, philosophical questions one can ask. In fact, I will attempt to show in later chapters that the very same question is central not only to Husserl's theory of time, but also to his efforts to ground his own phenomenological approach to philosophy. Nevertheless, I think that there is growing evidence that the debate about tense is in certain ways stuck. Some of the central issues in the debate have been mired in a hard fought but unproductive back-and-forth for some time. Other emerging questions appear to be unanswerable in their current terms.

In the later chapters of this work, I will argue that insights inspired by Husserlian phenomenology can help explain why some of the points of contention are unresolvable as formulated. In the end, these phenomenological contributions indicate that the dichotomy between mind-independence and mind-dependence may have to be abandoned if we are to come to an adequate understanding of time and tense. However, my aim in this chapter is limited to setting the stage for the phenomenological and comparative work to follow. To that end, I develop a two-part argument. First of all, with regard to several of the central concerns of the debate, I contend that there are compelling reasons to believe that neither tenses nor detenses can resolve all of the difficulties they face. Secondly, I make the case that the deficiencies in both positions indicate that there are important obscurities in the way that our *experience* of past, present, and future has been understood.

Before plunging into the argument, I should say something about the history and current status of the debate about tense. The reality of temporal becoming has been denied and defended by analytic philosophers for almost a century. Two issues which traditionally have been given significant attention will be largely excluded here for reasons which follow.

The first issue is the translatability of tensed sentences into tenseless sentences. Since tense pervades our language, and since much of analytic philosophy has focused on the careful analysis of language, one of the central questions of the debate about tense has concerned the eliminability of tensed language. Detensers have tried to argue that tense is not a feature of reality, since all tensed statements can be replaced by tenseless statements without loss of meaning. They have argued that, for example, the tensed utterance “My class will begin in one hour” really means “My class begins (tenselessly) one hour after the time of this utterance.” Tensers have responded by trying to show that no tenseless sentence can capture the full meaning of one that is tensed.

Recently this particular question has been apparently resolved in the tensors’ favor. Many tenseless theorists have admitted that meaning is not preserved when tensed language is converted into tenseless language.⁶ However, a “new” tenseless theory has emerged which claims that the indispensability of tensed discourse, and the irreducibility of its meaning, does not imply that there are tensed *facts* or *states of affairs* which account for this irreducibility. In other words, the debate has moved past the issue of translatability without any sign of detensers admitting defeat.

The issue of the translatability, then, will not be a focus of this work. But this is not only because the matter has been largely decided. It is also because the idea of the *new* tenseless theory of time raises, at least in part, precisely the kind of considerations which open up the possibility of a connection to a phenomenological approach to time.

If the question of whether there are tensed facts or states of affairs cannot be answered fully by an analysis of language and its use, how can it be answered? It seems to me that there are three plausible courts of appeal. The first is the role of time in the empirically grounded theories of physics. The second is the logical analysis of our conception of time, and, in particular, of tense. And the third is what is revealed by a careful reflection upon our most immediate, everyday experiences of time. Of course, it is this third which provides the most direct connections to Husserl’s investigations of time-consciousness, as we shall see.

⁶ See, for example, Mellor 1998, 4 and Oaklander and Smith 1994, 18. The basic idea is that the rules of use of tensed sentences can never be the same as the rules of use of tenseless sentences. A tensed sentence like “The class is beginning now” can only be correctly uttered at the time that the class begins. However, a tenseless sentence like “The class begins at 12:30 pm on October 1st, 2008” can be said truly at any time.

Physics is the other historically important area of the debate which will not be a focus of this project. Over the years, several prominent defenders have argued that the theory of relativity implies that tense cannot be a feature of real, objective time. The question of the soundness of their arguments is beyond the scope of this work, as well as the expertise of the author. However, according to the phenomenological perspective on time which I will ultimately advocate, a philosophical understanding of temporal becoming cannot take its lead from the theories of natural science.

The issues analyzed in this chapter, then, can be preliminarily divided according to whether they concern, on one hand, the logical and conceptual questions raised by temporal becoming or, on the other, our direct experience of temporal becoming. The central issue in the first category is a logical argument made against the reality of tense known as McTaggart's paradox. The second category includes debates about the implications of the presence of experience, as well as the implications of our direct experience of temporal becoming. In the end, however, the analysis of McTaggart's paradox will show that it cannot be resolved without further reflection upon the way that we experience the temporal characteristics of events. The goal of this chapter is thus to demonstrate that the debate about tense has come to revolve around certain thorny issues concerning our experience of time which cannot be adequately addressed within the current framework of the debate. This conclusion motivates the turn to Husserl's phenomenological analyses of time-consciousness in order to develop a different approach to these issues.

1.1 McTaggart's Paradox

The most well-known logical puzzle about tense is McTaggart's paradox. It has been discussed since its appearance in the 1908 paper by McTaggart which set the terms for the analytic debate. But there has been a particularly large amount of attention devoted to it recently since it represents the strongest argument the new tenseless theory possesses for showing that even if tensed language and tensed beliefs are ineliminable, there simply cannot be tensed facts.

It is notable that philosophers have such diametrically opposed responses to the paradox.⁷ And, despite years of innumerable careful and determined exchanges over what the paradox does and does not show, it seems that the opposing sides are no closer to a resolution than they were to begin with. What follows is a presentation of the paradox and the contours of the debate surrounding it, as well as an analysis of why the two sides seem to be coming no closer to a resolution.

McTaggart's original argument and the contemporary debate

McTaggart's paradox is essentially an argument meant to show that tensed determinations cannot really apply to temporal items,⁸ that tense and temporal becoming are unreal. On its surface the argument is quite simple. It begins from the premise that if moments or events are really tensed, then every event or moment must be past, present, and future (assuming there is no first or last moment of time). But past, present, and future are incompatible determinations. Nothing can be past *and* present, present *and* future, or future *and* past. The application of tenses to temporal items therefore produces a contradiction and so tense must not be real.

Of course, McTaggart recognizes, there is the obvious objection that past, present, and future do not apply to the same moment *at the same time*. Rather, they apply to the same moment only in succession. The year of my birth, for example, is not past, present, and future all at once. Rather, it is future at all times before 1978, present in 1978, and past at all times after 1978. McTaggart's reply to this obvious objection is to claim that it either involves circular reasoning or else gives rise to an infinite and vicious regress.

Consider a time at which my birth is present. In order to avoid saying that my birth is also past and future, we must say instead that it *will be* past and that it *was* future. But,

⁷ L. Nathan Oaklander, for example, quotes C.D. Broad's pronouncement that McTaggart's argument is a "philosophical howler" along with D.H. Mellor's assertion that it "seems beyond all reasonable doubt." (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 157)

⁸ "Temporal items" is used by some participants in the debate as a neutral term for whatever one might take to be the constituents of time, to occur in time. This could include things like moments, events, states of affairs, durations, etc. Though I will often speak of moments and events in my explication and analysis, I do not mean this to have any implications about questions concerning which temporal items do or do not exist. The answers to questions such as whether moments exist independently of the events which occur at them should not fundamentally alter the arguments presented in this chapter.

according to McTaggart, this is just to say that my birth is present in the present, future in the past, and past in the future. This, he contends, is circular since we have had to make use of the concepts of past, present, and future in order to keep them from implying a contradiction. Or, if it is not circular, then it leads to a vicious regress since it introduces another level of past, present, and future to make sense of the first. But these second-order tensed determinations will also imply a contradiction unless a third level is introduced, and so on (1908, 468-469).

There have been countless exchanges over McTaggart's argument without the achievement of any general agreement about whether there is indeed a vicious circularity or regress involved in characterizing temporal items as past, present, and future. In fact, it often seems as if the two sides are simply reasserting the same points.

For example, the tensor Quentin Smith has argued that McTaggart's claim about the circularity or regressiveness of the attempt to avoid a contradiction misses the point. According to Smith, there is, to begin with, no contradiction to resolve in the application of tense. On his view, there is no warrant for asserting of an event *E*

(1) *E* is past, present, and future.

Rather, a tensor need only ever affirm that

(2) Either *E* is past and was present and was (still earlier) future, or *E* will be past, is present, and was future, or *E* will be present and will be (still later) past and is future.

McTaggart's claim that using (2) to resolve the contradiction implied by (1) relies, according to Smith, on the idea that (1) should be affirmed to begin with. If it is never affirmed, then (2) is not being used resolve any contradiction. On its own, Smith contends, (2) is perfectly intelligible and unobjectionable (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 203-204).

But detenser L. Nathan Oaklander responds to Smith's solution by calling it "a verbal solution to a metaphysical problem" (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 199). Oaklander claims that temporal succession is implicit in (2) and Smith has not addressed McTaggart's argument that this succession cannot be appealed to in explicating the notion of tense without circularity.

This exchange is representative of others which can be found in the literature. In addition, it is just a short piece of a longer exchange between Smith and Oaklander in which largely the same assertions are made multiple times.⁹ In fact, Smith himself recognizes that the debate seems to be stuck in an alternation between contradictory assertions (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 202-203). It is my goal in this section to offer insight into why the debate seems to be stalled in this unproductive back-and-forth. However, before I attempt this, it will be instructive to consider a very different formulation of McTaggart's paradox which has been put forward by D.H. Mellor, one of the developers of the new tenseless theory of time.

A “more virulent strain” of McTaggart's argument

Mellor believes that McTaggart's argument is perfectly valid and should convince anyone that there are no real tensed facts. However, he recognizes that it has not done so and that rehashing the same tired disputes about regresses and circularity will not be effective. Therefore, he offers what he calls a “more virulent strain” of the argument which avoids the issue of regress and circularity (Mellor 1998, 75). Some, at least, have found Mellor's version to be more effective than the original.¹⁰

In order to appreciate Mellor's version of the argument we need to set the stage a bit. First, some terminology. A tensed *token* is a particular speaking, writing, reading, believing, thinking, etc. of any sentence type which directly or indirectly appears to attribute pastness, presentness, or futurity to an event. Tensed tokens occur at particular times. For example, my thinking right now “I will soon finish this paragraph” is a tensed token. If a token is true, this is because it has a *truthmaker* which is a *fact* about the world. For example, the token just mentioned might be made true by the fact that the event of my finishing this paragraph lies in the near future.

Mellor's overall strategy is to admit that tensed tokens are indispensable for communication and that they cannot be translated by or replaced by tenseless tokens. However, he argues that there is no reason to think that tensed tokens need tensed truth-makers. Tenseless facts are perfectly sufficient for determining whether a tensed token is true. His version of

⁹ See Oaklander and Smith 1994, 176-214.

¹⁰ See, for example, Dolev 2007, 20-22.

McTaggart's argument is meant to show that, indeed, the attempt to make tensed facts serve as the truthmakers for tensed tokens has an unacceptable consequence. On his view, it would be absurd to affirm the existence of tensed facts if they cannot fulfill their most obvious task of making tensed tokens true or false.

According to Mellor, the unacceptable consequence of making tensed facts the truthmakers for tensed tokens is that these tokens then have truth values which change over time. Consider a 1990 token y of the sentence S "The year 2000 is in the future." If tensed facts are the truth-makers for tokens of tensed sentences, then y is true iff the year 2000 is future. In 1990, the year 2000 *is* future and y is therefore true. However, in 2008, the year 2000 is past and y is therefore false. But though 2000 is no longer future in 2008, that does not change the fact that it was true for someone to call it future in 1990. The truth values of tokens uttered at particular times should not change over time. A 2008 token of S would be false, but this is a *different token*.

Therefore, according to Mellor, it cannot be the case that the truthmakers of tensed tokens are tensed facts. This is precisely because tensed facts change over time while the truth values of tokens do not. So we must admit that the truth conditions of tensed tokens are relative to the times at which the tokens are uttered. And this is just what the tenseless theory of time holds. According to the tenseless "token-reflexive" account, the token y is not made true by the fact that the year 2000 is in the future, but rather by the fact that the year 2000 is later than y . On this account, since, in 2008, the year 2000 is still later than y , y remains true in 2008 (Mellor 1998, 78-81).

The defender of tensed facts might reply to Mellor by trying to relativize them to the times at which they occur. That is, one might argue that what makes y true is the tensed fact that the year 2000 is *future as of 1990*. This kind of relativized tensed fact would still hold in 2008 and thus y would still be true in 2008, as it should. However, relational tensed facts such as *future as of 1990* are not really tensed facts at all, precisely because they do not change over time. That tensed facts change with time is what distinguishes them from tenseless facts and makes them candidates for explaining change and the passage of time. Thus, making tensed facts relative to times essentially reduces tensed facts to tenseless facts, which was Mellor's goal from the beginning.

How would a tenses respond to Mellor's "more virulent strain" of McTaggart's paradox? The reply that Smith might make to Mellor's version of the argument can be extrapolated from comments he makes in the context of responding to Mellor's general account of the truth conditions of tensed tokens. There Smith admits that for a token z of the tensed sentence "It is now 1980," z 's occurring in 1980 is both necessary and sufficient for z to be true. But z 's occurring in 1980 is a tenseless fact (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 46). How then can Smith, a defender of non-relational tensed properties, claim that *tensed facts* are needed to account for the truth of z ?

Smith answers this question by introducing a distinction between *tenseless truth* and *tensed truth* (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 46). The fact that z occurs in 1980 is necessary and sufficient for establishing the *tenseless* truth of z which is expressed by saying " z is (tenselessly) true at t_1 ." However, this tenseless fact is not sufficient for establishing that z is *tensedly* true, which is expressed by saying that " z is true now." For the *tensed* truth of z , the fact that 1980 is *present* is necessary. At a time later than 1980, it is *not* the case that z is (now) true. Rather at that time it is only the case that z *was* true. However, z is tenselessly true at times after 1980 since it is always tenselessly true.

Smith's distinction between tensed and tenseless truth can be straightforwardly applied in a rebuttal of Mellor's version of McTaggart's argument. Mellor argued that tensed facts cannot be used to evaluate the truth of tensed tokens since *tokens* should not have different truth values at different times. Given Smith's distinction between tensed and tenseless truth, however, one can allow that the *tenseless* truth value of tensed tokens does not change over time while still maintaining that their *tensed* truth values do. There is no contradiction implied by the existence of tensed facts if their role is to be truth makers only for the *tensed* truth of tokens which changes over time in just the way that tensed facts do.

Two incompatible perspectives: the roadblock in the McTaggart debate

This distinction between tensed and tenseless truth provides a clue for getting to the bottom of why the debate over McTaggart's paradox is stuck. Essentially, there are two incompatible perspectives from which to evaluate tensed claims and, therefore, the existence of tensed facts. One of these perspectives is that of *being at a particular time* and corresponds to

Smith's *tensed* truth. The other perspective is one *outside of any particular time*, a perspective which ranges over different times to determine what is the case at any one of them. This perspective corresponds to Smith's *tenseless* truth.

From the perspective of actually being at a temporal location, all events and moments are either past, present, or future—all temporal items have a tense. From this perspective, these tenses are absolute. Right now my birth does not seem to be merely past-as-of-now, it is simply and absolutely past. Of course, this is only because I am actually at a particular time, a particular time is actually present. Therefore, *from the point of view of this time*, there is no need to include the being-at-this-time as a condition on the pastness, presentness, or futurity of any events. On the other hand, if I do step away from the perspective of this moment and survey how things *would* appear from different possible temporal perspectives, then I see that past, present, and future would apply to events differently. From *this* perspective—one which is not actually within time insofar as it recognizes no time as actually present—it appears that tenses are relative to the time from which they are considered. From this tenseless perspective, tense becomes tense-at-a-time which ultimately is indistinguishable from tenseless relations.

The reason that the debate over McTaggart's paradox has been stuck in an unproductive back-and-forth is that each side insists on taking a different perspective without making that perspective explicit. Each side more or less assumes the truth of its own theory in evaluating whether or not tensed facts imply a contradiction. The defenders of the paradox assume a perspective which ranges over times and implicitly presupposes that there is not an actual present from which the truth conditions for all tensed statements must be determined. Those who attack the paradox, on the other hand, assume that the argument must always be carried out from the perspective of an actually present moment which implies that all events and moments are determinately past, present, or future. The two sides talk past one another because they make fundamentally different presuppositions about the perspective from which the paradox should be evaluated.¹¹

Let's see how this applies to the exchange over McTaggart's original version of the argument. In that exchange, tenses assume that there is a particular present moment which is actual. From the perspective of this moment, it is true that one is obliged to say of any event that

¹¹ Yuval Dolev makes a somewhat similar diagnosis of what goes on in the debate over McTaggart's paradox (2007, 161). Although he puts the problem in terms of assumptions about what is real rather than the perspective from which the paradox should be considered.

it is either past, present, *or* future. Detensers, on the other hand, assume that there is no privileged present moment from which the tense of temporal items is to be evaluated. If one must equally consider any possible temporal position, then it makes sense to assert that an event must be past, present, *and* future—even if it is admitted that the tenses apply successively. There is no way to come to an agreement about what the paradox shows without coming to an agreement about whether it must be answered from the perspective of an actual present moment or from a perspective not confined to such a moment.

The situation with Mellor's version of the argument is analogous. When Mellor claims that the truth value of a tensed token (located at a particular time) does not change over time, he is taking up a tenseless perspective which ranges over different times without considering any of them to be actually present. The tensor reply, on the other hand, assumes the tensed perspective of always arguing from the position of an actual present. From such a tensed perspective, a token either *is* true, *was* true, or *will be* true. From this perspective, the idea of a tenseless truth which remains the same across times does not make sense. If a presently tensed token and the tensed fact it refers to are present, then the token is true. If the token and the fact are past, then the token *was* true. If they are future, then it *will be* true.

Evaluating the arguments both for and against McTaggart's paradox depends upon taking up a perspective which is either essentially tensed or essentially tenseless. As long as this is the case, the paradox cannot help us to decide the debate between the tensed and tenseless theories of time. This is because which perspective reflects reality depends upon which theory of time is true. It would seem, then, that other areas of the debate about tense must settle the question of the implications of McTaggart's paradox.

The presentness of the past and the future: the way forward

However, this is not the only lesson that can be drawn from the impasse over McTaggart's paradox. The impasse helps to reveal a direction for further investigation concerning the *experience* of temporal becoming. It is clear that both the tenseless perspective according to which the conditions at any position in time are taken to be fundamentally comparable, as well as the tensed perspective according to which *present* conditions are somehow privileged, reflect something of our experience of time. What is it about our

experience of time that makes *both* of these two seemingly incommensurable perspectives compelling?

The debate over McTaggart's paradox does not answer this question, since the participants generally assume one or the other of the perspectives and then argue that tensed facts either imply a contradiction or do not. However, one of the directions that the debate has taken offers a clue. In his exchange with Oaklander over McTaggart's paradox, Smith admits that there is an infinite regress implied by the application of tense to temporal items, though it is not the regress which McTaggart and Oaklander claim, and it is not vicious. According to Smith, possession of the property of pastness by an event *e* would imply the following regress:

“pastness inheres in *e*, and presentness inheres in the inherence of pastness in *e*, and presentness inheres in the inherence of presentness in the inherence of pastness in *e*, and so on.” (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 205)

Oaklander argues that a regress of tensed attributes like this implies a contradiction. His argument suggests a way to begin thinking about what it is in our experience that makes both tenseless and tensed perspectives compelling. Oaklander's argument implies that it is not possible for presentness to inhere in the inherence of pastness in an event. He bases this argument on the claim that “if an inherence or exemplification “relation” (of any level *i*) *exists now*, then there must also *exist now* a term that exemplifies_{*i*} a property” (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 212). It follows that if an event's exemplification of pastness exists now, then the event itself must exist now. But the event's exemplification of pastness means that, by definition, the event is past. Thus, according to Oaklander, Smith's regress implies that an event is both past and present at the same time.

This argument, I think, suggests a problem at the heart of McTaggart's paradox. Tensors and detensors both recognize that we at least experience events to be past, present, or future. However, we are also aware that this *experiencing* of events, our own temporal perspective upon them, is itself (at least as it appears to us) a *present* perspective. This is why, if one asks *when* my birth is past, the natural answer is to say that it is *now* past, it is past at the *present* time.

It is this fact about our experience which tenses rely upon in asserting the privileged status of the present and, thus, the necessity of taking a tensed perspective. However, this privilege is also what allows detensors to generate a contradiction in the notion of real tense. Oaklander's argument presses the tensor on the issue of the supposed *presentness* of past and future events. How can one maintain that an event is past *as opposed to* present and yet also hold that its "being past" is itself present? The *presentness of the past* seems to leave the tensor open to the charge that a single event is both past *and* present.

What the detensor is pursuing here is an ambivalence in the notion of presentness. In one sense of the term, the present is on equal footing with the past and the future. Past, present, and future are three basic, *incompatible* determinations which characterize an event at different times. But, on the other hand, the present is something which characterizes *all events* at any time in so far as they are always *presently* past, *presently* present, or *presently* future. I believe that it is only through further reflection upon our experience of this second adverbial sense of presentness that the question of McTaggart's paradox can be properly understood and evaluated.

1.2 The Presence of Experience

I argued in the preceding section that the most important logical/conceptual question concerning time and tense cannot be answered until a fuller reflection upon the nature of our temporal experiences is carried out. In fact, issues relating to experience have become more prominent in the debate about tense in recent years. Tensors have identified a number of characteristics of our temporal experience which they claim only a tensed theory of time can adequately explain. In response, detensors have attempted to account for these characteristics of our experience within a tenseless framework, sometimes making the counterargument that tensors themselves do not have a good account of these characteristics.

In this section, I will consider the first of what I take to be the two most general, far-reaching areas of debate that have emerged in the discussion about experience and tense. These areas are the interrelated issues of the presence of experience and the experience of temporal passage. I believe that participants in the debate are right to view these issues as fundamentally important. However, I will endeavor to show that their attempts to account for these features of experience through tensed and tenseless metaphysical models of time have been inadequate. I

suggest that an approach which is not confined to the choice between these two models is required to account for the relationship between experience and temporal becoming.

What is the presence of experience?

If I focus my attention upon my own experiences and try to be aware of them as they happen, I find that they are numerous and varied. I feel the keys beneath my fingers as I type. I strain to hold onto the thought I am trying to articulate. I replay a melody in my head which I heard earlier in the day. I anticipate the words that will finish this sentence. One thing that all of these experiences have in common as I become aware of them is that they appear to be occurring *presently*.

It is difficult to imagine an experience without the possibility of that experience being present. A fact like this would seem to create a problem for the tenseless theory of time. How can an experience be present if there is really no such thing as presentness? Tensors and detensors have argued over this question under the heading of the presence of experience. Generally, tensors have asserted that detensors cannot account for the presence of our experiences while detensors have attempted to provide such an account.

However, the issue of the presence of experience is not as straightforward as it first appears. Though many authors discuss “the presence of experience,” they often disagree (sometimes without realizing it) about just what “the presence of experience” refers to. I think that part of this confusion stems from the fact that it is far from clear how conclusions about the nature of experience should affect the question of the mind-independent existence of temporal becoming. Even if detensors cannot explain away the presence of experience, does this really show that presentness is *mind-independently* real? Doesn't it rather show that presentness characterizes mind-dependent, subjective experience?

Answering these questions depends upon how exactly one understands the presence of experience. I think this is part of what motivates different authors to define the “presence of experience” quite differently from one another. In addition, these questions depend upon how one thinks about the relationship between mind and experience, as well as to what degree experiences can be viewed as events like any other. These are large and difficult questions

which cannot be answered at this point. However, they will be clarified to some degree by the considerations which follow.

I will begin by considering some of the different ways that the presence of experience has been defined. The consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the various views will reveal that it is not at all clear that the presence of experience provides evidence for the tensor view. I will then turn to the detensor attempt to explain the presence of experience in a tenseless framework. After showing that this attempt fails, I conclude that a new perspective is needed to make sense of the relationship between experience and the present.

How has the presence of experience been defined? Mellor takes it that what needs to be explained is the “necessary presence of experience,” (1998, 42) the fact that “only our experiences, beliefs, intentions, decisions and actions seem to be confined to the present” (1998, 44). This influential way of putting the problem is problematical for two reasons. First of all, on a purely descriptive level, it does not seem to be the case that our experiences are confined to the present. Some of my experiences are past and some are future. Secondly, even if there is a sense in which our experiences are confined to the present, this is not necessarily something unique to them. If we admit, for example, that all experiences are present when we are having them, this does not distinguish them from other events since *all* events are present whenever they occur.

Other philosophers have offered different descriptions of what is unique about experience. The tensor Hestevold, for example, claims that an experience is necessarily such that it can be *known* to be present. He offers the following formulation of the presence of experience (PE): “For any experience E and time t , E is necessarily such that if E occurs at t , then there exists someone S who knows at t that E is (presently) occurring if S considers (entertains) at t that E is occurring” (1990, 542). This description does appear to be an improvement on Mellor’s since it distinguishes experiences from other events based upon what can be *known* about them. While it may be true that, if there is such a thing as presentness, all events are present when they occur, it does not follow that they can all be *known* to be present when they occur. This appears to be something unique about experiences.

However, one problem with Hestevold’s formulation is that it is not clear that the presentness of present experiences is any different than the pastness of past experiences when it comes to its knowability. Consider a formulation of the pastness of experience (PAE): “For any experience E and time t , E is necessarily such that if E occurs at t , then there exists someone S

who knows at any time later than t that E occurred in the past if S considers (entertains) at a time later than t that E occurred in the past.”

One might object that PAE is false since I can certainly consider whether or not I had an experience in the past and not remember. But this objection is flawed. If I do not remember the experience, I cannot really entertain whether it is past or not. An analogous thing happens with present experiences when we are not even aware that they are occurring. I am usually not explicitly aware of the slight pressure exerted by the floor upon my feet as I sit at my desk. It is not simply that I am not aware of the *presentness* of this experience because I have not considered whether or not it is present. Rather, I am not aware of the experience *at all*. For our purposes, this kind of non-aware present experience is analogous to a past experience which I do not remember. In both cases, I cannot even consider whether the experience is present or past because I have no direct experiential access to it. PAE only applies to *remembered* experiences just as PE is only concerned with present experiences of which I am *aware*. It is plausible that I can no more take my remembered experiences to be present or future than I can take my currently conscious experiences to be past or future. Thus Hestevold’s formulation arguably does not get at something unique about the relation between experience and *presentness*.

Finally, William Lane Craig, a proponent of the tensed theory focuses on the simple fact that “we experience events as happening presently” (2000, 139). This conception is quite different from the previous two since it concerns the *experience of presentness* rather than the *presentness of experience*. It also is not a very strong claim in that it does not clearly imply that *we always* experience events as happening presently. The claim that we do, at least some of the time, experience events to be occurring presently seems unobjectionable. Craig does not deny that our experiences themselves can be self-reflectively grasped as present, but he argues that it is not the case that we infer the presence of events from the presence of our experiences. I do not conclude that the bird flying by my window is doing so presently by making an inference from the fact that my *experience* of the bird flying by is present. Rather, I simply see the flying of the bird as something which is presently occurring.

Such a fact about experience would present a major challenge for the detenser. If presentness (perhaps along with other tensed determinations) is directly experienced to be a basic feature of events, then the detenser is faced with explaining why this experience is misleading.

The fact that we take events to be past, present, and future is *prima facie* evidence that they really are tensed.

The link between presentness and experience: a problem for tenses

Before turning to detenser attempts to account for the presence of experience, I want to take stock of where the reflection upon competing definitions of the phenomenon has left us. This will show that the tensed theory is not in as good a position as is usually supposed when it comes to accounting for the presence of experience.

Craig's assertion that we do in fact experience events as happening presently was found to be the most likely version of the presence of experience, and the version most helpful to tenses. However, it does not entail a particularly close relationship between experience and presentness. The idea that the presence of experience is a *special* fact that detensers must account for assumes that there is something unique about the link between presentness and our experiences. Craig's version seems to give up the uniqueness of this link.

To say that we do experience events as occurring presently is not to say that we don't experience events as having occurred in the past or as going to occur in the future. Thus, it is merely to assert that we do in fact have an experience of the tense of events. While this is certainly important to the case for tense, it does not explain why we feel that there is some special connection between experience and presentness. The tensor might choose to deny that there is anything unique about this relationship, and look to other issues to make her case. Unfortunately for the tensor, there is evidence that there *is* something unique about the relationship between presentness and experience.

First of all, there are considerations like those advanced by Mellor. When I hear the explosive boom of a fireworks display I am watching, I am aware that the boom sounded a short time in the past. Yet my hearing of the boom is clearly present. This may not show that I do not sometimes, or even most of the time, experience events to be occurring presently. However, it *does* suggest that there is something about the experiencing of an event, or even the reflexive experiencing of another experience, which makes it harder to doubt the presentness of the experiencing itself than it is to doubt the presentness of the object of that experiencing.

But it is not only in the particular kind of case suggested by Mellor that we can recognize a close link between presentness and experiencing. Consider any past, present, or future event that is the object of an experience, broadly defined. I can perceive the present swaying of a tree branch, remember my past drive to work, or anticipate the way darkness will envelope the street outside when night comes. Though these events themselves may or may not be present, I cannot imagine living through the experiencing of them without imagining a present experiencing.

I claimed earlier that it is not the case that experiences are necessarily present. But this is only because experiences can themselves be treated as the objects of other experiences. When I remember my experience of joy when my son was born, I do so from the perspective of a present experiencing which takes a past experience as its object. Though experiences are not all present, I can have no access to a past or a future experience except through a present experiencing. This, I think, is where to look for the unique connection between presentness and experience. Though both events and experiences can appear to be past, present, and future, my only *access* to them is through a *present experiencing* of them. This, perhaps, is what can be salvaged of Mellor's contention that experience appears to be confined to the present. It is true that experiences *which are not taken to be the objects of further experiences* seem to be confined to the present.

This fact about experience is very closely related to the idea which closed the discussion of McTaggart's paradox. This was the idea that there is an "adverbial" sense of presentness which shows itself in the fact that if one asks when an event is past, present, or future, the answer, given a tensed perspective, must be that the event is *presently* past, *presently* present, or *presently* future. It is this "adverbial" presentness which characterizes all experiencing which is not the object of a further experiencing. To say that an event is presently past is to say that it could be presently *experienced* to be past. Similarly, to say that an event is experienced to be past, is to say that it is *presently* experienced to be past.

The inadequacy of tenseless accounts of the presence of experience

I turn now to the attempts made by detensers to show that a tenseless theory can adequately account for the presence of experience. The fact that there is some confusion over precisely what feature of experience is at issue might seem to complicate matters. However, the fundamental strategy which has been employed by most detensers does not much depend upon

which formulation of the problem they address. I will argue that this strategy cannot explain away either the presentness of experience or the experience of presentness.

Detensers claim that our awareness of the presentness of our experiences does not imply that these experiences really are present. Rather, there are *tenseless* facts about my experiences which justify my taking them to be present. These tenseless facts, they maintain, account perfectly well for my taking all and only the experiences I am having now to be present. Mellor, for example, argues that the tenseless truthmaker for a belief that something is present is its occurring at the same time as whatever it ascribes presentness to (1998, 44). Since my belief that my current experience is present always occurs at the same time as that experience, I will always believe that whatever experience I am having is present. Oaklander offers a somewhat similar account of our ability to know which experiences are present. He writes, “. . . if I am conscious at t_1 of an experience that occurs tenselessly at t_1 , and if, as a matter of tenseless fact, it is t_1 , then I know the experience is present” (Oaklander and Smith 1994, 346).

Let’s look more closely at Mellor’s account. He argues that the tenseless truthmakers of tensed beliefs show why it is that I always believe whatever experiences I am having to be present. It is not that these experiences really are present that justifies my taking them to be present. The justification rather lies in the fact that they are simultaneous with my belief.

Mellor’s account of the presence of experience is a simple application of his general token-reflexive account of tensed tokens. In this case, the tensed tokens are now-beliefs located at certain times. However, Mellor argues that this token-reflexive account does a special job when it comes to the necessary presence of experience. That is, it shows why I necessarily believe my experiences to be present. According to Mellor, the tenseless truth conditions explain this necessity by showing that it is tautological that I believe my experiences to be present. The presence of experience amounts to the tautology that whatever experience is cotemporal with my belief that it is cotemporal, is cotemporal with that belief. This is why we take whatever experience we are currently having to be present (1998, 44).

The first thing to notice here is that Mellor has set himself a pseudo-problem. I have already argued that it is not the case that experiences are necessarily present since some of my experiences are past and some are future. Mellor sets up the necessity to be explained by already *beginning* with a tautology. He begins with the fact that I believe whatever experience *I am having now* to be present. But this is just to say that I believe that if an experience of mine is

present, then it is present. No wonder Mellor can substitute in token-reflexive truth-makers and end up with a tautology. He already had a tautology because he specified that my now-belief concerns an experience *that I am now having*.

The real problem faced by detensers is whether they can explain what it is that underlies our belief that certain experiences and *not* others are present. Mellor must explain in tenseless terms not why I believe my *present* experiences to be present, but rather what it is about my particular experience of writing this paragraph that justifies me in taking it to be present. Now, it may seem at first as if he can accomplish this goal. After all, he can say that I am justified in believing my writing to be present because it occurs at the same B-time as my belief that it is present.

It is indeed true that I could not be justified in believing my writing to be present if it was not simultaneous with this belief. However, it is far from clear that a tenseless fact is sufficient to account for all of the implications of my taking my writing to be present.

Suppose that at t_1 I believe that my experience of writing this paragraph is present. Suppose also that this experience occurs at t_1 . Does it follow that I am justified in believing that my writing this paragraph is present? According to tenses, it does not, since t_1 could still be in the past or the future. In Quentin Smith's terms, Mellor has shown that my belief-token at t_1 must be *tenselessly* true if it occurs at the same time as the experience it concerns. However, from a tensed perspective, the tenseless facts do not determine what experience I take to be present *now*, since they do not determine whether t_1 or some other time is now present. Tenses can argue that the only way to specify which experiences should really be believed to be present is by specifying which experiences really are present. The fact that I believe (tenselessly) at a certain time that I have an experience which occurs (tenselessly) at that time can never give me grounds for knowing which of my experiences are *now* present.

Oaklander is able to avoid the tensor objection to Mellor's account only by smuggling tense into his. Recall the conditions Oaklander gives for knowing an experience to be present: “. . . if I am conscious at t_I of an experience that occurs tenselessly at t_I , and if, as a matter of tenseless fact, it is t_I , then I know the experience is present.” What separates this explication from Mellor's is that Oaklander specifies that “as a matter of tenseless fact, it is t_I .” Presumably this specification is meant to avoid an objection like that brought against Mellor. If *it is t_I* , then it can't be the case that the experience in question is in fact past or future.

But how can the fact about whether or not “it is t_1 ” be *tenseless*? This is a strange notion. What can it possibly mean for “it” to be a certain time other than for that time to be present? On a tenseless view, events occur at particular times and thus are related by preceding, being simultaneous with, or succeeding one another. But what event occurring at t_1 could possibly make it true to say that “it is t_1 ” other than the “event” of t_1 becoming present? Perhaps a detenser would reply that the notion of it being a certain time is primitive. So it may be. But what is at issue is whether the notion of it being a certain time is inherently tensed. And it does appear to be. The thought that it is *now* 2:30 PM is quite familiar and unproblematic. But the thought that it is *tenselessly* 2:30 requires some explanation. It is a plausible tenseless fact that my *thought* occurs at 2:30, but this is just as true at 3:30 as it is at 2:30—it doesn’t make it the case that *it is tenselessly 2:30*. If it is tenselessly 2:30, is it *not* then tenselessly 3:30? But then something about the world must change for it to go from being 2:30 to being 3:30. What accounts for this change if not the passage of time, if not the transition of presentness or actuality from one moment to the next? I submit that Oaklander has only avoided the problem faced by Mellor by giving a *tensed* theory of the presence of experience.

Before moving on it should be noted that the preceding critique targets tenseless accounts of the presentness of experience as opposed to the experience of presentness. However, it applies just as well to any similar attempt a detenser might make to account for the experience of presentness. Oaklander’s account, for example, might be altered to apply to the experience of presentness as follows: if I consciously experience at t_1 an event that occurs tenselessly at t_1 , and if, as a matter of tenseless fact, it is t_1 , then I know the event to be present. Once again, without the suspect “as a matter of tenseless fact, it is t_1 ,” such an account would be open to the charge that t_1 might not be present now.

I conclude that neither tensors nor detensors can provide an acceptable account of the relationship between experience and presentness. Detensors cannot adequately explain why it is that certain events or experiences appear to be present and not others. Tensors, on the other hand, cannot make full sense of the unique connection between presentness and experience. If tense is mind-independently real, it is not clear why experiences should be somehow more definitively present than the events which are their objects. The inadequacy of the two sides on this issue suggests that an approach which rejects the mind-dependent/independent dichotomy may be called for. Such an approach would be able to explain how it is that presentness is

uniquely related to experience while not reducing facts about presentness to facts about tenseless relations between mental events and the world.

1.3 The Experience of Temporal Becoming

Perhaps the most powerful evidence for a tensed, dynamic view of time is the fact that we experience events passing from future to present to past. As I wait in a car stopped at a traffic light, I anticipate the moment when the signal will change and the car will move. This event is experienced as approaching, as being in the near future. As the signal changes, my anticipation is fulfilled and the change becomes present to me. I may think to myself, “At last, *now* we are beginning to move!” After passing through the intersection, the changing of the signal and the beginning of the car’s motion are there for me as past. I can think back upon and “replay” in my memory these events which I have just lived through.

The tensed account of temporal becoming: the moving Now

As in the case of the presence of experience, the tensed account of such phenomena appears to be straightforward. As I wait for the light to change, the event of the light’s changing has the property or determination of being future. As the light changes, the event becomes present. Afterwards, when I think back upon it, the light’s changing is a past event. I experience temporal becoming—the passage of events from future to past—because the events themselves lose and gain tensed determinations (as well as *degrees* of those determinations—as time goes by, the light’s changing becomes *more and more* past). I experience the passage of time because time really does pass.

But once again, things are not as clear-cut as they seem for a tensed account. In fact, this straightforward, tensed explanation of the experience of becoming makes salient one of the most difficult questions faced by tenses. Is the idea of time passing in itself coherent? In order to explain the experience of temporal passage in terms of the real passage of tensed determinations, tenses seem forced to rely on the idea that there is some kind of spotlight or spark of presentness (often equated with actuality or existence) which “moves” along the ordered series of events or moments. It is because our experiencing activity “moves” along with this slice of presentness

that future events approach and past events recede from us. But is the notion of a “moving” present intelligible?. Tensors are faced with embarrassing questions such as whether the pure passage of time can speed up or slow down, as when we talk of one day passing more quickly than another? And even if the passage of time, the “moving” present, can’t speed up or slow down, doesn’t it still have to have a rate? Is the notion of moving or passing meaningful if the passage or movement has no rate?

Rates of movement or of change generally express the quantity that a certain measurable property such as spatial position or temperature changes with reference to the passage of time. The rate of the pure passage of time would thus specify how much time passes per unit of time-passing. In order to make sense of such a rate we might postulate a meta-time so that we could say, for example, that one second of time passes for every second of meta-time. But this move leads to a vicious regress since if meta-time is to be a genuinely temporal dimension it must have its own moving meta-now which would require a further time dimension, and so on.

Some have claimed that there is no problem with specifying the rate of the passage of time in terms of itself, and thus no need for meta-time at all. Michael Tooley, for example, argues that the question of how long it takes the present to pass through a unit of time is analogous to the question of how far something moves through space in covering a certain distance. To say that the present traverses one hour every hour is just like saying that the distance that an object moves in travelling one mile is one mile. In both cases, the answer to the rate question is analytic and so uninformative, but this doesn’t mean that the question is meaningless or absurd (1997, 320-21).

It seems to me, however, that such an argument loses sight of the fact that the notion of a rate (as well as the notions of motion, passage, and change) implies the comparison of two different dimensions. To ask what distance an object covers in travelling a mile is really just to ask how long a mile is. And yes the “analytic” answer is “one mile.” The reason that Tooley’s example seems to have something to do with rates of passage is that he asks his question about an object which does in fact move. But this motion is only true motion with a specifiable rate because the object’s position in *space* changes over *time*. The question as to what distance the object covers in going a mile makes no reference to the dimension of time. For this reason, the question reduces to one which has nothing to do with motion or change: How long is a mile? For the same reason, saying that an hour takes an hour to pass is really just to say that an hour is

an hour long. However, when tensors explain our experience of becoming through the notion of a moving present they are saying more than the fact that an hour is an hour long. Their model implies that there is a kind of passage which occurs *within* the temporal realm itself which is somehow analogous to the motion of an object through space *over time*. It is not enough to compare temporal distance to spatial distance in order to show that the idea of a moving Now with a rate is intelligible.

Other defenders of the moving present have suggested alternative ways that this motion might be assigned a rate. Notably, George Schlesinger has attempted to provide an account of the moving Now in terms of possible and actual worlds. He postulates the existence of a set of possible worlds which are identical except for the fact that each is actual during a different very short interval of time. The flow of time, then, consists in the becoming actual of one possible world after another. According to Schlesinger, the intervals during which different possible worlds are actual can, in principle, vary in length. The flow of time can thus be assigned a rate in terms of the number of possible worlds which become actual in a given period of time.¹²

This model is original and resourceful, but it is, I would argue, fatally implausible. The fact of the matter is that when we experience one moment and then another as being now, we do not experience these moments as belonging to, or *being*, completely different worlds. What recognizable meaning could “world” possibly have such that we only ever experience a world which is momentary? Furthermore, what kind of evidence could we possibly have for saying that we are in a different actual world than we were a moment ago, as opposed to saying that a new moment in the same world has become actual? Finally, can we even imagine what it would be like to experience different worlds being actual for different amounts of time?

If the tensor is denied the idea that the present moves at some rate, she is left to defend the idea that it is possible for the present to “move” from moment to moment without moving at any rate. Perhaps the pure passage of time is a special and fundamental kind of passage which provides a basis for the rates of all other motions but does not itself have a rate. While there is something appealing about this thought, it does not say much about how passage can still be passage without the possibility of being assigned a rate. Ultimately, to speak of passage or movement without a rate is to speak metaphorically. If the model of the moving Now is going to do any work in explaining our experience of temporal passage, it must be more than a metaphor.

¹² See Schlesinger 1994.

Nobody denies that our experience of temporal becoming makes it seem *as if* the present “moves” from moment to moment. The question is whether it is the literal passage of the present that accounts for this experience.

The tenseless account of the experience of temporal becoming: the moving subject

All this is not to say that the experience of temporal becoming does not present significant problems for the detenser. After all, the fact that we experience events as passing from future to present to past is the central plank in the tensor’s case. The challenge for the detenser is to somehow undermine or explain away this fact. Their general strategy for doing so has already become apparent in the discussions of McTaggart’s paradox and the presence of experience. This strategy is to develop a theory according to which we experience changing tenses not because moments or events themselves go from being future to present to past, or from non-actual to actual, or some such thing, but rather because they go from being *later than* to *simultaneous with* to *earlier than* our experiences of them. That is to say, detensers generally paint a picture according to which our experience of the tensed determinations of temporal items changes because we go from having experiences at one time to having experiences at another time. On their view, we experience changes in the tenses of temporal items as we “move” along from one event or moment to the next.

I want to argue here that this general strategy is not immune from problems similar to those faced by the doctrine of the moving present. Notice that in characterizing the detenser strategy I ended up saying that we “move” along from one moment to the next. This is the crux of the problem. Does it really make any more metaphysical sense to say that it is “we,” or “the subject,” or “consciousness” which “moves” *vis a vis* events or moments than it does to say that presentness, tense, or actuality does? I think the answer is no.

A detenser might respond that I am relying on a literal interpretation of the notion of “movement,” which I keep putting in scare quotes. Clearly the experiencing subject doesn’t move along the tenseless timeline of moments and events in the way that a car moves down the road. I grant this point completely. However, it is also the case that no tensor would admit that the “Now” moves along the timeline of events as a car moves down the road. The tensor’s problem is in making sense of the idea that there is a change in which moments or events are

present (and which are past and future) without this change being able to have a rate or some of the other normal characteristics of change. I think that the general detenser model faces a similar problem.

What is the detenser committed to in place of the idea that the “Now” occupies different temporal positions in some sort of regular, directed, and continuous way? She is committed, first of all, to the idea that our experiences are located at different times. This seems relatively uncontroversial. But is that enough to explain why we have the impression that things go from being future to present to past? No. For us to experience change in tense (even if tense itself is mind-dependent and unreal) we must go from having one experience to having another. That is to say, the conscious subject must be identified first with one particular experience of hers and then another. On a tenseless view, the only reason that an event would seem to go from appearing to be still in the future to appearing to be present is that I go from having an experience which is earlier than that event to having an experience which is cotemporal with that event. It is not enough that one of my experiences is located earlier than the event and one is cotemporal with it—that does not involve any apparent change. The apparent change comes in only because *I* go from having, or being identified with, one experience to the other.

The detenser might attempt to say that this is perfectly natural because time is directed from earlier to later. Since experience₁ is located at time t_1 and experience₂ at time t_2 , when it goes from being t_1 to t_2 , there is a change in which experience occurs and thus an apparent change in the tenses of events from the perspective of the subject. But here we return to the same problem we found in Oaklander’s account of the presence of experience. Tense is being smuggled in. What is meant by the phrase “when it goes from being t_1 to t_2 ”? This is like the notion of it *tenselessly* being a time. What could it mean for “it” to go from one time to another other than one time becoming present after the other? In order for the detenser to explain the appearance of temporal becoming, it is not enough that our experiences are located at different times. They are always located at these times. Rather, the conscious subject must be identified first with one experience and then another. Therefore, we have substituted the problem of the Moving Subject for the problem of the Moving Now. Instead of asking whether the Now moves along the timeline at a rate of one second per second we must ask whether the subject of experience moves along the timeline at such a rate.

I conclude, then, that both tenses and detenses face the vexing problem of how to conceptualize the seemingly metaphorical flow of time. Even though detenses deny that time really does flow, the model they rely upon to explain away the appearance of temporal becoming itself implies a kind of motion. Instead of time itself flowing, their arguments imply that mind flows through time. This is the consequence of thinking of tense as resulting from the perspective of a conscious subject located at different points along an objective time series (the B-series).

Ultimately, both tensed and tenseless theories of time make use of a notion of passage or flow of which they cannot give a satisfactory account. Is this flow merely metaphorical? If so, what aspects of the metaphor ground the metaphysical models? As was the case with the issues of McTaggart's Paradox and the presence of experience, it would seem that a more careful and detailed account of our experience of temporal becoming may be necessary to give a more satisfactory account of time. It is unlikely that the notion of time's flow can be adequately understood in terms of a really moving Now or in terms of the movement of the experiencing subject along the B-series. Therefore, a new framework for understanding the flow of time is desirable.

2.

Husserl's Account of the Perception of Duration and Succession

In order to determine how Husserl's theory of time-consciousness might shed light on some of the issues concerning our experience of time raised in the last chapter, we need to know what that theory is. This is perhaps easier said than done. Not only are there conflicting interpretations of Husserl's writings, but he himself often explicitly second-guesses his own conclusions. Not only that, but the texts that we will be considering are largely working manuscripts and lecture notes.

In order to keep our task focused and manageable, I will deal mostly with Husserl's early writings on time-consciousness: those included in John Brough's translation of *Husserliana* Volume X—*On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917). While there is a large volume of material from Husserl's later writings focused on time-consciousness,¹³ at least two well-known interpreters have argued that many of the core questions and positions to be found in Husserl's early work on time are carried over into these later writings.¹⁴

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the basic structure and guiding insights of Husserl's account of how it is that events or temporal objects, as he calls them, can appear in consciousness as extended through time and as succeeding and preceding one another. I then extend the discussion by trying to be precise about what Husserl means by presentness and pastness in various contexts. This leads us to discover some ambiguity and perhaps descriptive problems with the implications of Husserl's reflections for how we experience Nowness and the relationship between earlier/later directionality and tense in perceiving a temporal object. This

¹³ See in particular: *Die "Bernauer Manuskripte" über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/1918)*. *Husserliana*, vol. XXXIII, Ed Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001. And: *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1936)*. *Die C-Manuskripte*. Hua Mat VIII, Ed Dieter Lohmar. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006.

¹⁴ See Brough 2010, 22-25 and Zahavi 2004.

raises some questions about how what the participants in the debate about tense call A- and B-properties might relate to one another.

2.1 The Basics: Retention, Primal Impression, and Protention

Husserl famously analyzes the experience of a temporal object in terms of three interwoven intentional moments he calls retention, primal impression, and protention. These temporal syntheses or horizons are meant to account for the way that an enduring process or event such as a sounding melody, a passing car, or a deep breath, can be perceived as a coherent temporal object which is spread out over time. At the core of Husserl's analysis lies his recognition that, in order genuinely to *perceive* duration and succession, we must be directly conscious of not only the most strictly present phase of a temporal object, but also past and future phases of it.

As I listen to a short melodic phrase, the tones build upon one another as the phrase unfolds over time. If I focus my attention upon the temporal aspects of my experience as I listen, I notice, according to Husserl, that the first tone sounds and is then replaced by the second, which gives way to the third, etc. As the third sounds, I hear it as sounding "now," while the first and second tones are just past. However, according to Husserl, though the second and third tones are given as "just past" as opposed to "now," they are nonetheless genuinely there for consciousness along with the currently occurring third tone. If they were not, I would experience a single tone, or, perhaps, three disconnected tones, but not the unfolding of a melody. Similarly, the tones which have yet to sound are part of my present perception of the melody, in however indeterminate a manner. At the third tone, I would not hear the melody as a melody in the middle of its sounding if the coming tones were not intended by me in some fashion.

It should be emphasized that Husserl claims that my retentional (and protentional) consciousness of what is just past is genuinely *perceptual*—it is, as he puts it, *original* consciousness of the past. As such, retention can be distinguished from recollection, which is an unoriginal, representational consciousness of the past. If my retention (as the third tone sounds) of the first and second tones, *presents* the past to me, an explicit recollection of these tones at a later time *re-presents* the past. This distinction becomes clear when it is noted that a previously

heard melody which I explicitly recall and re-present to myself will come with its own retentional horizon.

Since retention is distinguished from primal impression by the fact that it constitutes what is just past as opposed to what is now, Husserl's analysis implies that, in some sense, we genuinely perceive what is past. Perception is not restricted to the present. However, the exact sense in which this is true for Husserl is not entirely clear. In addition, there is a tension between Husserl's emphasis on the original, perceptual, and presentative nature of retention and his insistence on the importance of primal impression in constituting what is now, actual, and the most original source of everything sensed or perceived. We can better understand the achievements, as well as the shortcomings, of Husserl's structural analysis of time-consciousness by trying to become clearer about the relationship between primal impression and retention, as well as about the different ways that concepts such as perception and presentness function in the analysis.

Three temporally significant senses of perception

We can start by noting that Husserl admits that the term "perception" can signify different things when it comes to the consciousness of temporal objects. Husserl employs the term at least three ways. At times, Husserl restricts the reference of "perception" such that only what is "now" is truly perceived. He writes, for example, "At any given instant . . . only the point of duration characterized as now is perceived in the fully proper sense" (Husserl 1991, 27). And he sometimes explicitly contrasts that which is retained with that which is perceived (1991, 34). On the other hand, Husserl acknowledges that the object of perception can be expanded to include any temporal object which includes a phase which is taken to be occurring now: "We speak of perception in connection with the tone-duration that reaches into the actually present now and say that the tone, the enduring tone, is perceived" (1991, 27). But the third way in which Husserl employs the term contrasts sharply with the first two, as he himself recognizes. As indicated earlier, he sometimes uses the term to refer to whatever is originally intuited, and therefore applies it to that which is retained, the "just past" itself. He writes, for example, of a melody that has ceased, "Its being just past is not merely something meant but a given fact, given

itself and therefore ‘perceived’” (1991, 38). And he remarks, “We have, then, characterized the *past* itself as *perceived*” (41).

One might claim that the question of how Husserl employs the term “perception” is a purely semantic one, that what Husserl is saying is clear enough, even if he recognizes that there is a question about how the word should be used. This is true to a certain degree. However, the ambiguity about how the term should be employed in the context of Husserl’s theory points to difficult questions about how best to interpret certain aspects of that theory.

To begin with, we can ask in what sense the just-past is intuited originally, or even “perceived,” according to Husserl. We have already noted that retention does not re-present the past in the way that recollection does. But can we really say that the past is something made present to consciousness? And, if so, in what sense?

Perception of the just-past

It is clear that, for Husserl, what is constituted in retention—a just-past note, for example—is not presented in the way that the “now-point” of a temporal object is presented in primal impression. According to Husserl, in attending to the experience of a temporal object unfolding before me, I can focus upon the moment of pure newness, the “the living source-point of being” (1991, 71), as he puts it. I can attend to the ever-changing moment of production, of welling-up, in which something is “impressed” upon me for the first time, before it begins to fade into pastness. If the retentive field is “perceived,” and even “present” in some sense, it must be in a sense distinguishable from the newness of the now-point.

We need to be careful here about the distinction between what is retained and the retaining activity itself—between the noematic and the noetic. There is a sense, for Husserl, in which the retaining activity, the noetic side of retention, can be described as present. He writes, for example, “But when the consciousness of the tone-now, the primal sensation, passes over into retentive memory, this memory itself is a now in turn—namely, it belongs to a new tone-now. That is, the memory is given itself; it is actually present; it is something present “in person” (1991, 338-9). When Husserl says that the memory is present, he means that the intending activity of retention is present even though that which is constituted by it is just-past. As I hear the third tone in a melodic phrase, I can focus my attention on the fact that the first and

second tones are given as just-past. But I can also focus on the fact that this “being given as past” is something that appears to occur along with the tone which is now sounding—the givenness of that which is just-past is itself “now.”

There are two points which need to be made about the presentness of retention just described. First of all, Husserl complicates matters significantly towards the end of his early period of writing about time-consciousness. At the end of the same sketch quoted above in support of the presence of retention, Husserl changes his mind. He famously claims that “*the consciousness of the now is not itself now*” (1991, 345). And neither is the retentional consciousness of the just-past itself now. Husserl concludes that retention, primal impression, and protention are not themselves properly temporal, they are not objects in immanent time. This conclusion points directly to the very difficult problem of how to think about the time-constituting flow of consciousness which, according to Husserl, constitutes time but is itself pre-temporal and even pre-phenomenal. There certainly seems to be a sense in which my retaining activity belongs together with my intending of whatever note is currently occurring. But Husserl cautions that we must be careful about levels of constitution here. In any case, this problem will be addressed later in this chapter.

The second, more relevant, point to be made here is that it is not the presentness of the noetic side of retention that we are concerned with when we ask about how what is constituted as just-past can be “perceived,” given in original intuition, and, in some sense, “presented.” We are concerned rather with the noematic, with the phases of the temporal object itself intended as just-past.

In order to answer the noematic question we must return to Husserl’s motivation for describing retention as original intuition. Husserl begins from the fact that we perceive temporal objects as enduring unities. It is a fact for him that we experience duration, succession, motion, and change directly—we do not make indirect inferences about them based upon explicit memories or anything else (“*The consciousness of succession* is consciousness that gives its object originally: it is “perception” of this succession” (1991, 45).) In order for this to be possible, it would seem that there must be some temporal thickness to what is present to me of the temporal object I am perceiving. When I hear a short melody or a spoken phrase, the first tones and words are there for me as I hear the last tones or words in a way in which what happened last week is not. When I see a bird fly by my window, I see it in a transition from here

to there—the beginning of its flight is given to me along with the ending, it is given as pointing towards the ending, which itself is given as a fulfillment, a consummation, of that beginning.

Near and far retention

These facts about experience suggest that there is a difference between retentions which constitute some immediately past phase of a present temporal object and those which constitute the phases of a long-past object. If the beginning of the musical phrase I am hearing is really there for me in a qualitatively different way than the melody I heard last week, then we need to make a distinction within the retentional field between “near” and “far” retention. Husserl himself does suggest such a distinction in his writings on time-consciousness. He writes, “. . . in addition to the intuitive part, there belongs to the sphere of primary memory [retention] an empty part that extends very much further.” (1991, 64). And he distinguishes at times between living and empty retentions.

If we make a distinction between near and far retention, then we can attribute to the phases of the temporal object held in near retention a kind of presence which does not apply to whatever is constituted by far, empty retention. The field of immediate just-pastness would thereby be a kind of in-between—sharing a sense of being past with whatever is emptily retained, but a sense of living presence with the now-point constituted in primal impression.

But two difficult questions arise here. First of all, can we be clearer about how it is possible to experience something livingly retained as both past and present? Is there some change of focus by which we can experience the first phases of a motion as both part of the indivisible, unitarily perceived present motion, and also as “past” in comparison to the ultimate newness of the “now-point”? Secondly, how are we to conceptualize the boundaries—if there are any—between near and far, living and empty retention; as well as between near retention and primal impression? Clearly these moments cannot be separated or isolated from one another. Husserl is very clear that the idea of a primal impression without retention or vice versa is nonsensical. Similarly we could not have either empty or living retention without the other. Nevertheless, in identifying these moments as structural aspects of time-consciousness, we must be able to answer the question of how exactly to think about the distinctions and boundaries between them.

2.2 The Original Temporal Field

Husserl at one point puts forward the idea that there is a limited “original temporal field” that “one might dare to assert always has the same extension” (1991, 32). And, at another point, he speaks of an “immediate temporal field,” which, he implies, includes multiple now-points (90). One might suppose that this original or immediate temporal field corresponds to what is livingly retained (in addition to the now-point and, presumably, whatever is immediately protended). If it is of some more or less certain extension, then what determines what falls inside of this extension?

The idea that there is a fixed extension to the immediate temporal field implies that we constantly experience a certain temporal width in original perception and presentness (taken in a broad sense which includes the “just-past”). Such a width or extension might be taken to correspond to some interval in objective time, though, of course, we are dealing with an immanent and not fully objectified temporal field at this point. In any case, the idea is that there is a more or less well-defined and constant “distance” through which the phases of a temporal object are held in living retention, throughout which they are part of what is immediately perceived, before they become constituted by empty retentions which are not involved in the same way in original perception and presentness.

Do we experience such a phenomenon? In order to answer this question, we need to get clearer about the scale we are talking about. Imagine watching a double play in a baseball game on television. The pitcher winds up and releases the pitch; the ball is hit sharply on the ground to the shortstop who flips it to the second baseman who has just arrived at the bag; the second baseman catches the ball, pulls it out of his glove while pivoting and fires off a throw to first; the first baseman stretches out, catches the ball and looks to the umpire who emphatically punches the batter out.

If I am a baseball fan watching this unfold, the whole event is set off for me as a single, unified temporal object. When the second baseman has the ball in his glove, the sharply hit ground ball is still there for me as the beginning of the double-play which is just now reaching its middle. There is a sense of beginning, unfolding, and completion that I experience as I watch the play. Nevertheless, as I watch the first baseman catching the ball, the way in which the hitting of

the ground ball is still present to me seems to be qualitatively different than the way in which the beginning of the throw from the second baseman is present. While the ground ball is clearly part of the presently unfolding temporal object I am experiencing, I can also take it to be something in the past as I watch the ball being caught by the first baseman. With the proper turn of attention, I can notice that the ground ball phase of the event is completed even as I experience the catch at first base as a completion of what began with the ground ball.

It is much less clear, on the other hand, that I can attend to the beginning of the second baseman's throw being past while I am seeing the first baseman's catch. In some sense, there just isn't "time" for this. And yet I clearly experience the throw from second to first as having some kind of temporal spread. Specifically, I experience the throwing of the ball as "earlier" than the catching of the ball at first base. While one might argue that this "must" mean that I experience the throwing as just-past when I experience the catching as present, it seems truer to experience to me to say that I simply experience the throw as a single motion with an earlier and later but no directly experienced present and past. It is true that, upon reflection, I may conclude that the beginning of the throw was past when the catching was present. But the senses of "past" and "present" here, I would argue, are merely derived from the assumption that any event A which is earlier than event B must be past when B is present. When I watch the throw, I do not directly experience this kind of pastness and presentness, but only the sense of earlier and later, the sense of temporal directedness, which accompanies the throw.

The extent of the original temporal field

If this is the case, we can ask what the object of living, near retention is in such an experience—how far does the original temporal field extend? The response that the field, as my experience of the double play finishes, includes the entire unified temporal object (all the way back to the hitting of the ground ball) fits with certain of Husserl's indications. First of all, Husserl often mentions the unity of the enduring melody and suggests that as long as a phase of the melody is present, the entire melody is perceived in some sense, and the beginning phases of the melody are livingly retained. In addition, this "wider" interpretation of the original temporal field fits with the idea that whatever is held in near retention is experienced as just-past, even while it is a part of the currently experienced whole. We could not say this with as much

confidence if the original temporal field were restricted to a scale corresponding to the throw from second to first.

However, the idea of this kind of “wide” temporal field creates a number of problems and questions. First of all, if what is livingly retained is tied to the unity and completeness of the temporal object being perceived, then the original temporal field could not be held to have a constant extension. Its extension would depend not only upon the duration of the particular process being experienced, but also upon how much of that process had already been taken to occur. Furthermore, tying the extent of the temporal field to the object perceived would seem to make it deeply dependent upon a number of contextual factors. What I take to be a unified temporal object clearly depends not only upon the content of the process that I am experiencing, but also upon what I happen to be attending to and interested in, what is going on in the background, and what kinds of relevant experiences I have had in the past. Is the beginning pitch or the umpire’s gesture part of the double play? If I have not seen much baseball, would I even take the double play to be a single event? Can’t I take an entire at-bat to be a single temporal object? How could one specify the differences between a double-play and an at-bat in this regard?

One might hold that it is clearly the case, and not something problematical, that the immediate temporal field is dependent upon the content and context of the temporal object experienced. This may be true. However, this conception of the original temporal field appears to run counter to Husserl’s insistence that he is describing and analyzing the *formal* structure of all temporal experience. To give perceptual content, context, and subjective attention and interest too great a role would seem to throw doubt upon the formal nature of the analysis.

Another problem that arises for any interpretation which ties the original temporal field to the unity of the temporal object being experienced is the fact that experience does not seem to be limited to clearly defined temporal objects. When I am lying in bed, letting thoughts run through my head before falling asleep, time certainly seems to be passing, but it is not clear that there is any well-defined temporal object which I am perceiving. In such a situation, would there not still have to be an original temporal field of a certain extent? How can we describe the contours of such a field without a temporal object to help define it?

A “narrow” temporal field?

In order to avoid some of the problems raised by the idea of a “wide” temporal field, we might try to interpret the original temporal field as narrower, as describing something on a smaller temporal scale. In the case of the double play, for example, we might take the original temporal field to include the throw from second to first, but not the entire play. In this case, the original temporal field might be defined by the shortest “now” that we can experience as such. This “now” would have to be not point-like, but rather thick with a duration corresponding to the sense of earlier and later which attaches to the throw as it is perceived.

The advantage of interpreting Husserl’s conception of an original temporal field in this manner is that it fits with his speculation that this field might have a constant extension. It does seem to be the case that there is some more or less unvarying spread of experienced time within which an event can only be experienced to be present as opposed to both present and past, even if the event is still structured according to an earlier/later directionality. The subjective length of the smallest possible present experienceable does not appear to depend upon whether one is watching a double play, listening to a melody, or watching a dancer move across the stage.

However, there is at least one way in which the idea that the original temporal field is “narrow” clearly does not fit with Husserl’s description of it. A narrow temporal field is meant to correspond to whatever phase of the temporal object *cannot* be concretely experienced as past as opposed to present. But if, as Husserl maintains, retention is responsible for the original constitution of the past, then retention could not be directly involved in the constitution of a narrow original temporal field. Rather, according to Husserl’s schema, primal impression would have to be responsible for the constitution of such a temporal field, consisting, as it does, of a “thick” *now*. Since Husserl implies that whatever is retained as just-past forms part of the immediate temporal field, the idea of a “narrow” field, restricted to a (thick) now-phase, does not fit well with his description.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the idea of something like a spanned “now,” experienced as stretching from earlier to later, could not fit into a broadly Husserlian theory of time-consciousness. Rather than corresponding to the “original temporal field” Husserl occasionally mentions, such a contoured “now” could, for example, be the correlate of primal

impression. This possibility, however, raises thorny issues about the way that Husserl characterizes primal impression.

2.3 The Width of the “Now”

To begin with, the idea that the “now” constituted by primal impression has some kind of “width” such that anything like earlier/later could be experienced within it contrasts with Husserl’s description of this “now” as a “source-point” or “tone-point individual” (1991, 70).

Husserl, of course, recognizes that there is no “concrete” experience of a now-point. Primal impression and the now-point constituted by it are abstractions. Primal impression, retention, and protention—along with their objective correlates—are *dependent* intentional moments. This means more than that one cannot, of course, experience a now-point apart from there being something given as just-past as well as a sense of an on-coming future (we cannot stop time’s flow so as to experience isolated moments out of context). It means also that one cannot even *conceive* of a primal impression and now-point without retention, protention, and their correlates. A now-point can only be what it is in the being pushed-back into retention of the content which came before it and in its giving way to the impending protended content. The primal impression can be what it is only through its connection to the retentions and protentions which accompany it. It is not merely that no one has ever experienced a now apart from a just-past and an approaching future, but that no one could say what it could possibly mean or be like to experience such a now-moment.

Nevertheless, Husserl does clearly maintain that primal impression, though it is abstract and dependent, is precisely that which is responsible for the constitution of the point-like sense of newness and originality which defines that which is most strictly now. According to him, it would not make sense to speak of anything being retained or held onto in consciousness, without recognizing a productive, originating moment, extensionless in its ideal limit, responsible for the being there of that which is held onto.¹⁵ The constitution of any kind of temporal spread beyond the ideal limit of such an extensionless now-point must, strictly speaking, involve retention. Husserl’s theory does not seem to allow for a strict “now”—something which is constituted

¹⁵ “If the primal consciousness were not on hand, no retention would even be conceivable . . .” (1991, 123).

purely by primal impression—to have any thickness or spread. Despite the fact that Husserl’s reflections on time-consciousness are well-known for their extension of the reach of the present—primarily through recognizing that we cannot be *presently conscious* only of a single instant if we are to experience temporal objects—his insistence on the *ideally* originating, productive character of that which is constituted by primal impression requires that one recognize a core, point-like now as an element of temporal experience.

The tension between our reflections and Husserl’s position was created by our recognition that there is a scale at which we perceive phases of temporal objects to be characterized by relations of earlier and later but not by pastness/presentness. This reflection challenges the idea that whatever phase of a temporal object is experienced as most present, as strictly “now,” must not have any sort of temporal spread or articulation. Ultimately, however, even this challenge to what seems to be Husserl’s understanding of primal impression and its function, can perhaps accommodate some of his central insights in this area.

Husserl, we saw, maintains that there must be a moment of original temporal production, in which some content is given to consciousness which can then be retained. The idea that the smallest now-phase that we can directly perceive is characterized by an earlier/later directionality does not necessarily conflict with the notion that the moment of newness and originality in the temporal object must be given as “now” through primal impression. Rather, what becomes questionable is the idea that this absolutely new and productive “now” must be (even if only as an ideal limit) a point-like and temporally extensionless “now.” Instead one might suppose that what is retained, what is constantly being pushed back into just-pastness, is precisely a “now” with some “width,” a “now” which is experienced as involving a spannedness corresponding to the earlier/later relation. One might suppose that temporal spanning goes all the way down, as it were, that we do not experience anything like a point-like now, but only something more like the “specious” present discussed by William James, among others.

In the case of the double play, for example, we might conclude that I do not, strictly speaking, experience the catching of the ball at first base to be “now” as distinct from my experience of the ball being thrown. Rather, I experience the entire throw and catch as a single movement, a single temporal phase, which is presented to me already articulated into an earlier and a later direction. It is this whole directed now-phase which is then *presently* there for me as

just-past when I see the umpire punch out the runner and experience the conclusion of the double play.

The question we are left with, then, is not whether a moment of temporal newness and origination is included in the experience of a temporal object, but rather to what degree such a moment is extensionless and point-like as opposed to being infused, even as an ideal limit, with an earlier/later directionality. Do we really find in the experience of a process, motion, event, or enduring a point-like “nowness” which, in its ideal limit, is an instantaneous time-slice? Or, is it rather the case that in reflecting upon my experience of any phase of a temporal object I find what one might call an incipient sense of width, of spread, which corresponds to the distinction between earlier and later? It seems to me that the latter is closer to the truth.

The implications of a “wide” now

If we continue this line of thinking, according to which there is a direct perception of something like the distinction between earlier and later in any imaginable now-phase of a temporal object, what consequences does it have for our understanding of Husserl’s theory of time-consciousness?

First of all, it adds an element which Husserl does not often focus upon. This is the relationship between the experience of temporal phases as earlier/later as opposed to past, present, and future. It seems as though Husserl for the most part assumes that there is a pretty clear transformation between these categories. That is to say, the earlier/later relation is taken to be an objectified version of relations that come to light through the experience of past, present, and future. So, for example, when we reflect on the fact that tone A appeared to be just-past when tone B appeared to be now, then we conclude that tone A is earlier than tone B. But, if it is the case that earlier/later relations are experienced directly as belonging to any phase of a temporal object, even, perhaps, if that phase is taken to be strictly “now” and constituted by primal impression, then the relationship between past, present, and future and earlier/later is more complex. We are faced with difficult questions such as how to relate earlier/later as it is experienced in a now-phase to more remote, extended earlier/later distinctions which intersect with the past, present, and future in different ways. Are there distinctions to be made between levels of objectivation when it comes to earlier/later relations? Etc.

There are further problems raised by the idea that there is an inescapable thickness to the now beyond that which is attributable to the retentional horizon of the just-past. For example, the notion of a “narrow” original temporal field, or a “wide” now-moment, suggests that the temporal characteristics of events or enduring objects are experienced according to some sort of inescapable interval structure. If I cannot help but experience the throw from second to first, for example, as a kind of unit—as a single movement covering a single time-span stretching from earlier to later—then it would seem that our experience of time is not continuous in the way we normally assume. After all, why must I experience the temporal spread as stretching from the beginning to the end of the throw and not beginning somewhere in the throw’s middle? Can’t I arbitrarily try to focus in upon any particular moment, any particular “piece” of content within that temporal spread? These questions raise again not only difficult problems about the relationship between form, content, and attention when it comes to the consciousness of the temporal attributes of objects, but also fundamental problems about how to understand both the continuity, and the lack thereof, we find in our experience of time.

A different role for retention?

The idea that there is an ineliminable temporal thickness to what is experienced as now, a thickness which corresponds more to the distinction between earlier and later than to that between past and present, also raises the question of how to think about retention in relation to these temporal distinctions. In particular, should one think of retention as having a role in constituting the “earlierness” of the “thick” now?

It was noted that Husserl clearly takes retention to be concerned with the constitution of what is past, and that this implies that primal impression would have to be responsible for the constitution of even a “thick” now, according to his schema. However, it does not seem that Husserl’s understanding of primal impression would allow one to think of it as constituting a temporal phase with an ineliminable temporal spread, with some kind of articulation into earlier and later directions. If something is to be constituted as temporally earlier, as coming before something else, and thus as being part of a temporal succession, must not something like retention be operating?

If what is part of a “thick” now is not given as past in any sense, then for retention to be involved in its temporal constitution, it would have to play a role somewhat different from that prescribed for it by Husserl. At a certain scale of temporal experience, the retentional and protentional moments of temporal intentionality would have to account for the earlier and later phases constituted as aspects of the presentness of the given object, as opposed to the past and future profiles of that object.

The question of the difference between the constitution of earlier and later phases as opposed to past and future phases of temporal objects is a difficult one. What is the difference between, for example, taking a briefly sounding tone to be spread out from earlier to later and taking the tone to be made up of past, present, and future profiles or phases? To begin with there is an ineliminable reference to the *temporal position of the experiencer* in talk of past, present, and future in a way there is not in the terms “earlier” and “later,” or “before” and “after” for that matter. If some phase of a sounding tone is experienced to be past, for example, it means that it has gone by; it has receded, been pushed-back, from the temporal position which I now occupy. If, on the other hand, one phase or aspect of a tone is given as earlier than another, this does not imply anything about what temporal perspective I have on the tone—whether I am earlier or later than that phase is not immediately evident.

However, since our perspective is phenomenological here, and since we are discussing the constitution *for consciousness* of earlier and later, there is, of course, some reference to the temporal position of the subject. When I experience a briefly sounding tone stretching from earlier to later, I also experience the entire tone to be present. Thus, there is no constitution here of earlier and later without the constitution of past, present, and future. If a phase of a temporal object is experienced to be present, this can only be in relation to a past which has gone before and a future which approaches. What we have been suggesting, is that an earlier/later directionality may be constituted *within* the “now,” within the present phase of the temporal object, not completely *apart* from past, present, and future.

Nonetheless, the lack of immediate reference to the temporal position of the subject when it comes to earlier/later gives us a clue about the constitutional differences in experiencing a tone or throw to be articulated into earlier and later as opposed past, present, and future phases. Even if the tone or throw is experienced as present at the same time that it is given with an earlier/later directionality, the earlier/later relation is given from the “outside,” ecstatically, as it were. It is

given all at once. There is a kind of finishedness and unity to the perceived earlier/later relation which there is not in the perceived past, present, and future profiles of a temporal object. To retain part of a melody as past, while part of it is protended as future and part of it is given as now, is to be at a certain point in the unfolding of the melody, looking both backwards and forwards, as it were. It is to take up a position *within* the time-span of the temporal object, with some of it being already finished and some of it yet to come. The experience of an earlier/later dimensionality within the strict present must take that relation of earlier and later as a whole which it somehow encompasses, rather than as two directions leading away from it, so to speak.

In light of this, we cannot think of retention and protention as constituting the earlier and the later, or the before and after, in the way that Husserl describes them as constituting the just-past and the about-to-arrive. When it comes to the just-past phases of a temporal object, for example, we are to think of each particular past phase as retained in consciousness at a certain moment and then, subsequently, pushed back further into the past as a new now-moment emerges out of the protended future and pushes the previous now-moment into being retained as just-past. When it comes to the earlier and later phases of a tone which is given as wholly present, however, we cannot think of a certain earlier phase as given first, and then pushed back “into the earlier” as a later phase comes to givenness. Or, at least, we could only reconstruct such a description after the fact and by making use of assumptions about the relationship between objective succession and the experience of earlier and later. Almost by definition, if a tone is experienced as having earlier and later phases within a single “now,” these phases cannot be experienced one after the other, since this would require something being given as now and then passing to not-now.

But how, then, could something like retention play a role in the constitution of earlier and later phases of a brief tone or throw? It cannot do so if we think of retentions as corresponding one-to-one with individual “earlier” phases of the experienced tone or throw. Rather, it seems that we would need to think of retention in terms of a retentional *dimension* of that consciousness which constitutes what is experienced as being now—and, correspondingly, an earlier aspect or “direction” on the side of the phase of the temporal object constituted as now. The earlier aspect of the throw from second to first is only “retained” insofar as it is experienced as having suggested and pointed towards what came after it. Similarly, the later part of the throw is only experienced as later insofar as it is that which was pointed towards by the earlier part of the

throw. This entire complex of mutual reference and implication is given somehow all at once. I do not have any *experience* of successively retaining each phase of the throw I am seeing, but, rather, when I reflect on having seen the throw, I find that I can attend to the way that it was given with a sense of earlier/later directionality constituted by the way the beginning of the throw prefigured the end, and the end of the throw was given as holding onto and fulfilling that very prefiguring.

According to such a view, I cannot describe the most basic, small-scale experiences of temporal extension and succession from a perspective which situates itself within that extension—a perspective which sits, so to speak, at the now-point, looking backward over the retained past phases of a temporal object and forward towards the protended future phases, and which then takes stock of the changes that occur as time flows and future phases become present and then past. Rather, I can only describe the experience of the throw from second to first by looking back on that consciousness which constituted it in its wholeness. That consciousness may be said to have both a retentional and a protentional dimension. The retentional dimension accounts for the way in which all of the throw, except for the ideal limit of its starting point, is given as later only as a fulfillment of the held-onto “earlier” which pointed towards it. And the protentional dimension accounts for this very pointing-towards-fulfillment which gives any given phase of the throw a sense of being earlier in relation to that which it had pointed towards as later.

Ultimately, it may not be possible to integrate this quite different understanding of retention and protention into Husserl’s theory of time-consciousness. For one thing, if retention and protention are thought of as constituting earlier and later aspects of the *now-phase* of a temporal object, then they would have to have a radically different relation to primal impression than Husserl envisioned. They could not function *alongside* primal impression, as it were, to constitute the past and future horizons of the now-point. Nevertheless, we can hope that this exploration of the consequences of recognizing the immediate perception of earlier/later features on a very small temporal scale has been useful. If nothing else, we have become aware of some of the difficulties which arise in trying to get clear about the functions of retention and primal impression in certain concrete examples of temporal experience.

Degrees of presentness

We entered into the discussion of the “original temporal field,” and the reflection upon primal impression and the width of the “now,” in order to gain insight into the question of in what sense that which is constituted by retention is still present. What have we learned?

First, we should be mindful of distinctions which have emerged regarding retention and primal impression. When we ask about the presentness of that which is retained, we need to be clear about what kind of retention we are talking about. First of all, there is the distinction between ‘near’ and ‘far’ retention. Far retention retains things “emptily” as Husserl puts it. What is retained by far retention is not perceived, and it is not present in any meaningful sense of the word. What is emptily retained is only there for consciousness (and thus “present” in a weak sense) insofar as it can be reawakened and intuited again in a reproductive act of recollection, and perhaps also insofar as we can identify the way that past experiences affect our present ones through things like habit and disposition. But this kind of presentness is not presentness in *distinction* from pastness. What is emptily retained can be said to be present only in the sense that the past is always also present. The past is always there for us, affecting us in the present in various often unnoticed ways. But we will have to turn to near retention to find something that is retained and yet marked by a presentness which is more than the presentness of all that is past.

Even within Husserl’s concept of near, living retention, we have seen that there may be distinctions to be made. Whether or not we think of the “original temporal field” as wide or narrow, we can distinguish between the way that, as the first baseman catches the ball, the beginning of the double-play is present and the way that the beginning of the final throw is present. In the first case, we are dealing with a retention which is still living in the sense that what it constitutes belongs to the currently perceived temporal object. What is retained is a moment of that which is unfolding before us now, in the present. It is a just-past phase of the currently perceived temporal object. The profiles or phases constituted by such intermediate retentions are still living in a way in which the baseball game I saw yesterday is not. I must hold the beginning of the double play in consciousness together with the ending of the double play in order to experience the entire thing as a unified and ordered event. That which is just-past does

not need to be reawakened out of the depths of consciousness in order for it to be presented to me—it is an integral part of what is currently being presented.

And yet, according to Husserl, that which is retained as just-past is still to be distinguished from the most original temporal presence, from the point-like now of the temporal object constituted in primal impression. We experience the just-past as still living, as still current somehow, and, yet, also as already having passed by—it is part of what is perceived, of what is intuited, but it is the past part. This view suggests that the past is not only present in the sense that it is always in a present moment that we remember something from the past. It is not only that the past is always given to me in some now. Rather, there is a transitional state in which phases of a temporal object are experienced as both now and not-now, as passed by and held onto—this is the perception, the original and immediate intuition of the past.

When it comes to describing the experience of something like the throw from second to first, we have seen that it is questionable whether anything like Husserl's conception of retention is really involved. Nevertheless, it is perhaps important to recognize that there may be some quality of temporal spread, some nascent distinction between early and late, between before and after, which is given as wholly present. If this is the case, then we can identify an originary presentness, which is distinguished (if only abstractly) from the secondary presentness of a phase of a temporal object livingly retained as just-past, which nevertheless is not instantaneous or point-like. From such a point of view, one might recognize that earlier/later or before/after features of temporal objects are given with a present immediateness which cannot be reduced to the relations *between* a constituted past, present, and future. In such a case, one is faced with the difficult question of describing the kind of all-at-once and yet temporally spread quality which characterizes such a thick originary presentness. In order to understand the experience of such a presentness, we cannot think of moments of conscious intending matching up one-to-one with moments of now-content as time flows on in its succession. Rather, there is an encompassing, standing-outside aspect to the moment of conscious intending which constitutes a thick now, and this calls for further clarification.

Despite the clarification we have achieved concerning different possible types of retention and how they relate to primal impression and to the constitution of presentness, many questions remain. What makes the different types and degrees of presentness we have identified all deserve to be called by the same name? And how do they relate to the idea of an objective,

“actual” present? How does the immediate perception of earlier and later features of temporal objects relate to the objective ordering of moments and events according to relations of earlier and later? Perhaps most perplexingly, how are we to reconcile the idea that, at some level, temporal objects are experienced through unified, indivisible fields of temporal spread with the seeming continuity and formal quality of the flow of time?

In the next chapter, we turn from the constitution of objects within immanent time to the two other levels of temporal constitution identified by Husserl: the higher-level objective time of empirical being, and the lower-level absolute time-constituting flow. These areas of phenomenological investigation shed some light on certain questions raised in this chapter, but they also open up new horizons in the phenomenological investigation of time which are crucial to understanding to how Husserl’s work relates to the contemporary debate about the reality of tense.

3.

Levels of Temporal Constitution in Husserl: Objective Time and the Absolute Flow

Our task in this chapter is to explore two further important directions in Husserl's thought about time-consciousness. First of all, there is the constitution of higher levels of temporal objectivity than we have considered so far. In particular, we must consider the constitution of the one single homogeneous objective series of temporal locations and, perhaps, the idea of a fully objective and transcendent present which may come with it. Secondly, we must turn to the temporality of our experiencing activity, to the noetic structure of time-consciousness itself and the most fundamental levels of temporal constitution. In this direction lie Husserl's ideas of the living present and the absolute self-constituting flow of time. Thus, we need to investigate both higher and lower levels of time-constitution.

Up to this point, we have focused on Husserl's attempt to describe how it is that the duration and succession of temporal objects can be constituted in consciousness. However, we need now to call attention to the fact that the objects and the levels of constitution that we have been focusing on have been limited in very particular ways. First of all, we should remember that when we have considered tones, melodic phrases, double-plays, throws, etc. we have done so only from a very specific point of view. Not only are we trying to operate within Husserl's phenomenological reduction—and thus assume nothing about what “really” exists and have no recourse to explanations which rely upon what we take for granted in the natural attitude—but we have also been taking the temporal objects discussed in their purely immanent aspects. Thus, we have been concerned only with the constitution of the temporal aspects of their appearance as seen or heard objects, completely apart from any question of their constitution as transcendent physical objects. We have asked only how it is that I hear the tone as spread out through time, not how it is that I take the tone to be a vibration in the air emanating from a plucked string and fit into the causal nexus of a surrounding physical world.

In addition, we have focused upon the way that the temporal characteristics of immanent temporal objects—such as a tone as heard or a throw as seen—are constituted through interrelated moments of the acts of consciousness which intend them. We have not asked how those acts themselves, and their various moments, are constituted in turn.

Constitution in general

Before we get into the details of higher and lower levels of temporal constitution, perhaps something should be said about the role of constitutional levels in general in Husserlian phenomenology. The concept of “constitution” is central to Husserl’s work and yet it is very difficult to define. There are articles, chapters, and entire books devoted to explicating it.¹⁶ It is generally recognized to be an “operative” concept, which cannot be given a sharp definition but is foundational for other concepts as well as open to extension and revision based upon discoveries made through its application. We will certainly not attempt a definition here. We can say, however, that constitution generally refers to the accomplishments of consciousness in producing, bringing about, or revealing various levels of objectivities and meanings. Thus, we can ask, for example, how a physical object is constituted through the various perceptual and proprioceptive acts in which we become conscious of it. Or we can ask about how the meaning of a spoken sentence is constituted through acts of hearing sounds, and acts of understanding and synthesis by which those sounds are taken to be words combined in a certain unity of expression.

It is of vital importance that different levels of constitution and objectification are built or founded upon one another. So, for example, in the natural attitude, I take the desk before me to be a physical object in the world, there for other people just as much as it is for me, as affording certain practical possibilities such as having a computer placed on it for typing, and as having certain cultural and personal significances. The constitution of the desk as such an object presupposes the constitution of many lower-level objective realms and meanings. For example, taking the desk to be an object in the physical world presupposes the constitution of both time and space, as well as the constitution of the lived body itself. Taking the desk to be there for others and to have various personal and cultural significance presupposes the constitution of the self, others, and culture.

¹⁶ See, for example, Welton 2000, 165-198 and Sokolowski 1970.

3.1 The Constitution of the One Objective Time

We are now in a better position to appreciate one of Husserl's objectives in discussing time-consciousness. He asks how it is that time as a single infinite series of moments ordered according to relations of earlier and later is constituted. Husserl takes it that this is the conception of time taken for granted both in our everyday natural attitude and in doing empirical scientific research. The way that Husserl attempts to answer this question is by identifying different levels of temporal constitution leading up to this "one objective time," as he puts it. He tries to describe what accomplishments of consciousness are involved in going from one level of objectivity to a higher one.

We can trace the broad outline of some of this explication of the constitution of empirical, objective time by beginning from the level we have been discussing. This is the level of immanent temporal objects such as the heard tone or the seen double play. These appearing objects are constituted as extending through what Husserl often refers to as immanent time through the functioning of retention, primal impression, and protention. The next question to ask is how it is that we move from the level of appearances within immanent time to the kind of single objective and empirical time assumed in the natural attitude and by science.

The key to beginning to answer this question for Husserl is the self-identical nature of temporal objects and their phases as they become pushed back within immanent time. Husserl asks how it is that the temporal object can "sink back" and thus "change its place in time" and yet be supposed to "preserve its place in time" in that very sinking back (1991, 66). Of course, the answer is that the object only sinks back in relation to the "actually present now," but this now itself is taken to be an ever new moment of objective time. Thus my eating breakfast this morning sinks further and further back from the present time as it gets later, but it still keeps its location in time, remaining one hour after I woke up and one hour before I left the house. How is this accomplished in consciousness?

According to Husserl, we need to attend to how the now-point is experienced in order to answer this question. Any phase of an object which is experienced to be now is also, according to Husserl, given as *new*, and as having pushed back and modified whatever content was now before it. Because of the newness that each and every now-point confers upon its content, an

object or object-phase experienced as now is posited as a “this,” as a particular, self-identical temporal object or phase. As a new now-point emerges, the object becomes modified and pushed back, but it remains “apperceptively preserved precisely in absolute identity” (1991, 68). It is because the object is preserved in its “thisness” as it sinks back in time, that the moment of newness which originally accompanied it, its particular now-point, can be given in an absolute identity which excludes every other now-point. Husserl writes, “. . . the identity of the individual is *eo ipso* identity of temporal position. The continuous welling-up of ever new primal impressions, apprehended as individual points, again and again yields new and different temporal positions” (1991, 71).

The role of recollection in the constitution of objective time

However, the preservation of the individual identities of temporal positions as they sink back, is, according to Husserl, not enough to constitute a “unitary, homogeneous, objective time” (1991, 72). What is missing is the ability to reproduce, in principle, any particular temporal position in its absolute identity and in its relationship to all other temporal positions. A time-point can retain its identity as it sinks back in the retention of what is just-past without my being able to return to it and exhibit to myself with evidence that this time-point maintains its position relative not only to all of the other time-points that I have already experienced but also in relation to what I am experiencing now and what I will experience in the future. After all, once a temporal object has reached its end and sunk back into empty retention, the time-points associated with it are not there for me intuitively at all. By what evidence do I take those time-points to be part of a single objective time?

In order for the “one objective time” to be constituted, I must be able to return again and again to a given past moment and reproduce it for myself as remaining identical and as maintaining its relations with all other moments. This is precisely what is accomplished by reproductive memory or recollection, as Husserl variously refers to it. We must remember here the distinction that Husserl makes between retention and recollection. Retention is a partial moment of an act which intends a temporal object. It is responsible for the original constitution of the past and functions along with primal impression and protention in constituting a temporal object with its durational and successive features. Recollection, on the other hand, is a complete

act which re-presents, rather than originally presenting, a temporal object which is past. Recollection reawakens a past experience of an object and reproduces that experience and its object in an intuition which is not a species of original perception. In recollection, the re-presented temporal object appears to us again along with the retentional and protentional horizons through which it was originally presented. In recollection, a past living present is given *again* in the current living present.

According to Husserl, it is because recollection gives me the possibility of “shifting back” to any position in the flow of my experiences to produce it “once again” that it is essential to the constitution of objective time (1991, 114). When I reproduce an elapsed ‘now’ through recollection, I identify the ‘now’ that I re-intuit with the ‘now’ that is there for me non-intuitively in retention. In this way, I bring to evidence the fact that the moments which lie behind me in the past are the very same as those which were once present and which maintained their identities while flowing back. Because the practical possibility of recollection exists, in principle, at any time for any temporal location I have experienced, all past temporal locations can (ideally) be re-identified *ad infinitum* (in actual fact, of course, memory is limited—there are gaps and vaguenesses). Past temporal locations are thus constituted as objective for me in the sense that they are always there to be referred to, predicated of, and exhibited with evidence in their self-identity.

It is important to call attention here to the fact that recollection reproduces not only a temporal object, or some phase or even now-moment of that object, but also the *temporal horizons* that accompany the object. When I recollect the double-play that I saw on TV an hour ago, it is given to me as precisely *that* double-play, occurring over *that* particular stretch of time which has since faded into the past. I can also attend to certain phases or moments of the double play and, again, identify them as the same moments and phases which I earlier watched, and which themselves were experienced as relating to one another as earlier and later moments of the double-play. But it is also the case that while I am remembering the double-play, I am also conscious, at least implicitly, that there *was* an at-bat, and indeed a whole part of the game, preceding the double-play. And as I run through the memory of the double-play, I experience again the same sense of anticipation that there *will be* something following the double-play—perhaps a commercial break. In other words, the retentional and protentional horizons which

were originally part of the experience of watching the double-play, and which extend beyond the beginning and end of the double-play itself, are reproduced along with it.

This is important because it allows me to confirm the way each temporal object, along with the extent of time it occupies, is related to all other temporal objects and times that I have experienced. After recollecting the double-play, I can turn my attention to that which was reproduced as retained during the original recollection, to what happened before the double-play. I can then (under ideal conditions) bring this retained content to explicit recollection, and I can run through it in recollection until it leads back into double-play. And I can also begin again from the recollected double-play and follow out the protentions present in that recollection past the end of the double-play to the television commercials I saw next.

Ideally, I could begin from the double-play which I saw an hour ago and, in recollection, run through in order what I experienced all the way up to the present. In doing so, I would be constantly filling in the protentional horizon of my recollection by re-awakening material which had previously been retained. In following the train of protentions up to the present, I exhibit to myself the ordered connection between the recollected temporal locations and the present. Thus I can return again and again to the original evidence that each temporal location in my past was connected through intervening locations to every other location, and, ultimately, to the currently experienced present moment. In this way, the past that I have lived through becomes constituted as an objective series of ordered self-identical temporal locations terminating in the ever-new ‘now.’

In order to constitute all of the time that I have lived through as objective, I must be able to generalize from the example of the double-play that I saw an hour ago on TV to any event lying in my past experience. Even in the case of the double-play, the ability to recollect my experience as it was and to connect it up with the present was qualified as ‘ideal’—it may in fact be the case that I can’t quite remember everything that I have experienced since the double-play. And, of course, there is no one who could remember *everything* that she has experienced in all of the detail in which she originally experienced it—never mind recollecting all of her past life in one ordered episode. Is this a problem for the constitution of objective time? For Husserl, the answer is no. Even though we must qualify our statements about recollection with ‘in principle’ and ‘ideally,’ they still suffice for the constitution of objective time. It is certainly necessary that I have in fact recollected many past experiences, and that I have the sense that “I can” return

memorially to these experiences, as well as to others, at will. I can confirm over and over again my ability to recollect the double-play I saw earlier. But it is also the case that I feel that there is nothing in principle which prevents me from doing the same with anything that I have experienced. I may recognize that there are many things which I have experienced and never recollected, and even that there are many things I never will be able to recollect no matter how I try. Yet, I attribute this inability to the imperfection of my memory, or to some kind of process of repression or the like, and not to any kind of break or disorder in time itself. Why is this?

First of all, I have had the experience of succeeding in recollecting something that at first I could not. And, by extension, it appears to me to be an open possibility that for any particular temporal object, or for any particular stretch of time, I might be able to recall it. Secondly, I cannot imagine by what evidence I would conclude that gaps or fuzziness in my recollections reflected discontinuities or contradictions or disappearances in time itself. Perhaps when I try to recall what happened the evening after my high school graduation, for example, I find that I cannot. It is nevertheless the case that, in running through the memory of the graduation ceremony, I still have the sense that something will happen next and I have no recollection that this expectation was disappointed in some way, even though I cannot follow the indications forward to recall exactly what did happen.

The constitution of objective future time

Up to this point, we have discussed only the constitution of the objective time which I have experienced in the past. How do we get from here to the experience of one single objective time, which encompasses events which happened before I was born, as well as events stretching out into the future? Husserl, to my knowledge, did not say much explicitly about this question. However, there is a significant amount that can be extrapolated from his general point of view concerning the constitution of objective time.

The question of the objectivity of future time depends not only upon recollection and the interplay between retention and protention, which has already been discussed. It must also involve what Husserl usually refers to as *expectation*, especially as it interacts with recollection and retention/protention. Expectation is the future-directed analogue of recollection, just as protention corresponds to retention. When I engage in an act of expectation, I imagine

experiencing something in the future which I believe is likely to happen—I might think about what I will say in the class I am teaching this afternoon or what it will be like to visit my hometown next weekend. Like recollection, expectation does not *present* an object originally, but rather *re-presents*—in this case, we might rather say *pre-presents*—it (The German *Vergegenwärtigung* [re-presentation], which Husserl uses here, is sometimes translated as *presentification* to avoid the implication that it refers only to reproduction of the past). While protention, like retention, is only a partial intentional moment of a concrete act of taking a temporal object to be unfolding presently, expectation (like recollection) is a concrete act of its own which includes its own retentive and protentive horizons.

It should be noted that there are, of course, important differences between recollection and expectation corresponding to the fundamental differences in the way we experience past and future time. In recollection, we re-awaken an experience which has already occurred and which, therefore, we experience again more or less as it was, depending upon the clarity and lack of confusion in the memory. When we expect something to happen in the future, we do so with an awareness that things may turn out very differently. There is an openness, an indeterminacy, which accompanies expectations in a way that it does not accompany recollections. However, while this difference has far-reaching implications for understanding temporality, it is not particularly relevant to the way that expectation plays a role similar to that of recollection in the constitution of objective time.

In order to say more about how expectation is involved in the constitution of the objectivity of future time, we should first remember the way that what is constituted in primal impression as ‘now’ is constantly marked as *new* and then maintained in its identity as it is pushed back in retention. Instead of focusing on the process by which this now-moment is maintained in its identity as it sinks back (as we did when considering the objectivity of past time), we can attend to the way that the content which does the pushing back, which is constantly arriving into the now, gives itself as a ‘this’ coming out of the future. As each new moment becomes ‘now’ it differentiates itself absolutely from the moments which precede and follow it. And, it is given as fulfilling, at least partially, the protentions which pointed towards it. Thus, we experience the future as a store of individuated temporal locations which follow after the retained temporal locations that helped to determine how these future locations and their content would be protentionally intended.

However, as we saw with the constitution of the objectivity of past time, the above described process is not enough to constitute a “unitary and homogenous” future objective time. Such an accomplishment requires expectation. Just as recollection (in principle) allows me to reproduce a past time, to return again and again to it, to make it again the “zero point” of a temporal intuition, expectation allows me to “shift forward” again and again to a future time and to make it the zero point of a temporal intuition. Expectation allows the re-identification of future times just as recollection does of past times. In addition, these future times are identified precisely as specific future times insofar as they are the very same temporal locations that will make up the new now-moments marked in their individual ‘thisness’ as they become present.

In addition to all of this, however, there is also a special role for recollection to play in the constitution of objective future time. By what evidence do I take it that when I return again and again to an expectation about a future experience, I am indeed expecting something about a time which actually lies in the future and will come to be present? It is only because I can recollect my past expectations and their fulfillments (even if those fulfillments were partial or total revisions of my expectations) that I feel that I can “shift ahead” to future times and re-identify them with evidence. Even if my past expectation of visiting my hometown turned out to be all wrong because the trip was cancelled, it does not change the fact that the time which I presented to myself in that expectation did indeed come to be experienced—it was simply experienced with a different event filling it.

Beyond past and future: one single objective time

At this point, we should have a better handle on how past and future objective time is constituted out of the level of immanent temporal objects. However, there is still some distance to go, it seems, from the past and future objective time we have described to something like the single, homogeneous, and (as Husserl sometimes asserts) infinite objective time assumed in the natural attitude and by natural science. First of all, objective time should not be separated into future and past segments—it, Husserl appears to assert, must be a single, homogenous series, the division of which into future and past should be arbitrary. Secondly, objective time must extend before my birth and after my death, and perhaps infinitely—how is the objectivity of time which

I have not and will not experience constituted? Thirdly, objective, empirical time must be the same for all subjects, and yet we have focused only upon the first-person perspective.

Let us begin with the issue of the division of objective time into past and future segments. In order to understand how a single, homogeneous time can be constituted out of the future and past objective times which we have already described, we must focus upon the ‘now’—the strict present—as the transition between future and past. In order for future and past objective time to be constituted as a single and homogeneous temporal series, the ‘now’ must act as a pure transition between future and past, allowing the identity of what were once future moments to be maintained as those moments become past. What features of our experience allow the ‘now’ to be given in such a way?

First of all, the ‘now’ as pure transition appears to be different from the ‘now’ given as a “border point of an extent of time” (1991, 72), though Husserl at least once asserts that this is what the ‘now’ must be. Thinking of the ‘now’ as essentially a border point, appears to make it part of a stretch of time taken statically as opposed to dynamically. The ‘now’ as border point can be taken as the beginning of a future stretch of time, or as the ending of a past stretch. But in neither of these roles does it appear as the dynamical transition between the two stretches.

Then, again, if the ‘now’ is experienced as a kind of moment of maximum reality or actuality, as the peak of givenness, so to speak, then it is not taken as a pure transition. If the ‘now’ is taken to be a kind of temporal container or spotlight through which an impression gives itself in its actuality, then this moment must stand out, in some sense, from the future and the past—how can it be the transition between them?

This is not to say that, according to Husserl, and, perhaps, according to the best phenomenological standards, the ‘now’ does not appear as border point and as moment of maximal givenness. Rather, we want only to distinguish that aspect of our experience of the ‘now’ as a pure transition from these other possible ways of experiencing the ‘now.’ If the now is taken solely in its aspect of characterizing that ‘this’ which is arriving from out of the protended future only to sink back immediately in retention (and in fact the arriving and the sinking back are one and the same—there is no halt at the ‘now’—it is pure transition, pure arriving/passing away), then such an experience of the ‘now’ can allow us to match up, as it were, the objective identity and ‘thisness’ that we find in future and past temporal moments. If the ‘now’ as transition is precisely the maintaining of that identity from future to past aspects,

then it underlies our experience of the times that we have and will have experienced as a single, homogenous and objective time.

But, once again, we must point out that recollection has an important role to play here. Only through recollection can I reproduce and live through again the way that some future time, experienced in expectation, became, through the transitional now, something past and able to be recollected. I can recollect the experience of expecting a certain future event, and I can also recollect the experience of living through the event as something which was expected, and, finally, I can recollect my earlier recollection of this same event as past and as something which was once expected. Only through the fact that “I can” produce such recollections in which the re-presented event, and the temporal stretch associated with it, is identified as the same in all of these modes, is the unity and homogeneity of past and future objective time able to be constituted.

We are now in a position to appreciate in broad outline how, according to Husserl, a single objective time “containing” those events which I have experienced, am experiencing, or will experience might be constituted on the basis of lower-level experiences of immanent temporal objects. However, we have still not discussed how such a conception of objective time can be amplified into a conception which covers moments and events which I have not and never will experience, as well as moments and events as they are experienced by other subjects. The one objective time which is assumed in the natural attitude as well as in Newtonian physics is not a personal time, limited to a single subjective perspective or to the bounds of a single life.

Here, however, we reach a level of constitution which requires phenomenological work beyond the scope of this study. In order to establish the way in which objective time is taken to extend beyond the bounds of my own immediate experience, we would need to understand the kind of being which other conscious subjects have for me. This involves the notoriously difficult problem of the constitution of the Other in Husserlian phenomenology. How is it that I experience another person as being conscious of the world, as living in and through her body in the way I do? How is the being of others as other subjects, as world-constituting consciousnesses, constituted for me in my experience of them? According to Husserl, it is only by answering such constitutional questions about the Other that I can come to understand the meaning of the intersubjectively valid objective world. And, ultimately, it is in terms of this concept of intersubjective validity that the single objective temporal series must be understood.

We might note here that even an objective time series which is intersubjectively identical and which stretches beyond the beginning and ending of any particular life, still falls short of the conception of a single, infinite objective time. Such a conception seems to include any imaginable time, even those which precede or succeed all human life, or even all actual conscious life of any kind. To describe the full constitution of such a conception, one would have to account for the move from actual intersubjective experience of time to time which could only *possibly* be experienced by conscious subjects, as well as for the constitution of the notion of infinity and its application to the temporal series.

3.2 The Constitution of Objective Time: Implications

While it is clear that further constitutional work would be required in order to give a complete Husserlian account of objective time, enough has been sketched to allow us to ask how this constitutional story might shed light on some of our earlier questions about Husserl's understanding of presentness, just-pastness, and the perception of earlier/later relations.

Perhaps the most important point to take into account in this regard is simply the fact that, for Husserl, the meaning of objective time points back to our experiences of immanent temporal objects. If we ask what evidence we have for thinking that we can identify moments or extents of time that are objectively earlier or later than one another, we can only answer with descriptions of the way temporal objects are given through retention, protention, and primal impression, of the way that certain phases of those objects remain self-identical in retention and are connected with self-identical moments or extents of time, of the way that those object phases and moments are arbitrarily reproducible in recollection, and so on.

“Objective” presentness

What are the implications of this fact for our understanding of presentness and just-pastness? First of all, we must distinguish the objective presentness of a moment or extent of time from the varieties of presentness we encountered in describing the direct experience of an immanent temporal object. The “real” or “objective” presentness of a moment or extent of time

depends upon the constitution of a series of objectively ordered positions in time, one of which may be picked out as “really present” in opposition to all of the others which are either past or future. However, on Husserl’s view, our experience of time as such an objectively ordered series of moments depends constitutionally upon, among other things, our more basic experience of phases of temporal objects being given as now, just-past, and about to occur. Thus, the objectively real presentness which we might attribute to a given temporal position must be distinguished from the presentness that characterizes the now-phase of an immanent temporal object in its transition from future to past. From the point of view of Husserlian phenomenology, the objective presentness of a particular moment or temporal position cannot be said to encompass or be more fundamental than any particular experience of the transitory now-phase of an immanent object since such an experience is foundational in constituting the structure to which the objective presentness belongs.

From an Husserlian perspective, then, we have to avoid at least two mistakes in characterizing the relationship between the varieties of presentness revealed in the immanent sphere and objective presentness. First of all, we cannot identify one with the other. Secondly, we cannot say that the appearing presentness of a now-phase of an immanent object or of the original temporal field is *mere* appearance when compared with the reality of objective presentness; it is not “specious” or “fake” presentness. These kinds of presentness should not be thought of as somehow “specious” as opposed to the “reality” of objective presentness since, in fact, we could not have any concept of objective presentness if it were not for our experience of immanent varieties of presentness. One might call immanent presentness “transcendental” or “irreal,” since it plays a part in *giving* objective worldly reality, rather than being a part of that objective worldly reality itself.

We can see from this vantage point that there is a reason that immanent and objective presentness share the name “presentness” even though they must be carefully distinguished. The varieties of presentness that characterize immanent temporal objects or their phases are related to objective presentness through their role in its constitution. They are something like immanent correlates of objective presentness. Even though objective presentness requires other constitutional accomplishments (such as recollection, apperception of other subjects, etc.), it is most directly based upon the immediate grasping of something as “now.” However, it must always be kept in mind that the kind of presentness constituted as an aspect of the immanent

stream of consciousness is not the same as the higher level objective presentness which is taken to characterize a position in objective time.

All that has been said so far about the relationship between immanent and objective time, is really just an application of a very basic and central point in Husserlian phenomenology. The point is simply that, from the perspective of the phenomenological reduction, there is a founding relationship between the immanent acts of consciousness and the transcendent objectivities which appear in and through them. However, though this point is basic to all phenomenological practice, it is easy to lose sight of its implications when it comes to discussions of time and time-consciousness.

The distinction between constitutional levels as it applies to Husserl's discussion of our experiences of various kinds of presentness, pastness, and futurity helps to account for some of the vagueness we found in his descriptions. Since Husserl used terms like "present" and "just-past" to describe phases and aspects of purely immanent temporal objects, we cannot expect them to have precisely the meanings and extensions that they do when it comes to objective time. Most notably, the strict distinction that we tend to draw between the past and the present when it comes to objective time does not necessarily hold good for immanent time. The details of the constitution of objective time help us to see why this is the case. The role that recollection plays in constituting objective time suggests it may be a major factor in establishing a strict distinction in experience between what is objectively present and what is objectively past. When we recollect some event, we re-present it to ourselves as if it were currently occurring. In the experience of recollecting something, we find a past and a present directly juxtaposed.

While I am now sitting at my computer, taking a break in my typing, I am at the same time recollecting the morning's walk to my son's preschool to drop him off. Clearly the break in typing, the staring at my computer screen is happening now, it is present. Likewise, the recollecting activity itself appears to me to be occurring now. However, what is recollected, the walk, is clearly past. There is no blurring here between what is past and what is present. Since recollection is a complete, re-presentative act which intends an unfolding temporal object with its own temporal horizons, there is no overlap or confusion between the time of the act and the time of what is re-presented. By the time one has re-awakened and re-presented to oneself some past event, it is clearly *past* as distinct from the present moment in which one is carrying out the recollection and having other background experiences.

On the other hand, in the retaining of some object or object-phase as just-past there is not the same kind of explicit distinguishing from the present. The retentional horizon is, after all, itself indispensable to the experience of a temporal object being present in the full sense. To be sure, it can be distinguished abstractly from the moment of new emergence which Husserl attributes to primal impression. But, whereas recollection gives us an unquestionably *past* presentness, retention is essential to the constitution of whatever we are *currently* experiencing as present. Of course, retention is also essential to the constitution of the past, insofar as it is that which holds onto what has gone by such that it *can* be reawakened by recollection. However, it is precisely the fact that retention is involved in both the constitution of pastness and of presentness that makes the absolute distinction between past and present problematic on the level of immanent as opposed to objective time. The contribution of recollection is necessary if we are to experience the past as something radically distinct from the present.

We can note here as well that our most basic experiences of the fundamental continuity and transitional nature of time have much to do with the way that the retentional horizon cannot be neatly assigned to either the present or the past. The facts that no phase of a temporal object can be experienced to be present without there being a retentional horizon and a sense of nascent temporal stretch, and, conversely, that all just-pastness is experienced as connected with and in some sense pointing towards the now, are largely equivalent to the fact that we experience time as continuously passing away.

Objective time and the earlier/later relation

In addition to helping us to understand the inherent ambiguity of concepts like presentness and just-pastness in the immanent realm, Husserl's description of the constitution of objective time can also shed some light on the question of the relationship between presentness and the earlier/later relation. The Husserlian account of the constitution of objective time offered above implies a multilayered set of founding relationships between the temporal designations past/present/future and earlier/later. In discussing the idea that something could be characterized as objectively or "really" present, we saw that it depended upon the constitution of a series of moments or temporal positions as ordered according to earlier/later relations. Thus, some object or time-point could not be experienced to be objectively present without the general experience

of temporal locations being earlier and later than one another. But the experience of such an objectively ordered series of temporal locations presupposes, in its turn, the constitution of immanent temporal objects and their phases as just-past, present, and about to occur through retention, primal impression, and protention. So, on a lower level, past, present, and future are foundational for earlier/later relations.

However, we might take things one step further here if we think back to our example of watching a double play. In our discussion of that example we noted that, upon seeing the first baseman catch the ball, there was a difference between the way that the beginning of the throw from second to first was present to us and the way that the original hitting of the ball was present. We considered the idea that there was some temporal spread to the throw from second to first—indeed, a sense of the throw being earlier than the catch—without the beginning of the throw being experienced as *past* in any sense when the end of the throw was experienced as present. If we are right to describe the experience this way, then there would appear to be a direct experience of earlier/later relations on a small scale which is not founded by the experience of temporal objects and their phases as present, just-past, and about to happen. We would then have to distinguish this kind of direct perception of the earlier/later relation as characterizing a phase of a temporal object from our experience of it as ordering an objective series of temporal positions. The direct perception of earlier/later would belong to a constitutionally lower level and not be founded upon retention, protention, primal impression and their correlates. However, it also emerged in our earlier discussion of the double-play that a phase of a temporal object experienced as irreducibly stretched and articulated by the earlier/later relation is nevertheless also experienced precisely as a *present* phase. If this is the case, then neither presentness nor the earlier/later relation could be said to be constitutionally foundational for the other on the lowest constitutional level.

Let us conclude our consideration of the constitution of objective time by summarizing the major lessons we drew from it. First and most importantly, it underlined the importance of constitutional levels when it comes to interpreting Husserl's discussion of time-consciousness. Two examples of this importance are 1) the difference between objective or "real" presentness and the presentness of an immanent temporal object or its phases and 2) the fact that terms like

presentness and pastness cannot be held to the same standards of precision in the immanent domain as they are in the objective domain.

The second lesson we took from the constitution of objective time was the complexity of the multi-level constitutional relations between the temporal determinations past/present/future and earlier/later.

3.3 The Temporality of Experiencing and the Absolute Flow

Now that we have explored some of the implications of the constitution of objective time in Husserl, we must turn our attention in the opposite direction, towards the lowest level of temporal constitution: the so-called ‘absolute flow’ and the temporality of experiencing itself. Husserl’s discussion of this level of temporal constitution is fraught with difficulty, complexity, and even contradiction. Interpreters do not always agree as to what his basic position is. This is not surprising given that some of the most important texts that deal with the lowest level of temporal constitution have the feeling of provisional and even experimental attempts at an account. Husserl sometimes suggests one position and then rejects it for its opposite.

Nevertheless, Husserl’s discussions of the absolute flow have continued to fascinate phenomenologists and other philosophers for the last hundred years, and the topic has often been recognized as foundational for phenomenology in general. One reason for this is that it concerns the way that consciousness relates to itself, the way that we experience our own experiencing. Husserl’s account of the constitution of the lowest level of time-consciousness is in many ways an account of the structure of self-consciousness or self-awareness. As such, it is an account of the possibility of phenomenology itself. Without an awareness of her own experiencing as her own, the phenomenologist could not possibly reflect upon it and its objects, and recognize them as world-giving.

In addition to its importance in establishing the possibility of phenomenology, Husserl’s discussion of the temporality of experiencing is noteworthy for at least two other reasons. First of all, it is the place where Husserl engages most directly the problematic notion that time *flows*. Secondly, and relatedly, Husserl attributes a number of surprising and seemingly paradoxical features to the ultimate time-constituting flow. He claims that it constitutes itself and appears to itself. In addition, he describes it as pre-temporal and pre-phenomenal.

Before we get to some of these far-reaching issues in Husserl's description of the absolute flow, we need to situate the topic of the temporality of our experiencing more clearly in relation to the rest of our discussion of time-consciousness. Our account of the constitution of objective time began from the experience of immanent temporal objects. We focused upon the way that objects such as a heard tone or a viewed double-play are experienced as enduring and changing through time, on their having past, present, and future, as well as earlier and later, profiles or phases. But what about the *seeing* or *viewing* of those objects? Are not these processes themselves also temporal? Doesn't our perceiving, our experiencing activity, endure and change? Isn't it too past, present, or future? Isn't it divisible into earlier and later phases? If this is the case, then how are our conscious acts themselves constituted as temporal?

We need to slow down and be careful here before we try to give Husserl's answer to this question. What, exactly, do we mean by "perceiving" and "experiencing" in this context? What is meant by "acts of consciousness" here? The answer to these questions is not obvious, especially during the period of Husserl's early writings on time-consciousness when his notion of the phenomenological reduction and the structure of intentionality was quickly evolving. Unfortunately, I think, the lack of attention to these questions has contributed to the confusion and controversy among interpreters about Husserl's position.

Three levels of constitution

Husserl famously identifies three levels of constitution or three levels of objectivity (as they are variously referred to) when it comes to time-consciousness. This is how they are listed in the beginning of the third section of the original *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time*:¹⁷

1. the things of empirical experience in objective time (in connection with which we would have to distinguish still different levels of empirical being. . . .);

¹⁷ This list of "Levels of Constitution" was apparently adapted by Edith Stein from a listing of "Levels of Objectivity" given in Supplementary Text No. 40 of *Husserliana X* (1991, 297). The lists are not substantially different, with the possible exception of the language and emphasis of level 2. In the original, level 2 is given as "The pre-empirical 'time' with past, 'now,' later; and that which 'exists' pre-empirically, that which endures and changes (the tone as 'content of consciousness')."

2. the constituting multiplicities of appearance belonging to different levels, the immanent unities in pre-empirical time;
3. the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness
(1991, 77)

In this chapter, we have already discussed in detail the constitution of the first and second levels on this list. The constitution of the level of objective time and the things of empirical experience was our focus in the last section. But what about the second level—the “constituting multiplicities of appearance,” the “immanent unities in pre-empirical time”? What is being referred to here? The term “immanent unities” can serve as our clue. This language suggests that Husserl is talking about the immanent temporal objects such as the tone, or the appearance of the double-play, which were our focus in the early parts of the chapter, as well as our starting point in discussing the constitution of objective time. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that in the original text on which this list is apparently based, Husserl mentions as an example of the second level “the tone as ‘content of consciousness’” (see footnote 16 above).

It is the third level, that of the “absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness,” which we have not had occasion to discuss directly in previous sections, and which, as we’ve indicated, is most relevant to the topic of the temporality of experiencing itself. Husserl does not thematize this ultimately constituting level of consciousness during most of his discussion of the constitution of temporal objects through retention (or primary memory), protention, and primal impression. John Brough has argued convincingly that the level of the absolute consciousness does not emerge explicitly for Husserl until late in his early writings, once he has rejected the applicability to time-consciousness of the schema for intentionality which he developed in the *Logical Investigations*—apprehension-content of apprehension.¹⁸

However, while we have followed Husserl’s lead in this chapter in not thematizing the absolute flow of time-constituting consciousness in our discussion of the way that retention, protention, and primal impression function to bring about the experience of unified temporal objects and, with it, of duration and succession, really the absolute flow has been part of our discussion all along. This is because the time-constituting syntheses of retention, protention, and

¹⁸ See Brough, John. “The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl’s Early Writings on Time-Consciousness.” *Man and World* 5(3) (1972): 298-326. Rpt. in Bernet, Rudolf, Donn Welton, and Gina Zavota Eds., Edmund Husserl, *Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Vol III*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 247-272.

primal impression are precisely what make up flow, the absolute time-constituting consciousness itself.

When we focused in the early part of this chapter upon the temporal characteristics of immanent objects and their phases, along with the question of the extent of the original temporal field, we were focusing on that which is constituted by retention, protention, and primal impression. Retention, for example, as a moment of the concrete act through which a temporal object is experienced as such, can help us account for the unity of the temporal spread with which a melody or double play is experienced. The functioning of retention can do this by allowing us to explain how it is that we can “have,” or even “perceive,” the just-past phases of a temporal object *as* just-past, or, perhaps, as earlier as opposed to later. It can also allow us to account for the experienced identity of a particular temporal object or phase of a temporal object through the passage of time. But, according to Husserl, by a turning of our attention, we can focus upon the constituting activity of retaining, protending, and having a primal impression, rather than on the temporal characteristics of the objects constituted by these syntheses. That is to say, we can turn our attention to the absolute experiencing itself and ask how it is that this experiencing is given to us, and whether it itself is given as temporal.

As I sit writing, I hear a telephone ringing in the other room. I bracket the ring’s existence as a physical object emanating from the vibrations of a telephone in a particular spatial location, and I focus only upon the temporal aspects of the aural appearance, of the immanent sounding. Each ring builds as I hear it from its beginning towards its end, and, in so doing, appears to endure for a certain stretch. As each ring ends, it points towards the following silence which, in turn, suggests its own demise in the beginning of a succeeding ring. This succeeding ring is then experienced as a repetition, as a kind of a renewing of the ring which came before, which is now past, but which is still living, still there for me to be heard as repeated by the succeeding ring. If, in reflection, I try to focus on what I experience at some point in the middle of the second ring, I find that the earlier phases of that ring are there for me as part of the building of the current sounding, but they are there for me in a different way than the current phase of the ring which has a sense of newness, of just-nowness which was anticipated in the phases I now retain. The first ring, on the other hand, is experienced as having passed by, yet it is still there coloring the way I hear the second ring, it is there for me as just having ended, as something which I could easily turn back to and replay in my mind.

Now, however, instead of focusing on the way that the ring spreads out through its succeeding phases, and on the way each ring follows the previous one, I attempt to turn my attention to the way that I experience *my own experiencing* of the immanent ring. I turn my attention away from the temporal characteristics of the immanent ring constituted through my experience, and towards the pure time-constituting activity itself. According to Husserl, when I reflect upon the experience of hearing the second ring, at the time that the middle of the ring is sounding, I can notice that it is not only the just-past phases of the sound that are held onto as part of the current perceiving. I also retain the primal impressions, retentions, and protentions through which each just-past phase of the ring (along with its past and future horizons) were constituted. I can focus on the way that each phase of time-consciousness—each noetic complex of retention, protention, and primal impression—retains not only the elapsed phases of the object being constituted, but also the elapsed phases of consciousness. Thus, according to Husserl, in reflecting upon my experience of an immanent temporal object, I can become aware of the flow of consciousness itself.

The distinction between the flow and constituted acts in immanent time

It is important to note here that becoming aware of the absolute flow *as such* is not the same thing, for Husserl, as, for example, reflecting on an act of consciousness as a unity which occurred at a specific point within immanent time. In fact, acts in this sense belong to the second level of constitution as opposed to the third in the list reproduced above—they belong to the category of appearing unities within immanent time, they are an example of what is *constituted* by the third level of the absolute flow.

When I remember how this morning I made the judgment that I ought to bring my umbrella when leaving the house, for example, that judging is given to me as a unified event in my past immanent time, in my own stream of consciousness. As such, it is given as an enduring object which is intended through the operation of retention, primal impression, and protention, along with its horizons of what came just before it and what is to come just after it. The act as a unified temporal object is given to me as having been characterized as “now” at a certain point in the past, and then as having become more and more past. In this sense, such an objectivated act

is analogous to an immanent tone or an appearing double-play for Husserl. It is something constituted through the flow of phases of consciousness, it is not this flow itself. This is why Husserl gives the following examples of “unities in ‘immanent’ time”: “sensed contents—a color-adumbration, a ‘tone’; . . . the sensed appearances of a thing—the appearance of a house, the appearances of a physical thing; of ‘acts’ in the proper sense (as occurrences that are sensed)—the ‘turning of my regard towards something’ and the act of meaning; joy. . . , wish, predication, etc.” (1991, 302-303).

Given such a list, it is easy to be confused about what precisely belongs to Husserl’s second level of temporal constitution and, specifically, how “acts” fit into it. On one hand, the entities of the second level must function as unified temporal objects which are constituted in the constant ‘change’ of the flow of consciousness, but, on the other, they are also the immanent multiplicities of appearance through which the higher-order unity of transcendent objects is constituted. These “multiplicities of appearance” are both constituted and constituting. But how can tone and color adumbrations, appearances of physical objects, and *acts* like judging and wishing all belong to this level? Must we not distinguish between *appearances* and *acts*? When we ask about the constitution of immanent temporal objects such as a tone, is this not a different question from the constitution of acts of consciousness? If an immanent tone is analogous to an act of judgment, then where does the act of perceiving an immanent tone fit in?

While there are complex issues involved in these questions, which I am not sure Husserl had completely worked out for himself at this time, the general answer is that, to a certain degree, Husserl does think of sense-content such as an immanent tone as belonging to an act of consciousness. From the perspective of the constitution of a transcendent object, immanent sense-content, along with an apprehension which animates and determines the reference of that content, makes up the act of consciousness which intends the object. So the immanent tone is on par in this sense with an act of judgment, for example. They are both temporal objects or events within immanent time which can also serve in the constitution of transcendencies (perhaps a physical sound or an empirical state of affairs). It follows then that we cannot speak of the “act” of “perceiving” an immanent tone in the same sense. The immanent tone is not experienced by the act, it is rather part of the act. Though Husserl is not completely consistent with his terminology in this area, we can instead speak simply of “experiencing” an immanent tone as a

temporal unity. This “experiencing” is precisely the constitution of the immanent tone through the flow of consciousness.¹⁹

Awareness of the flow: the double intentionality of time-constituting consciousness

If, then, we must distinguish between experiencing an act of consciousness as a unified temporal object within immanent time, and our awareness of the constituting flow of consciousness itself, it still remains to be said precisely how such an awareness is possible. While we have already indicated that becoming aware of the flow involves the ability to focus upon how, for example, retention retains prior retentions, protentions, and primal impressions, there is more to say about how this works, about how it is possible for consciousness to become aware of its own ultimately constituting activity. Husserl himself struggled with the issue of whether it is coherent to say that the flow of absolute consciousness is aware of its own flowing.

Husserl expresses the problem like this:

If a self-contained flow (belonging to an enduring process or object) has elapsed, I can look back on it; it forms, so it seems, a unity in memory. Does not the flow of consciousness therefore also become constituted in consciousness as a *unity*? Thus the unity of the tone-duration becomes constituted *in the flow*, but the flow itself becomes constituted in its turn as the unity of the consciousness of the tone-duration. And must we then not also go on to say that this unity becomes constituted in an altogether analogous way and is every bit as much a constituted temporal series, and that one must therefore surely speak of a temporal now, before, and after? (1991, 390)

Husserl’s worry here is that the only way that the flow of consciousness can become given as a phenomenon is by being constituted as a temporal unity, and that this would imply that there must be another, more fundamental, constituting consciousness underlying it. This would imply either an infinite regress of levels of consciousness, or else, simply that the flow itself could never come to consciousness as a *constituting* flow. Can consciousness be aware of itself in its

¹⁹ John Brough and Dan Zahavi, among others, have recently debated these issues. Zahavi claims that “The absolute flow of experiencing simply is the pre-reflective self-manifestation of our experiences” (2003, 170). Brough, on the other hand, emphasizes the unity of the flow of consciousness over and above the particular acts which it is aware of. He compares acts to waves in the sea, asserting: “The flow is no more the sum of its acts than the sea is the sum of its waves,” (2011, 37). See also Zahavi 1999 and Brough 2010.

flowing, constituting unfinishedness, or only by looking back on itself as an objectified, finished act inserted into the stream of immanent temporality?

Husserl's answer to this question, although somewhat tentative (He writes: "I have tried the following solution to this difficulty" (1991, 390).) is that consciousness *is* aware of its own flowing. This is made possible by Husserl's well-known concept of the double-intentionality of time-constituting consciousness. According to this conception:

There is one, unique flow of consciousness in which both the unity of the tone in immanent time and the unity of the flow of consciousness itself become constituted at once. As shocking (when not initially even absurd) as it may seem to say that the flow of consciousness constitutes its own unity, it is nonetheless the case that it does. And this can be made intelligible on the basis of the flow's essential constitution. Our regard can be directed, in the one case, through the phases that 'coincide' in the continuous progression of the flow and that function as intentionalities of the tone. But our regard can also be aimed at the flow, at a section of the flow, at the passage of the flowing consciousness from the beginning of the tone to its end. (1991, 84-85)

The two "inseparably united intentionalities" (87) described in the preceding passage, which form two sides of the single flow of consciousness, are called by Husserl "transverse" and "horizontal" intentionality [*Querintentionalität* and *Längsintentionalität*]. When my regard is directed *through* the phases of consciousness to the temporal unity of the expanding tone, for example, then I am immersed in the *transverse* intentionality. I am focused upon the moments of the tone which are held onto by retention, given as now through primal impression, or anticipated by protention, but not to the phases of consciousness itself. On the other hand, I can direct my attention *at* the flow, or *along* the flow, by virtue of the *horizontal* intentionality which consists in, essentially, the fact that each retention retains not only the phases of the tone, but also the primal impressions and retentions (and protentions, though Husserl does not focus on this aspect) which came before.

According to Husserl, then, we can have a kind of non-objectifying experience of consciousness as time-constituting by focusing on the way that, in retaining the profiles of the temporal object, consciousness also retains itself, its own time-constituting activity. This is essentially to say that consciousness is pre-reflectively self-aware. It is structured such that in accomplishing its most fundamental function of presenting appearances spread out through immanent time, it also affords a glimpse of its own functioning.

Now, as Husserl remarks, it is surprising that the absolute flow can somehow constitute itself. In general it is a rule in the phenomenology of constitution that an object is always constituted through accomplishments of consciousness which are more immanent than it. The absolute flow is unique in being both constituting and constituted in relation to itself.

The relationship between horizontal and transverse intentionality

Is there any more to say about how the relation between horizontal and transverse intentionality as two aspects of the one flow can allow for the coincidence of the constituted with the constituting? There is evidence that Husserl's thinking tended in two opposite directions on the question of the relation between transverse and horizontal intentionality. On one hand, as Brough has pointed out (1972/2005, 267-268), sometimes Husserl's descriptions suggest that transverse intentionality is dependent upon the operation of horizontal intentionality. For example, Husserl writes that each phase of the flow of consciousness "has the peculiarity that it is consciousness of the earlier now. . . In a certain sense, however, it re-presents the earlier time-point intended in the mode of the now by making the primal sensation present" (1991, 387). On this view, it would seem that we retain the just-past profiles of a temporal object by retaining the primal impressions (or primal sensation, as Husserl sometimes calls it) through which they were originally experienced as now (presumably along with the intervening retentions of these primal impressions). This would make horizontal intentionality a condition for transverse intentionality and imply that our consciousness of the pastness of objects depends upon our awareness of our own past consciousness. Self-awareness would be a necessary condition for the consciousness of the world.

On the other hand, there are also places where Husserl suggests that something about the temporal constitution of immanent objects causes that constitution to be necessarily aware of itself. In such a case, horizontal intentionality would appear not as a *condition* of transverse intentionality, but as a necessary *result* of it. Husserl writes, for example, that "retention, because it is a still-being-conscious, a consciousness that holds back—because it is, precisely, retention—is also retention of the elapsed tone-retention: in its process of being continuously adumbrated in the flow, it is continuous retention of the continuously preceding phases" (1991,

85). According to this line of thinking, the constitution of temporal objects must also necessarily constitute its own flowing—in allowing the temporal object to appear as such, it must also appear to itself. And this is because the kind of holding-back/holding-onto which is necessary for an object to appear as temporally extended must also necessarily hold onto itself as elapsed. Husserl implies that this is true just because the general function of retention is to hold or retain.

Whatever the precise relation between horizontal and transverse intentionality, we have seen that Husserl is convinced that time-consciousness does somehow appear to itself and constitute itself as a flow. This flow is, for Husserl, absolute subjectivity itself. Yet it is not easy for him to describe the exact functioning of this flow is and how it can be uniquely self-constituting. But we have still not raised the central difficulty that occupied Husserl in coming to grips with this flow. This is the question of whether the flow is itself temporal.

The quasi-temporality of the absolute flow

We began this section with the goal of investigating Husserl's views about the temporality of our experiencing itself. This led us to the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness. And yet, in the end, Husserl denies that this flow is itself properly temporal. But, it is nevertheless something which we must call a "flow," and it has phases that follow after one another. Though Husserl concludes that the flow of consciousness is not "authentically" temporal, he has great difficulty deciding the issue and struggles mightily to find ways to describe this "pre-temporal" or even non-temporal flow. The difficulty Husserl has in characterizing the absolute flow points towards some of the deepest problems in the philosophy of time in general. It will be instructive follow Husserl's thinking in grappling with this difficulty.

In thinking about the temporality of experiencing, even in sketches written near the end of the period represented by *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, Husserl often asserts that retention, protention, and primal impression, that experiencing itself, are given as characterized by temporal determinations. For example, he writes, "First of all, the now of *consciousness* is set over against the now-point of the object. The house stands before me as present, as presently enduring. And the consciousness of the now is itself a now, and the

consciousness of the enduring present is itself an enduring present” (333). And, “What is brought to appearance in the actual momentary phase of the flow of consciousness—specifically, in its series of retentional moments—are the past phases of the flow of consciousness” (88). In these later texts, Husserl asserts that the phases of consciousness itself can be given as now or as past.

However, during the same period, Husserl rejects the view that the flow of consciousness and its phases are properly temporal and should be characterized by temporal terms such as “now” or “simultaneous.” He writes, “Is it inherently absurd to regard the flow of time as an *objective moment*? *Certainly!* On the other hand, memory is surely something that itself has *its now*, and the same now as a tone, for example. *No*. There lurks the fundamental mistake. *The flow of modes of consciousness is not a process; the consciousness of the now is not itself now*. The retention that exists “together” with the consciousness of the now is not “now,” is *not simultaneous* with the now, and it would make no sense to say that it is” (1991, 345). Here, Husserl rejects his own tendency to think of the flow of consciousness as being characterized by the same temporal predicates as immanent temporal objects are. When I am in the middle of hearing a tone, my retention of the earlier phases of it, along with my primal impression of the newly emerging phase, are not “now” in the way the tone or the newly emerging phase of the tone can be taken to be “now.” Phases of consciousness cannot be simultaneous with, or presumably earlier or later than, temporal objects or their phases, even if these temporal objects are themselves immanent.

Why does Husserl come to this conclusion? First of all, the fact that the flow *constitutes* immanent temporal objects along with their temporal attributes suggests that the flow itself should not have the attributes in the same way. If it did, it would be like saying that the appearance of a house could have the same attributes as the transcendent physical house itself. But a visual appearance of a house from a certain perspective cannot be made of wood or be 20 feet tall like the house, though it can present the house as having these attributes. Similarly, my consciousness of the tone as now should not itself be able to be now in the same way.

But this is not really enough to show that the flow is not temporal. After all, it is supposed to be an exception to the rule that something cannot constitute itself, so why couldn't it be temporal like the things it constitutes? Husserl has more considered reasons. Here he lays out his reasoning:

Now if we consider the constituting appearances of the consciousness of internal time, we find the following: They form a flow, and each phase of this flow is a continuity of adumbrations. But as a matter of principle—and this contradicts 2)—no phase of this flow can be expanded into a continuous succession (and therefore the flow cannot be conceived as so transformed that this phase would be perpetuated in identity with itself). On the contrary, we necessarily find the flow of continuous ‘change’; but this change has the absurd character that it flows precisely as it flows and can flow neither ‘faster’ nor ‘slower.’ But further: Where is the object that changes in this flow? Surely in every process *a priori* something runs its course. The change is not a change. And therefore it also makes no sense to speak of something that endures, and it is nonsensical to want to find something here that remains unchanged for even an instant during the course of a duration.

Therefore it is evident that the time-constituting appearances are objectivities fundamentally different from those constituted in time. . . Hence it also can make no sense to say of them (and to say with the same signification) that they exist in the now and did exist previously, that they succeed one another in time or are simultaneous with one another, and so on. But no doubt we can and must say: A certain continuity of appearance—that is a continuity that is a phase of the time-constituting flow—*belongs* to a now, namely to the now that it *constitutes*; and to a before, namely, as that which is constitutive (we cannot say ‘was’) of the before.” (1991, 381-2)

The flow of consciousness must be fundamentally different from a temporal object because the flow is not a change or process. A change or process has a rate—it can go faster or slower. But the phases of consciousness cannot succeed each other more or less quickly. We can’t imagine what it would even mean for one phase of the flow to continue on or endure in the way that we can imagine the first note of a melody enduring rather than giving itself over to the second note. For this reason, Husserl realizes, it does not make sense to apply the same temporal predicates to the flow that we would in the case of a true process or event. All Husserl can say in the end is that we are confronted by something which appears to flow, but in some non-temporal way. He can say only that the flow has phases which “belong” to the “now” and to the “before” which they constitute.

Husserl’s considered position appears to be that the absolute flow which constitutes itself through the operation of horizontal intentionality is only “quasi-temporal” in distinction from the genuine or authentic temporality of the immanent object constituted through transverse intentionality. He describes the flow as having a phase of actuality—“the flowing now-point”—as well as phases that preceded it or that are not yet actual (1991, 88). He writes of the flow “It is *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute properties of something to be designated *metaphorically* as “flow”; the absolute properties of a point of actuality. . . In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we have no names” (1991, 382).

One can see how difficult it is for Husserl to find words to describe consciousness as *flowing* without describing it as *temporal*. He tries to capture the quasi-temporal way in which one phase of the flow appears to be present by labeling it “actual.” But he still needs to resort to clearly temporal language to say that the *preceding* phases are *no longer* actual and some phases are *yet to come*.

There are points in Husserl’s discussion in which he tends even further towards the view that the flow of consciousness is itself radically non-temporal. In appendix VI to the original *Lectures*, Husserl writes “Subjective time becomes constituted in the absolute timeless consciousness, which is not an object” (117). And then, later, “What abides, above all, is the formal structure of the flow, the form of the flow” (118). Taken together, these statements suggest that the formally abiding character of the flow of consciousness implies that it is outside time, even eternal in some sense. Such a suggestion puts one in mind of the ‘nunc stans,’ an eternal Now outside of time. Or, if one tries to incorporate the flowing into the formulation, one is left with the *standing-streaming* character of the living present as the non-temporal source of all temporalization. Husserl at one point even flirts with the idea that there is an “ultimate” “unconscious consciousness” which “controls” all consciousness in the flow (1991, 394). But it is hard to see what explanatory work such an ultimate consciousness could accomplish which a more radically “eternalist” interpretation of the absolute flow could not.

Parallels between Husserl’s absolute flow and the passage of “real” time

The problems that Husserl encounters in trying to describe the ultimately time-constituting consciousness have much in common with classic problems philosophers have had in trying to describe the passage of time from a metaphysical perspective. For example, Husserl’s recognition that the flow of consciousness is not a genuine process or change and thus cannot have a rate of passage is analogous to the recognition that time itself cannot flow faster or slower. The question of what it can mean to say that time flows is thus closely related to Husserl’s struggle to say what exactly the “flow” of consciousness consists in.

In general there are significant parallels between what for Husserl is the lowest level of immanence—the absolute flow—and what, for analytic metaphysicians is the apparently tensed character of real time. This is quite surprising since one would assume that what non-

phenomenologists discuss as real time would correspond more directly to the highest levels of constituted objective time which we discussed in the second part of this chapter. And, in fact, the ordered series of earlier and later moments which scientists, as well as most metaphysicians, assume to be part of “real time” does correspond to the highest levels of constitution in Husserl’s thinking—to intersubjectively objective time. However, the problem of what it means to say that time really flows from one moment to the next, or the problem of how the ordered series of earlier and later moments relate to tense (past, present, and future), has more in common with the issues which arise when Husserl attempts to characterize consciousness itself as flowing. Relatedly, the question of whether time flows at all, whether it is transient or eternal, whether it is tensed or not, seems to reflect the same tension that is expressed in Husserl’s back and forth over whether the absolute flow of consciousness should be thought of as temporal or whether it should be thought of as a timeless and formal.

These parallels between Husserl’s absolute flow of consciousness and the debate about the flow of objective time in analytic metaphysics raise some questions which promise to advance our understanding of time. First of all, why is it that, from a phenomenological perspective, the main paradoxes of the metaphysics of the flow of objective time appear in the attempt to describe how it is that consciousness appears to itself? Secondly, is it possible that some of Husserl’s suggestions about how we should think about the flow, and about how horizontal intentionality functions, might help to illuminate some problems which emerge in the metaphysical analysis of the passage of time? Specifically, for example, could the implication in Husserl’s thinking that the flow of phases of consciousness simply *is* the holding-on-to-itself-as-absent of retention have anything to offer the vexing metaphysical question of what it could mean for time itself to pass?

In order to be in a position to explore these issues, however, we need to address more directly what is at stake in the difference of perspective between broadly realist metaphysics and phenomenology. The metaphysicians ask whether the flow of time is something that belongs to objective time itself, or whether it is not rather the result of the way that our conscious perspective on that time, taken as something existing mundanely within time, interacts with the objective temporal series. Husserl asks about the flowing of consciousness from a phenomenological perspective according to which that consciousness appears in a constituting and transcendental register, and not as something to be found within the objective time of the

world. And yet similar questions about the structure of the flow arise. How does this affect how we understand the difference in perspective between the two philosophical inquiries?

4.

The Dependence of Tenseless Relations on Tense: A First Connection Between Husserl and the Debate About Tense

In the preceding chapters, we have explored two very different approaches to the philosophical problems presented by time. In the first, we outlined some of the central areas in the contemporary debate about the reality of tense or temporal becoming. We focused on exhibiting the apparent intractability of several issues in that debate which all, we claimed, had to do with difficulties surrounding the experience of time. In the second chapter and third chapters, we turned to a consideration of Husserl's phenomenological investigations into time-consciousness. We paid particular attention there to how the experience of past, present, and future might relate to the experience of earlier/later when it comes to different time-scales. We also focused upon Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time, as well as on his concern with the temporality of our experiencing activity itself.

Now we face the question of what these different inquiries have to do with one another. How and why are we attempting to bring contemporary analytic metaphysicians and Husserl into conversation? On one hand, it makes sense that Husserl's detailed descriptive work on the temporal characteristics of our conscious experience might contribute to a debate in which characterizing the experience of becoming has become a central difficulty. However, there are such large differences in the assumptions made by the participants in the current debate and those made by Husserl, that it is hard to see how they could avoid talking past one another.

4.1 The Potential Overlap Between Husserl and the Debate About Tense

From the transcendental-phenomenological perspective that Husserl was developing during the time of his early work on time-consciousness, the metaphysical debate about the mind-independent reality of temporal becoming appears to be hopelessly naïve. According to

the most basic principles of mature Husserlian phenomenology, there is no more fundamental evidence than that provided by possible experience. Thus, the notion of an object or reality which is, in principle, absolutely mind-independent is absurd.

There are, of course, distinctions that we can make between subjectivity and objectivity when it comes to various entities and regions of experience. There is a clear sense, for example, in which the pain I feel in my leg is more mind-dependent than the chair I am sitting on. To begin with, other people who walk by can see the chair, but they cannot feel the pain. The existence of the pain is thus directly dependent upon my personal experience in a way that the chair is not. The pain does not appear to me as something that would still exist if I ceased to perceive it, while the chair does. However, this does not mean that the being of the chair, of physical objects in general, or of any other entity, is absolutely mind-independent. This is because, Husserl would point out, the appearing of a physical object as something which transcends any possible conscious experience of it, is still itself an *appearing to consciousness*. There is simply no way that I can say anything about the being of physical objects apart from the possible ways that they can be experienced by me and by others, even if these experiences include the sense that these objects are always given as “more than” any particular experience or set of experiences of them.

Therefore, while it may be the case that we can ask whether certain aspects of time (such as tense) are more like the pain or more like the chair, we cannot ask whether any aspect of time exists mind-independently in some absolute sense. From Husserl’s transcendental perspective, there can be no distinction, at the most fundamental level, between what time can possibly be experienced to be, and what it is in itself. We can only hope to understand what time “really” is by becoming clearer about how we experience it.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the broadly realist assumptions of most of the participants in the contemporary debate about the status of temporal becoming, Husserl’s phenomenological investigations take us only so far. As long as he limits himself to a discussion of time-*consciousness*, to an account of how it is that we *perceive* temporal objects, how it is that time *appears*, he does not get at the question of the mind-independent reality of tense. For these philosophers, a phenomenological investigation of time-consciousness might contribute to resolving problems in the philosophy of time-*perception*. An accurate theory of the perception of time might in turn contribute to the debate about tense, essentially by providing empirical

premises for metaphysical arguments. But a phenomenological investigation could not have something decisive to say about the reality of temporal becoming. And this is where the real disagreement with Husserl lies. The transcendental-phenomenological perspective which Husserl developed would not acquiesce to using phenomenological insights into time-consciousness as premises for metaphysical arguments operating within what he called the “natural attitude.” From Husserl’s point of view, this would fundamentally alter the nature of the phenomenological results themselves.

How are we to respond to this fundamental disagreement over the proper scope and point of view for philosophical work? To engage in a general debate about the merits of realism, idealism, and transcendental philosophy would clearly require more than is possible here. But not only that, it would also, I believe, be premature when it comes to the subject of temporal becoming. The issue of the nature of temporal becoming is so closely intertwined with that of the nature of consciousness and its relation to the world that it might be the case that a better understanding of time could actually help contribute to debates over realism and transcendental philosophy. In other words, it may be that insights and problems encountered in trying to understand time, whether from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology or a broadly realist metaphysics, will help shed light on the larger philosophical disagreements between the two approaches. We must return to this question later.

A natural connection: objective time

It remains to us, then, to find a way to investigate the connection between Husserl’s phenomenology of time-consciousness and the debate over the reality of tense without adjudicating the different presuppositions made by the two approaches. There are a number of different options. Perhaps the most obvious way to pursue a connection would be to focus on what Husserl has to say about “objective time.” Rather than worry about whether anything is really absolutely mind-independent for Husserl, we could simply focus on the level of constitution which seems most closely to correspond to the objective reality of concern in the debate about tense. If Husserl has something interesting to say about the nature of objective time from a phenomenological perspective, perhaps this would have some implication about whether, and in what sense, temporal becoming should be thought of as objective.

It is true that there is something of interest for the debate about tense in Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time. However, his *description* of objective time itself is not, I think, the most promising part of his analyses in terms of a potentially beneficial back-and-forth with the debate about the reality of tense. To a large extent, this is because Husserl's characterization of objective time is essentially the same as the standard contemporary characterizations of "B-time" or "tenseless time." If one looks only at how Husserl characterizes objective time, and at the assumptions he seems to make about it, one would probably conclude that Husserl is a standard B-theorist or detenser, but one without much to offer in support of such a position. He appears to simply take it for granted that objective time is made up of a fixed, infinite series of temporal positions which can be ordered according to relations of earlier, later, and simultaneous with (1991, 10 and 64-74). Because Husserl's focus is not upon the properties of such a fixed, objective time, but rather upon how such a time gets constituted in consciousness, he is not very clear about what it consists in. He relies for the most part on the force of the words like "objective," "fixed position," and "homogeneous." Nevertheless, the way that he contrasts the fixed temporal order of objective time with the sinking back in time through which it is constituted, shows that he thinks of this objective ordering in terms of measurable relations between temporal positions which do not change in the way that past, present, and future do. In fact, Husserl does make this point of view explicit in a text written in 1904. He says there "In objective time there is no now, no past, etc" (1991, 195).

Husserl is not a detenser

Why, then, should we not class Husserl as a detenser or B-theorist who denies the objective reality of past, present, and future? Well, first of all, we would not gain much insight from this since Husserl does not offer any kind of sustained argument for a "tenseless" view of objective time, but rather simply assumes it. But, more importantly, equating the tenselessness of Husserl's "objective" time, with the detensers' view that tense is mind-dependent would mistakenly ignore the complexity of Husserl's position. There is a reason that Husserl is more focused on the *constitution* of objective time than he is on its properties. His concern, of course, is with consciousness, with lived experience, rather than with the details of objective time as it is encountered in the natural attitude. But, as indicated above, because of the method of

phenomenology and Husserl's transcendental position, consciousness and lived experience cannot be equated with the subjectivity of a mind taken as something existing within the empirical world, within objective time itself.

This point becomes clear if we look at the full passage in which Husserl denies that objective time is tensed. It reads as follows:

In objective time there is no now, no past, etc. Yet it must be noted that these expressions can be meant, on the one hand, subjectively, <signifying> the relation between experiencing subject and objective time, and, on the other hand, phenomenologically, under abstraction from objective time as such and from the objective subject as such. . . (1991, 195)

Husserl is not a detenser because he does not hold that tense is mind-dependent in the same sense that the detensers do. The detensers claim that past, present, and future are merely subjective. What this means for them is that it is only from my particular location along the B-series that certain moments and events appear to be past, present, or future to me. The song I am listening to right now is not *really* present, it is only *really* simultaneous with my hearing it, which makes it appear from my subjective point of view to be present. This is precisely what Husserl means when he says that tense terms can be taken to signify the relationship between the experiencing subject and objective time. Both detensers *and* tensors, as a general rule, think of the experiencing subject as something located within objective time (because the subject is something existing within the world). The only question for them is whether tense is a product of the relationship between the subject's location and objective time (detenser position), or whether it is a feature of objective time itself (tensor position).

In the above passage, Husserl distinguishes a "phenomenological" signification for tensed terms from the "subjective" one just described. It is this phenomenological point of view on tense which distinguishes Husserl from the detensers. What does this phenomenological signification consist in? According to Husserl, past, present, and future take on a different signification when one leaves the natural attitude by enacting the phenomenological reduction. But how is this possible? Shouldn't precisely the *signification*, the *meaning*, of past, present, and future remain the same even if we bracket the question of whether or not they exist objectively? If we bracket, for example, the question of the existence of physical objects, they are still experienced as having the same meaning or, better, *sense*. This is precisely the point of the

method of phenomenological reduction, to get at the *sense* or signification of various regions of being by bracketing the question of existence. How, then, does a phenomenological perspective on past, present, and future give them a different signification?

From a phenomenological point of view, tense or temporal becoming is not merely something which is experienced, and which might or might not turn out to exist in itself. On the contrary, it is an aspect of that very experiencing itself. Any perceiving or imagining or remembering is only imaginable as tensed. Past, present, and future are fundamental to the appearing of the world itself, and to the appearing of objective time as characterizing that world.

Therefore, understanding tense in its *phenomenological signification* requires more than simply bracketing the question of its existence. It requires understanding the special role that tense plays in the very appearing of the world and of the objective time which characterizes it. To assert that temporal becoming is mind-dependent as the detensers do is, for Husserl, to think of tense as a relation between an intra-worldly subject and an objective world organized by the B-series. It is to miss the role that tense plays in constituting that world as temporal in the first place. Thus, it would be a mistake to call Husserl a B-theorist and be done with it. It would miss the unique contributions that a phenomenological investigation might make to understanding temporal becoming.

Beyond objective time: promising connections

If, then, equating Husserl's objective time with the "real time" of the contemporary debate about tense is not the way to go, where does that leave us? The direction suggested by the preceding discussion is to ask whether Husserl's investigation into the *phenomenological* sense of past, present, and future has any relevance to the contemporary debate about tense. Even if Husserl assumes that past, present, and future are not categories applicable to constituted objective time, this does not mean that Husserl's account of them from a phenomenological point of view does not have something to offer the debate. In fact, as I have indicated, it turns out that many of the central issues which emerge in Husserl's account of time-consciousness are intimately related to the most intractable problems in the contemporary debate which were identified in Chapter 1.

The rest of this work will focus upon three general areas of overlap between Husserl's account of time-consciousness and the debate about the reality of tense. First of all, there is Husserl's discussion of the *constitution*, as opposed to the properties, of objective time. As explicated in Chapter 3, this discussion addresses the ways that the experience of past, present, and future are necessary conditions for being able to experience something like the B-series. Such a claim should be of great interest in the debate about the reality of tense where one question which has been posed is whether the notion of a tenseless time does not depend in some way upon tense. While this question has been answered negatively by many participants in the debate, Husserl's concept of constitution as it is applied to this issue may lend ammunition to those who argue that the detenser position is untenable because tenseless time is not thinkable apart from tensed time. On the other hand, Husserl also emphasizes the fact that we directly perceive seemingly tenseless temporal characteristics such as succession and duration. Such a position would tend to undermine the case for thinking that tenseless time depends upon tense. The details of Husserl's constitutional account should, in any case, contribute nuance to this area of tension in the contemporary debate.

In addition, the attempt to apply Husserl's account of time-consciousness to the question of the dependence of tenseless relations on tense forces us to focus on certain aspects of temporality which are not generally Husserl's explicit focus. The stark distinction between tensed and tenseless temporal relations which is at the center of the debate about temporal becoming (following from McTaggart's distinction between the A and B series) is not something which Husserl explicitly discusses. Trying to determine the implications of his account for questions based on such a distinction forces us to ask difficult questions about that account, and to attend more carefully to phenomenological distinctions between experiencing temporal items as earlier and later than one another as opposed to experiencing them as past, present, and future.

A second area of overlap is the potential connection between Husserl's account of the experience of presentness, just-pastness, and the near future in terms of retention, primal impression, and protention, with the problems about presentness and non-presentness which were outlined in our discussions of McTaggart's paradox and the presence of experience in Chapter 1. In that chapter, we found, for example, that there were differing senses of presentness at play in discussions of McTaggart's paradox. Husserl's analysis of the different aspects of

intending a temporal object as present might help to clarify what those different senses of presentness are and how they relate to each other and to our experiencing.

On the other hand, there is once again a potential benefit to our understanding of Husserl's account itself in exploring how it can contribute to a better understanding of McTaggart's paradox. In applying the different senses of presentness which emerge in Husserl's reflections, we are forced to confront the fact that Husserl does not appear to consider the idea of an "objective" present. Now, it is true, as we have pointed out, that the notion of an absolutely and in principle mind-independent time could find no place in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. However, tenses have put forth several strong reasons for believing that tense is as much an attribute of "objective" time as is datability in terms of earlier/later relations. To begin with, when we experience an event as happening now, we do not experience it to be now only for us, but for any real or possible observer as well. It is true that Husserl more or less recognizes facts like this, but he does not explicitly turn his attention to the question of whether or in what ways past, present, and future could be taken to characterize "objective" time. As indicated earlier, he simply assumes that "objective" time is tenseless. Perhaps challenging this assumption and asking, from a phenomenological point of view, what it is about tense that can make it appear to be "objective," would help to clarify and deepen Husserl's account of time-consciousness. It would also, presumably, make the connections between Husserl's descriptions and the arguments of the tenses more explicit.

The final area of intersection to be explored is perhaps the most difficult, but it is also the profoundest and most surprising. This is the parallel between the problems that emerged in the debate about tense and Husserl's struggles to characterize the lowest-level of time-consciousness, what he sometimes refers to as the absolute flow. It is surprising that the deepest similarities between the two approaches should crop up here since the lowest level of temporal constitution is, according to Husserl, the most immanent and at the furthest remove from objective time. Since the debate about tense is interested in the objective reality of temporal becoming, one would expect Husserl's analysis of that which is most *immanent* to be of little concern to that debate. One might expect, as well, that the fact that Husserl situates the flow, temporal becoming in its purest form, at the most immanent level would simply be a consequence of his view that constituted objective time is tenseless. In other words, isn't the fact that it is absolute consciousness itself which flows just more evidence that Husserl is basically a

B-theorist who assumes that tense is a feature of consciousness, of subjectivity, and not of the world itself?

As our earlier response to this point of view indicated, what is most immanent, or what is constitutionally most fundamental for Husserl, should not be equated with what is subjective according to detensors and tensors. Since Husserl is approaching the question of time phenomenologically, consciousness does not signify for him an intra-worldly subject as it generally does in the debate about tense. Therefore, when it turns out that the flow characterizes the lowest constituting level of consciousness for Husserl, this does not mean that temporal becoming is the most subjective (as opposed to objectively real) of things. It certainly does not make it more partial or personal or mind-dependent than B-series relations. Rather it means that temporal becoming is fundamental to the structure of the appearing of the world as such. Rather than suggesting that temporal becoming is less real than the B-series, it suggests that which underlies the constitution of the B-series most deeply.

Perhaps, when we recognize this distinction between temporal becoming as merely subjective and temporal becoming as part of the structure of the givenness of the world to consciousness, then it is less surprising that Husserl's struggles to describe this level of constitution bear a close resemblance to the struggles over the reality and nature of temporal becoming in the debate about tense. One of the difficult problems we found in the debate about tense, for example, was how either side could avoid implicitly characterizing temporal becoming in terms of a kind of movement. This appeared problematic because temporal becoming is not the kind of thing that can have a rate as all motions or changes can. What could it possibly mean to say either that the Now moves from moment to moment or that the experiencing subject moves from moment to moment? In explicating Husserl's notion of absolute flow, we found the same problem. What can we say about a flow which cannot go faster or slower, which cannot, in principle, end or begin?

This is not the only similarity between Husserl's discussion of the absolute time-constituting consciousness and the debate about tense. Their very structures echo one another. One of the surprising claims that Husserl makes about the absolute flow is that it is both constituting of temporality and constituted as temporal itself. As we saw, he struggles mightily over the question of whether this lowest level of time-consciousness, the transcendental source of temporality, so to speak, is itself to be thought of as temporal. It's as if Husserl is asking what

the most fundamental, encompassing category is—transcendental consciousness or time as the absolute flow—and he can't really make up his mind. They seem somehow co-primordial, and yet not identical. His back and forth on this issue is not unrelated to the back-and-forth of the whole contemporary debate over whether temporal becoming is something that characterizes reality or not. Here, reality corresponds to the role of transcendental consciousness in Husserl, and temporal becoming to the absolute flow. It is as if the participants in the contemporary debate cannot decide whether there is a reality which stands outside of temporal becoming, encompassing it as a feature of the subjectivities which reside within objective time, or whether temporal becoming is so all-encompassing that it is the structure, so to speak, of reality itself.

So, despite their very different presuppositions about the nature of reality, consciousness, and philosophical method, the contemporary debate about tense and Husserl's work on time-consciousness exhibit structural similarities in their attempts to deal with the most vexing philosophical questions time presents for them. Exploring the details of this structure by bringing these two approaches into conversation with one another promises new insight on both sides of the conversation, and, most importantly, insight into the elusive nature of time.

We turn, now, to the first area of overlap: The constitution of objective time and the possible dependence of tenseless relations on tense.

4.2 Does the B-series Depend on the A-series?

In his article *The Unreality of Time*, McTaggart claimed that if there were such a thing as time, it would have to be tensed, or, as he put it, there would have to be an A-series—a series of moments or events ordered according to their degree of pastness or futurity. Of course, in that article, McTaggart went on to attempt to show that the existence of the A-series would entail a contradiction and thus that time is unreal. Contemporary participants in the debate about tense, however, almost universally accept the reality of time. For them, the question is whether time is tensed or not. McTaggart's much discussed argument against the existence of tense has been one of the primary weapons of detensors in the debate. However, McTaggart's argument that if time *did* exist, it would *have* to be tensed, could provide support for tenses, though it has not been widely taken up by them. There may be good reasons that this argument has been largely

dismissed. For one thing, it appears to depend upon dubious assumptions about the nature of change and its relationship to time. Nevertheless, McTaggart's argument suggests a line of reasoning according to which the existence of tenseless time is somehow *dependent* upon the existence of tensed time. This general line of reasoning, if not the particulars of McTaggart's argument, holds promise for the tensor position. I will argue that Husserl's analysis of the constitution of objective time lends some support to this line of thinking. However, in the end, this analysis suggests that the relationships of dependence between tense and tenseless time are too complex and multifaceted to unambiguously favor the tensor position. Rather, these dependence relationships help to reveal the limitations of the idea that it must be the case that either tense is objectively real (in the way that the objective series of earlier and later temporal positions is taken to be), or else it is merely subjective and nonveridical.

McTaggart's Argument

McTaggart's original argument begins from the assertion that there can be no such thing as time without the existence of real change. He then makes the controversial assumption that the preeminent candidates for real change are events rather than objects. But, according to McTaggart, the only way that an event can change is by going from being future to being present to being past. Put in terms of properties, it is only the *tensed* properties of an event, such as degree of pastness, that can change over time. All other properties of an event remain the same. A given event is always at the date at which it occurs, it is always earlier and later than the same other events, it is always of the same duration, etc. The first class I taught this semester, for example, was and will always be an hour and twenty minutes long, have begun at 12:50 on January 31st, and have started with me introducing myself. However, it went from being in the future six months ago, to being present on the 31st, to being past now.

Since the only possible candidate for real change is change in tense, McTaggart concludes that there can be no time without tense. He then goes on to make the further claim that earlier and later are clearly *temporal* determinations and that, therefore, there can be no B-series without there being an A-series. Importantly, this claim rests on the idea that the pure ordering of moments as if they were points along a line is not enough to make that ordering *temporal*, not enough to give us the B-series. Rather, one must add to this ordering a *flowing* in

one direction to get the full notion of earlier and later. Consider, for example, the moment that I was born, the moment I turned 10 years old, and the moment I turned 20 years old. The fact that the moment I turned 10 falls in between the moments of my birth and my turning 20 is a consequence purely of the fixed order of those moments, analogous to the way that point B might fall between points A and C on a line segment. However, the fact that my turning 10 is *later* than my birth and *earlier* than my turning 20 requires something more than pure order. It requires a directionality which, according to McTaggart, can only be established by the flowing of time, the constant changing of tense. McTaggart terms the pure ordering of moments without the flow the “C-series,” and claims that the B-series is derived from the combination of the C-series with tense (1908).

The Logical Relations Between the A- and B-Series

There is no doubt that there are many points to be disputed in this argument. This is not the place to deal with the counterintuitive claim that events are what undergo change, or with the claim that there can be no time without change. However, McTaggart’s position that the B-series is somehow derivative of the A-series can be defended in other ways. In fact, there are tensers who have tried to make such arguments.²⁰ One approach focuses upon the direct logical relations between the A- and B-series rather than upon the way real change might seem to require the existence of the A-series. This approach begins from the fact that A-series and B-series positions of events are correlated. If my birth is past and my death is in the future, then, inevitably, my death is later than my birth. Similarly, if World War I occurs before World War II, then it cannot be the case that World War II is ever more past or less future than World War I. The fact that tense and date are so clearly logically connected suggests that we can analyze one in terms of the other. If we are to reduce one set of temporal relations to the other set, then we must choose which is to be reduced to which. The set which is reduced would be the less fundamental one. We could argue, in other words, that one type of temporal attribute is more conceptually basic than the other. The other type of temporal attribute could then be understood as being constructed out of the more basic one and, thus, as retaining the logical properties that link the two types of attributes.

²⁰ See Tooley (1997, 158-175) for a discussion of some of these attempts.

If we hypothesize that the B-series is more fundamental than the A-series, then we end up with an analysis or reduction along these lines:

a is past when *b* is present iff *a* is earlier than *b*

On the other hand, if we analyze the B-series in terms of the A-series, we end up with something like this²¹:

a is earlier than *b* iff

a is past and *b* is present

or

a is more past than *b*

or

a is less future than *b*

or

a is present and *b* is future

or

a is past and *b* is future

How should we choose between these options? First of all, we should note the asymmetry between the two directions of reduction or analysis. If tense is analyzed in terms of earlier/later relations, it turns out that any particular tensed relation (such as “*a* is past when *b* is present”)²² reduces to one particular earlier/later relation (in this case, *a* is earlier than *b*). On the other

²¹ See Le Poidevin 2004, 135.

²² The reader may notice that we have used two different kinds of expressions to refer to tensed relations or states of affairs: “*a* is past **when** *b* is present” in the first analysis, but “*a* is past **and** *b* is present” in the second analysis. It might be argued that the first of these expressions refers to a relation between *a* and *b* while the second refers to two states of affairs involving *a* and *b*. In any case this difference in expression is deliberate and not unimportant and it will be discussed shortly.

hand, if earlier/later is analyzed in terms of tense, a disjunction made up of five disjuncts must be given to capture the possible situations that any particular earlier/later relation might imply. Why is this and what does it imply?

There are a number of possible tensed states of affairs which may correspond to any given earlier/later relation. This means that given a certain tensed state of affairs involving two temporal positions, there is a unique earlier/later relation determined to hold between the temporal positions. But, given a certain earlier/later relation, there is *not* a unique tensed state of affairs that is determined. Tensors might argue that this kind of asymmetry suggests that the A-series is more fundamental than the B-series because A-relations are more consequential or determinative than B-relations. If B-relations are basic, then, given their indeterminacy, something else would be needed to derive A-relations from them. However, if A-relations are basic, then B-relations can be straightforwardly derived. In other words, it seems more plausible that tensed relations can provide an exhaustive analysis of earlier/later relations than vice versa.

However, such an argument does not really get at the underlying issue. Why is it that a single earlier/later relation does not determine a unique tensed state of affairs? It is because *a*'s being earlier than *b* does not tell you what moment is now present. On the other hand, the assertion that *a* is past and *b* is present tells us not only that *a* precedes *b*, but also that *b* is currently present. It is not that the tensed assertion tells us more about the relation between *a* and *b*, it tells us a (purported) temporal fact over and above that relation.

Ultimately, it is unclear whether there is even such a thing as a *tensed relation* between two temporal positions. In the proposed analyses above, there were two different kinds of tensed expressions used. In offering a reduction of tense to earlier/later relations we used the expression “*a* is past **when** *b* is present.” In the other direction of analysis, on the other hand (the one that the tensor would argue is to be preferred), we used the expression “*a* is past **and** *b* is present.” Only the first of these statements (*a* is past **when** *b* is present) seems clearly to refer to a temporal relation *between a* and *b*. According to the most plausible interpretation of this statement, it does not tell us whether *b* is *in fact* present or not. It only tells us what tensed attribute *a* would have *if b* were present. On this reading, this expression is equivalent to “*a* is earlier than *b*,” which is why we can make the assertion: If *a* is earlier than *b*, then *a* is past **when** *b* is present. We cannot, on the other hand, assert: If *a* is earlier than *b*, then *a* is past **and** *b* is present.” This is because *b* may in fact be past or future and not present at all. Since the

assertion that *a* is past when *b* is present does not tell us anything about what is in fact past, present, or future, one can deny that such an assertion is really about tensed attributes at all. Rather, it uses counterfactuals concerning tense to express a temporal relationship which is more directly expressed through the tenseless language of precedence relations.

The implication of this discussion is that it is misleading to speak of *tensed relations* or of *the A-series* in the way that we speak of *tenseless temporal relations* or *the B-series*. Consider the fact that, over time, there is just one B-series but (infinitely?) many A-series. This is precisely what makes tensed temporal determinations so different from tenseless ones—the tensed ones change. In the A-series in which my typing is present, this evening's sunset lies in the future and tomorrow's sunrise is more future than that. In the A-series in which this coming midnight is present, the same sunset lies in the past, my typing lies further in the past, and tomorrow's sunrise is in the nearer future. However, all of these events maintain their relative positions along the one B-series. When we speak of the fixed temporal relations between events established by the B-series, we are not specifying which A-series is actual. Any particular A-series will include within it the fixed temporal relations that are expressed in the B-series. But, what makes that A-series ineliminably tensed is that it *is now*, or *was in the past*, or *will be in the future* actual. The fixed B-relations are maintained over each and every A-series, but they do not tell us which A-series is actual and which ones are not. This is why expressions of tensed relations such as "*a* is past when *b* is future," are not really A-expressions at all: they are true no matter which A-series is actual. They simply tell us how the tenseless B-relation between two temporal positions *would* appear from the perspective of a given A-series.

Therefore, despite the fact that there are strict logical connections between the ordering of any given A-series and that of the B-series, the idea that one can be reduced to the other is misguided. It is true that in any given A-series, the fixed ordering of the B-series is expressed. But this does not make the B-series reducible to that A-series. The B-series captures the fact that the tenseless temporal relations of precedence and succession are constant over all possible A-series. On the other hand, the B-series does not determine which A-series is actual at any given time. So, while the ordering expressed in any given A-series might be reduced to the ordering of the B-series, the tensed character of the A-series cannot be so reduced.

The experiential dependence of tenseless relations on tense

There is, however, another avenue open to proponents of tensed theories of time for claiming that earlier/later relations are somehow dependent upon, and thus imply the existence of, tense. While our preceding discussion established the fact that the B-series is not reducible to any one A-series, it also suggested that we do in fact experience the fixed ordering of the B-series through the actuality of the current A-series along with its constant transitioning to a new actual A-series. In fact, the B-series was suggested to be precisely that aspect of each A-series which is stable from one A-series to another. That is to say, it is generally acknowledged that we experience fixed relations of precedence and succession through the constantly changing tense of moments or events. It is only because I hear the first note of a melody as sinking further into the past as the next notes become present that I can know the first note to be forever earlier along the B-series than the following notes. Thus, a tenser can argue that since we don't experience precedence relations directly, but only through our experience of tense and the flow of time, tense must be conceptually more basic than earlier/later relations and necessary for the latter's existence. In other words, the experiential/perceptual priority of tense means that it must be real in order for any aspect of objective time to be real.

There are two ways that detensers can respond to such an argument. The first is to deny the premise that earlier/later relations are not directly perceived or experienced—some detensers have taken this direction and claimed that we do directly perceive these relations. The second possible response is to deny that the experiential priority of tense has anything to do with the question of its objective reality. This second response is at the core of the detenser position in general, since most of them admit that we do *experience* events to be past, present, and future. The overall strategy of most detensers is to deny that our *experience* of tense implies that tense is objectively real. So why should the fact that we *experience* tenseless relations through tense make any difference? This may be the way that we *perceive* or *experience* tenseless relations most directly, but the evidence for the reality of tenseless temporal relations, and the unreality of tense, is not a simple matter of what we experience. In order for time to appear to us, it may need to *appear* to be tensed, but this doesn't mean that it must really *be* tensed.

4.3 Husserl's Contribution: The Phenomenology of the Constitution of Objective Time and the Experience of Earlier/Later Relations

Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time can help to shed light upon both aspects of the disagreement over whether tenseless temporal relations are somehow dependent upon the existence of tense. On one hand, his general transcendental phenomenological approach to understanding objective time, as well as the details of his account, lend support to the idea that the transition of temporal objects and their phases from future, to present, to past is essential to any conception of time as an objective series of earlier and later moments. On the other hand, there are aspects of Husserl's general account of time-consciousness which suggest that we experience temporal objects to be characterized by an earlier/later directionality not derived from our experience of the tensed aspects of those objects. So it is also possible to use Husserl's writings on time-consciousness to support the detensers' contention that we do in fact experience tenseless temporal relations directly. Ultimately, the details of Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time show that the argument that tense must be objectively real because relations of precedence and succession cannot be experienced without it is an oversimplification of the situation.

Husserl's general approach to the philosophy of time through the transcendental phenomenology of time-consciousness is well-suited to the thesis that whatever is indispensable to our experience of a certain aspect of reality cannot be dismissed as merely our subjective access to that reality. That is to say, according to Husserl, if we give an account of how some feature of objective reality is constituted in consciousness, this account gives us insight into the meaning or sense of that feature of objective reality. The lower-level objectivities and aspects of consciousness itself which form part of that constitutional story are not to be taken to be merely subjective in the sense of being personal or one-sided. Rather, their essential role in the constitution of a feature of reality makes them constitutive of that reality, they are inseparable from it.

In Chapter 3, we discussed Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time as a single infinite series of moments ordered by earlier/later relations. According to this account, we can attend to the way that a given now-point of an experienced temporal object is held onto in

retention as it sinks into the past. Because each now-point arises with its own particular sense of “thisness,” which is maintained as it sinks back in retention, each sinking now-point is experienced as occupying a self-identical position in time along with the content belonging to it. This kind of identical location in time is a big part of experiencing two moments or events to be related tenselessly as earlier and later than one another. It is only because we experience one phase of an event as having sunk back into the past while retaining its “thisness” that we can experience it as being permanently earlier than the phase of an event which is just now beginning to sink into the past.

But, according to Husserl, this is not all that is necessary for the constitution of a series of objective temporal locations ordered as earlier and later than one another. We also need to be able to “go back,” so to speak, and reproduce these self-identical temporal locations at whenever we want (within reason). Without this ability, we could not reaffirm to ourselves that the identical locations are in fact held onto and, in some sense, constantly “there” to be experienced with evidence. This means that the concrete intentional acts of recollection and expectation, in addition to the syntheses of retention, protention, and primal impression are necessary to the constitution of objective time. So, on Husserl’s view, we could have no experience of objective time, no notion of objective time, without the ability to reproduce temporal objects as past or expect them as future.

All of this would seem to suggest that Husserl’s position should support the tensed theory of time insofar as an objectively ordered time series cannot be experienced without the experience of temporal objects as tensed. This is certainly true as far as it goes. We should be clear here that Husserl is not simply asserting that as a matter of fact we happen to experience objective time through the experience of temporal objects as tensed. Rather, he is attempting to describe the essential constitution of objective time (and therefore of tenseless earlier/later relations). This means that we cannot imagine how objective time could be constituted in any other way. The sinking back of the now-point and the reproduction of previously experienced temporal objects and their phases as “past” are implied by the notion of an objective temporal series of earlier and later moments, insofar as this notion can be given with evidence in experience. Husserl’s work in this area speaks directly against the detenser claim that any kind of experiential priority granted to tense does not have any implication for its reality vis-à-vis the reality of tenseless temporal relations.

One could argue then that Husserl's analysis of the constitution of objective time, given his transcendental-phenomenological understanding of constitution, implies that tense must be at least as "real," in some sense of that term, as the tenseless temporal relations which depend upon it. On his view, the idea of there being a series of earlier and later objective temporal positions without there being immanent temporal objects given as past, present, and future would be nonsensical. However, we must be careful about what kind of "reality" is being attributed to tense here. We need to remember that Husserl's constitutional story is not meant to imply that the tensed attributes of temporal objects are "objective" in the sense that the series of earlier and later temporal positions are. What his account *does* imply is that there is a non-merely-subjective "phenomenological" sense of tense which must be invoked in any attempt to understand what we really mean when we talk about (or even what we implicitly intend when we experience) the tenseless earlier/later relations of objective time.

The "reality" which, according to Husserl, must characterize tense in order for objective time to be constituted is a *phenomenological* or *transcendental* "reality." In fact, in Husserl's terminology, such *transcendental being* is technically not *real* at all—it is the *irreal* basis for the constitution of any reality. But, it is not, we emphasize again, a *merely subjective* phenomenon to be discovered within the already constituted world. Tense, on this view, is not the relation between a subjective point of view and the objective timeline, nor is it an objectively real attribute of the moments or events which fill such a timeline. Rather, it is the very structure through which the temporal world reveals itself. It is the structure or form of transcendental consciousness itself, of the appearing of the world.

Therefore, a proponent of tensed theories of time could only argue that Husserl's account supports the contention that tenseless temporal relations require tense if she were willing to take up some kind of transcendental perspective. She would have to admit a realm of "reality" or of "being" which is neither subjective nor objectively real, but which is rather that through which any objective reality must be constituted and its meaning understood. If she were not willing to do this, she would have to conclude that Husserl's account is merely suggestive and not really pertinent to the question at hand.

Our examination of how Husserl's account of the constitution of objective time might contribute to one possible argument for the reality of tense has thus led us back to the differences in philosophical presupposition between Husserlian phenomenology and the broadly realist

metaphysical debate about tense. This examination raises the question, from an Husserlian perspective, as to what exactly tenses mean by the “objective reality” they attribute to tense, and, specifically, whether they mean the same kind of objective reality which can be attributed to the objective series of tenselessly related temporal positions along with their datability and measurability. On the other hand, from the perspective of the debate about tense, we are left wondering whether Husserl’s thinking about time-consciousness manages to address the reasons why it has been appealing to many metaphysicians to view tense as objectively real.

The analogy between time and space

In order to understand this situation more clearly, as well as to move us on to the question of what Husserl has to tell us about the direct or immediate experience of the tenseless relations of precedence and succession, it may be helpful to step back for a moment and make a brief comparison between time and space in regard to these issues. Both Husserl and the participants in the debate about tense draw upon analogies and disanalogies between time and space in their thinking about time.

We can begin with the observation, often noted in the debate about tense, that there are certain parallels between temporal indexicals such as yesterday, tomorrow, now, etc. and spatial indexicals such as here and there. Both sets of indexicals appear to make reference to the position of the speaker in specifying a temporal or spatial position. So, if I say that yesterday was New Year’s Eve, you need to know whether I am saying so on January 1st to know whether my statement is correct. Similarly, if I call you on the phone and tell you to come over here as soon as possible, you need to know where I am in order to know what I mean by “here.” Generally speaking, temporal indexicals get their indexicality from being tensed expressions—there is an implicit reference to what time is past, present, or future in their use. Similarly, there is an implicit reference to which spatial locations are “here” or “there,” “close by” or “far away” in the use of spatial indexicals. So, to extend the analogy, we could speak of “hereness” or “thereness” as tensed attributes of space.

Now, no philosophers (of whom I am aware) engaged in the debate about tense would make the claim that spatial tense is objectively real. It is not the case that the area I happen to be standing in has the objective property of *hereness*. On any standard view, *hereness* is a subject-

dependent property in a way that other spatial designations such as *next to*, *10 feet above*, *one mile north of* etc. are not. Detensers would generally claim that the situation is similar when it comes to time—tensed attributes such as *presentness*, *pastness*, and *futurity* are, on their view, mind- or subject-dependent in a way that tenseless temporal relations such as *earlier than*, *after*, or *simultaneous with* are not. Tensers, on the other hand, claim that at least some *temporal* tensed attributes are in fact as objectively real as tenseless relations, even though this is not true of tensed *spatial* attributes. They claim that there is a disanalogy between time and space in this regard.

What does this have to do with Husserl and the question of how tenseless relations may or may not depend upon tense? First of all, we should note that Husserl would agree that spatial tense is not “objectively” real in the way that tenseless spatial relations like *one mile to the north of* are, just as he seems to agree with detensers that there is no past, present, and future when it comes to “objective” time. However, this does not mean that he would agree with both tensers and detensers that spatial tense is therefore *merely* subjective or mind-dependent. Rather, Husserl would likely say that, just as with temporal tense, there is a *phenomenological* sense in which spatial tense can be understood. That is to say, objective space is constituted through spatial experience which is immanent and pre-objective, and which includes attributes such as *hereness* and *thereness*. It is only through the experience of my own lived-body as providing a point of orientation, and above all, through its defining of a “here” and a “there” that I can possibly experience something like objective space which can be measured and defined in non-subjective terms. Therefore, just as with time, Husserl would argue that I can take spatial tense in a merely subjective sense—as expressing the relationship between a subject located within objective space and that objective space itself—or, on the other hand, in its phenomenological significance as playing a role in the very constituting of that objective space to begin with.

This comparison between space and time, I think, helps us to see why Husserl’s account of the constitution of objective time does not really provide the type of support for tensed theories of time that tensers are looking for. This is because Husserl’s account of the dependence of objective time on tense applies equally to the dependence of objective space on spatial tense. Since no tensor would want to admit the objective reality of spatial tense, he could not accept that Husserl’s account of the constitution of objective time provides evidence that temporal tense must be objectively real. Rather, it is a matter of accepting or rejecting the

phenomenological perspective from which both spatial and temporal tense have a kind of being which is neither objectively real nor merely subjective.

This comparison also helps us to see that our discussion of Husserl's account of objective time fails to capture what it is about tense that makes tensed theories of time attractive. Why is it so much more plausible to say that *past*, *present*, and *future* are objective features of reality than it is to say that *here* and *there* are? This is a question that we must put to Husserl as we go on to discuss both his conception of presentness, as well as his understanding of absolute time-constituting consciousness as a flow.

Is the perception of tenseless temporal relations direct?

For now, however, the analogy between space and time points us in one further direction in our attempt to understand how Husserl's work relates to arguments over the dependence of tenseless temporal relations on tense. This is the question of whether we do in fact immediately perceive or experience temporal items as characterized by tenseless temporal relations. If we directly experience one phase of temporal object or event as earlier than another, for example, without the intermediary of tense, then it would seem to follow that tenses could not hope to claim that tense is somehow more experientially basic than tenseless temporal relations. The argument that we directly experience tenseless relations was the second of the two possible counterarguments which we indicated earlier were available to detensers in defending themselves against the claim that the B-series is somehow dependent upon the A-series.

One reason that the comparison between space and time is helpful here is that there is the possibility of a difference between the two when it comes to the question of how directly we experience the objective attributes of each. I think it is pretty uncontroversial that we often directly perceive "objective" spatial relations such as *next to* or *approximately a foot above* without the explicit mediation of spatial tense. When I look at the Manhattan skyline from a certain angle, for example, I see the Empire State Building as closer to the Chrysler Building than it is to the Statue of Liberty, without having to infer this from my experience of these structures as being "here" or "there." Similarly, I see the leaves of the tree outside my window as being located above the cars on the street without the mediation of spatial tense. Husserl, in fact, makes this explicit when he compares what he calls the "quasi-objective" space of the

visual field with the “quasi-objective” time of the temporal field. In the visual field, Husserl writes, we find “relations such as next-to-one-another, one-above-the-other, one-inside-the-other, as well as closed lines completely delimiting a part of the field, etc. (1991, 5).

Matters are not quite as clear, however, when it comes to tenseless temporal relations. Are these perceived directly, without the mediation of temporal tense? This is precisely the question that, if answered negatively, could provide ammunition for a tensor position when it comes to the reality of temporal becoming. Perhaps, as a tensor might have it, one thing that distinguishes temporal from spatial tense is that it is somehow more necessary for the experience of tenseless temporal relations than spatial tense is for tenseless spatial relations. That is, perhaps one reason that we are more inclined to attribute objective reality to *past*, *present*, and *future*, than we are to *here* and *there*, is that we can only experience succession and duration through experiencing temporal tense, while we can experience *above/below* or *next to/apart from* directly—i.e. without the mediating experience of *hereness* or *thereness*.

From an Husserlian point of view, the question about whether tenseless spatial relations differ from tenseless temporal relations appears to be a question about whether quasi- or pre-objective versions of tenseless temporal relations—such as *earlier than* or *simultaneous with*—are part of the original and immanent temporal field through which objective time is constituted. In the case of space, it is clear that for Husserl “tenseless” spatial relations, such as *one-above-the-other*, do in fact characterize the visual field and therefore pre-objective space. It must certainly be the case, then, that fully objective space is constituted not only on the basis of the lived body as a center of orientation, along with the concomitant experience of *here* and *there*, but also on the basis of the quasi- or pre-objective spatial relations found already in the “immanent” visual field. On the other hand, our reconstruction in Chapter 3 of Husserl’s account of the constitution of objective time made no significant mention of the experience of immanent temporal objects as earlier/later. Rather, the focus was on how the continuous passage of a primally-impressed now-point into the just-past of retention helped established the absolute identity of that point in time and enabled the construction of an objective timeline whose positions could be ordered successively.

Nevertheless, it is not at all clear that other aspects of Husserl’s writings on time-consciousness don’t support the notion of the direct perception of tenseless temporal relations. To begin with, in the introductory section recently quoted from, Husserl sets up a parallel

between quasi-objective space and quasi-objective time, which suggests that there are analogues in the immanent temporal field to relations like *one-above-the-other* in the visual field. Even more significant is Husserl's general emphasis on the fact that we genuinely and originally perceive succession and duration. Our perception of these temporal phenomena is a major part of what Husserl sets out to describe and analyze in his writings on time-consciousness. One of the clearest aspects of Husserl's theory is his distinction between the original intuition of enduring and successive temporal objects and the reproduction of such through, for example, recollection. If it is the case that we really do perceive succession and duration themselves through intuitions which give temporal objects as enduring and succeeding one another, then it would seem to follow that tenseless temporal relations must make up part of our immanent temporal experience. It would seem to follow, in other words, that we *directly* experience phases of temporal objects as stretching from earlier to later (duration) and as being earlier and later than one another (succession), rather than that we only experience such tenseless temporal relations on the higher-order level of fully objectified temporal objects located along an objectified absolute timeline.

The distinction between earlier/later and past/present/future in Husserl's work

Part of the problem in reaching a conclusion in this matter is that Husserl does not make a systematic distinction between tenseless and tensed temporal relations when he is discussing the operation of retention, protention, and primal impression and the level of immanent temporality. And perhaps there is good reason for this to some degree. After all, on the level of immanent temporality we do not have fully constituted objects or a fully constituted objective time. So it is not clear whether and to what degree the concepts of objective tenseless temporal relations or of objective tense apply at this level.

We have been assuming in the discussion up to this point that when Husserl talks about a succession of notes in immanent time in relation to the way that one note is held in retention as just-past when another note is emerging as now, for example, that the general relationships between "succession" and "past" and "now" are substantially similar to the corresponding relationships on the level of objective time. But in Chapter 2 we noted that it is not clear that the just-pastness attributed to a note held onto in retention can really be distinguished rigidly from

presentness or nowness in the same way that past and present are distinguished at a higher level of constitution. As Husserl points out more than once, we run into difficulties here with the limitations of language which lead us to use the same words to describe aspects of different levels of constitution.

Nevertheless, there are, of course, reasons that we use the same words in these different contexts. More importantly, the account that Husserl gives us of time-consciousness, even in its lowest constitutional levels, must not lose touch with the recognizable features of our concrete experiences if it is to be admissible as phenomenological description. This means then, that we need to be able to make sense, on an experiential level, of the way in which Husserl's structural account of retention, protention, and primal impression, along with their noematic correlates, really gives us a description of what it is like to be directly conscious of succession and duration.

Clearly, Husserl's account of time-consciousness is meant to describe the structure through which we are conscious of immanent temporal objects as enduring and as succeeding one another. But how does it do so? As already noted, the retention/impression/protention structure appears to account for the experience of succession and duration through the experience of a phase of a temporal object passing from future to present to past. Granted, this passage is not on the level of objective time, and the "futurity," "presentness," and "pastness" which are the noematic correlates of protention, primal impression, and retention are not on the same constitutional level on which we normally think of an event as lying in the future, present, or past. Nonetheless, if retention/primal impression/protention gives us the structure of the consciousness through which we experience succession and duration on the immanent level, it does so through positing something *analogous* to the transition of a moment from being still in the future, to being now, to being held as just-past. It would seem, then, that Husserl is giving us an account of the experience of succession and duration in the immanent sphere which ultimately makes such an experience dependent upon the experience of a transition from future, to present, to past. So, despite Husserl's general position that succession and duration are directly perceived or experienced, his analysis of what this means, of the structure through which this occurs, suggests that such an experience is actually mediated by the experience of something analogous to a tensed transition.

A phenomenological weakness in Husserl's account

When we are discussing such a low level of temporal constitution, it is sometimes hard to be sure that our phenomenological descriptions really reflect our concrete experiences. One of the reasons that it is proving difficult to decide whether Husserl's account of time-consciousness supports the notion that we perceive tenseless temporal relations directly is, I think, that it is not entirely clear to what degree his structural account is adequate to all aspects of our concrete experiences of succession and duration. Consider the experience of hearing someone speak a word out loud—the word “cat” for example. According to Husserl, we can focus our attention on the temporal characteristics of the immanent sounding of the word as an enduring object. There is no doubt that the sounding of the word has a certain span which stretches from the initial sound of the “c” to its culmination in the sound of the “t.” It seems to be clear that I hear the “t” sound as succeeding the “c” sound, and the stretching out of the “a” sound in between. These facts are consonant with Husserl's claim that we experience duration and succession originally and intuitively. They also fit with Husserl's apparent assumption in comparing time-consciousness with space-consciousness that there are pre-objective temporal relations analogous to pre-objective spatial relations such as “one-above-the-other.”

However, Husserl's account does more than note that we perceive the immanently sounding “cat” as enduring through a succession from beginning to end. Rather, Husserl analyzes this succession in terms of the syntheses of retention, primal impression, and protention, as we have seen. According to this analysis, what constitutes my experience of the temporal spreading-out of the word “cat” is the continual transition of phases or profiles of this temporal object from being protended as about to occur, to being primally-impressed as Now, to being held in retention as more and more past. If this is really what we experience when we experience succession or duration, even at the lowest levels of temporal constitution and at the smallest time-scales, then it would seem to follow that duration and succession imply a deeper experience of something like a transition from one proto-tense to another.

However, the question which faces us here is whether this structural description has a concrete experiential basis. To return to our example, Husserl claims that we can attend to the way that when the “a” sound in cat is most vividly emerging as Now, the “c” sound is there for

me as just-past. Then, as the “t” sound emerges, the “a” is there as just-past and the “c” is held onto as even further past. It is not clear to me that I can find evidence for such a description in my experience of hearing a word like “cat” spoken at a normal speed. As we found in Chapter 2 when we considered the experience of watching a single throw on the baseball diamond, there just doesn’t seem to be “time” for this kind of experience. Though I do find, in my experience of hearing the word “cat,” a temporal spreading-out and a directionality—a foreshadowing of the end in the beginning and a completing of the beginning in the end—this seems somehow all given at once. I cannot, it seems to me, even in reflection, stop the unfolding in the middle to see that I am holding onto the beginning of the word as I wait for the end to come.

One might claim that I am asking too much here. It might be argued that Husserl is not trying to describe the concrete experience of hearing a word like “cat,” but is rather giving us the horizontal temporal structure that any such experience must conform to. On this view, we should not say that we “infer” succession or duration in any sense, or on any level, from an experience of transition between tenses, but it is nevertheless the case that retention/primal impression/protection describe the general structure of the consciousness in which any temporal spread is constituted.

Such a response is, in my view, phenomenologically inadequate. On what basis are we positing that my experience of hearing the word “cat” has such a structure, if not on the basis of finding this structure given in a concrete example of the experience? The only other reason that one might posit such a structure on this level, it seems to me, is that one is making certain non-phenomenological assumptions about the structure of time and its relationship to consciousness. So, for example, if one assumes that conscious activity must be located at a certain point in time, and that this point in time must be simultaneous with that which is perceived to be most fully Now, then one would come to the conclusion that any perception of succession or duration must depend upon the phases of a temporal object transitioning from being future vis-à-vis consciousness, to being simultaneous with consciousness, to being past vis-à-vis consciousness.

Husserl explicitly rejects or at least worries about these sorts of assumptions. Rather than holding that only a non-enduring, instantaneous point of content can be truly perceived at any one time, he sees his theory partially as an attempt to describe how we can be originally and *perceptually* conscious of *enduring* temporal objects. And, as we saw in Chapter 3, he struggles

explicitly with the question of whether the lowest level constituting activity of consciousness should be thought of itself as occupying some sort of temporal position.

Nevertheless, it seems that phenomenologically inadmissible assumptions such as these may be necessary to conclude that the retentional/impressional/protentional structure he proposes characterizes time-consciousness on every level and at every time-scale. After all, if I hear the word “cat” as enduring from its beginning to its end, and if my conscious intending of each phase of that word must be separable (at least in thought) into moments which are simultaneous with that phase of the word which is given as most originally and purely Now, then it must be the case that the experienced succession and duration results from a transition through which consciousness experiences (and holds onto) each of the phases of the word in continuous transition from some sort of future to present to past. But, if it is instead the case that we have no reason to assume that my conscious intending is identifiable with any particular moment within the experience, and that it is not necessarily the case that I experience one phase of the word as more Now than another (nor, therefore, as more simultaneous with the conscious intending itself), then it is not clear why I should describe phases of the word as going from being protended to being Now to being held onto in retention. So, it may be that Husserl, despite his good intentions, is more influenced by these sorts of metaphysical assumptions in his early writings on time-consciousness than he realizes.

This is not to deny that his account of the consciousness of duration and succession in temporal objects tries valiantly to avoid such assumptions. The notion that retention and protention are moments of the original perceiving of a temporally extended object is a truly innovative and largely phenomenologically sound idea. That this kind of horizontal structure is in play in any original intuition of a temporal object captures much that is true about time-consciousness and allows the sharp and quite necessary distinction between recollection and other forms of reproduction consciousness on one side, and original perceptual consciousness on the other. Not only that, but the retention/impression/protention structure fits well with the continuity which is such a salient feature of our experience of time. Indeed, while certain metaphysical assumptions may be necessary to apply this structure to short time-scales, it fits much better at slightly longer time-scales in which we can attend to the way that that which has passed by is still there for us perceptually in some sense, retained as part of the same perception which includes the now emerging phase of the perceived object. As we saw in Chapter 2, it is

much easier to find retentional, impressional, and protentional horizons in the experience of seeing a double-play unfold before you as a single event than it is in the experience of seeing only the throw from second to first. One might, in fact, hypothesize that it is the applicability of Husserl's structure at slightly longer time-scales that makes it so tempting to apply it to those shorter time-scales whose features it may fail to reflect accurately (at least without those metaphysical assumptions mentioned above).

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether the retention-impression-protention structure requires unsupported metaphysical assumptions in order to be fully applicable to the experience of hearing a spoken word or seeing a ball thrown a short distance. In part, this depends upon difficult questions raised in Chapter 2 about how one interprets the structure in general, and retention and primal impression in particular. One of the central questions dealt with there is, I think, crucial in determining the phenomenological plausibility of this structure. This is the question of whether and to what degree we really experience a *now-point* in the way that Husserl characterizes it. One could argue that if we follow Husserl on this issue, then the application of the retention-impression-protention structure to even indefinitely short perceptual time-scales is warranted (and this would presumably buttress the view that tenseless earlier/later relations are not generally directly experienceable without the mediation of something like tense). However, if we conclude that we do not experience such a now-point, then there is a significant question as to whether the retention-impression-protention schema can characterize time-consciousness formally and universally in the way Husserl describes. Therefore, answering such a question has implications not only for whether or not Husserl's theory can be used to support a possible tensor argument in the debate about temporal becoming, but also for whether and in what direction Husserl's theory itself might need expansion or revision.

The question is not one which can be definitively resolved here. Nevertheless, this is a good opportunity to discuss briefly why I find Husserl's notion of an experienced now-point (as the noematic correlate of primal impression) problematic. As noted in Chapter 2, Husserl is very careful to be clear that the now-point is only an abstraction which cannot be understood apart from its role along with retained and protended profiles in constituting a presently unfolding immanent temporal object. However, the now-point has a very important function for Husserl in that it is responsible for expressing that moment in our experience of any temporal object which is most purely original, new, and vivid. For Husserl, the now-point is perhaps an ideal limit, but

it is a limit which expresses something genuine and important about any temporal experience—namely that there is a sense that whatever is held onto and retained, whatever is anticipated more or less openly as about to happen, must go from this state of being anticipated to being held-onto through a moment of vivid emergence. To refer to an example he makes use of, if the comet is going to have a tail, it must also have a head.

Now, there is no doubt some sense in this line of thinking. However, I worry that its structural abstractness fails to capture something important about the concrete perceiving of a temporal object. Think about hearing the word “cat.” Or even a quickly spoken sentence like, “There’s my cat!” If, while listening to the word or the sentence, I try to focus my attention as much as possible on the “now-point,” on the emerging edge of newness which belongs for a vanishingly short time to each moment of sound, I find it an impossible task. I either feel like I keep missing it, or else I feel like I am focusing more on my own preparing-to-focus than I am on the constantly emerging leading edge of sound. In fact, in order to really hear the word or the sentence, I find that I must let my attention drift back as I take in the word or sentence, so that I can hear the word or sentence building from its beginning towards its end. When I reflect upon my experience, it seems as if what is most vivid is always something that I know is not objectively the most recently emerged content. When I try to focus on the now-point, I find echoes of what has just gone by instead. If I may indulge in even more metaphorical language, it is as if my attention must constantly fall back to move across the grain of time to pick up surges of directedness. It is as if there is a kind of fluctuating window that frames the word or sentence as it is heard, so that the whole of it can appear at once as a stretching across that window.²³

If something like this is the case, it is hard to know how to fit the notion of a now-point, no matter how ideal or abstract, into the experience itself. As we found in the double-play example of Chapter 2, there seems to be a scale at which the unfolding of time, the succession and duration that so eminently characterize temporal objects, is experienced all-together, as a single motion, so to speak. It seems to be oxymoronic to talk about a succession experienced as a togetherness, as something all at once. And there is no doubt that Husserl was trying to capture the way that succession is a unity which is nevertheless not a complete togetherness (otherwise how could one phase succeed another?) with his retention/impression/protention structure. But it

²³ This brief phenomenological reflection is inspired by the insights of Peter Manchester in his book, *The Syntax of Time*, especially in the discussion found on p. 36.

does appear that there is something different about the way that the earlier/later directionality is experienced all at once, from outside, as it were, at the shortest time-scales.

Concluding remarks

Where does all of this leave us? There are two sets of conclusions to be drawn as we end the discussion of how Husserl's work might contribute to arguments over the dependence of tenseless relations upon tense.

The first thing to take away from this discussion is the fact that difficult problems emerge in Husserl's own phenomenological analyses when we try to become clear about how the experience of succession and duration relates to the experience of past, present, and future, even on lower levels of temporal constitution. One of the problems we faced is how to reconcile phenomenological differences between very short time-scales and ones which are somewhat longer. This problem is intimately related to the question of how to understand the apparent continuity of time, and especially how to reconcile this continuity with the way that we experience temporal objects or events as discrete unities, as well as with the notion that there are qualitative differences between the way we experience temporal attributes at different time-scales. Also related is the tension between Husserl's claim to give a formal analysis of the structure of time-consciousness with the clear influence that the content and context of that consciousness has upon its context. Implicated in all of these problems is the vexing question of the role of the primal impression and now-point in a Husserlian view of time-consciousness—how should we interpret and evaluate Husserl's understanding of this abstract and ideal aspect of our experience of temporal objects? All of these issues call for further work in Husserl interpretation and in phenomenological reflection. Although one could not claim that these are all previously unrecognized problems, they have been thrown into sharp relief by the attempt to apply Husserlian ideas to the debate about tense.

The second set of conclusions we can draw concern the question of the degree to which Husserl's work on time-consciousness supports one side or the other in the argument over whether the tenseless temporal relations are somehow dependent on the experience of tense. As has become clear, there is, unfortunately, no simple answer to this question. When we consider

the constitution of objective time as a homogenous series of absolute temporal locations ordered as earlier and later than one another, Husserl's account seems to support the perspective of some tenses that tenseless relations are unthinkable apart from tense. Both his conception of phenomenology (and of constitution in particular), as well as the details of his account, lend credence to view that the notion of an objective time series without reference to the experience of tense would be nonsensical.

On the other hand, when we focus more upon the lower levels of temporal constitution, the bulk of the evidence (though not all of it), drawn from Husserl's descriptions, suggests that we do directly or immediately experience something at least akin to what the participants in the debate about tense would refer to as tenseless temporal relations. Therefore, one could imagine a defender using Husserl's views to attempt to defend the idea that tenseless relations can be separated from the experience of tense, and that they are just as experientially and conceptually basic. The complexity of the situation only increases, however, when we consider the fact (once again noted in Chapter 3) that, on Husserl's view, tense is involved in a different way even in the immediate experience of succession and duration. Even when we consider the experience of an immanent temporal object on a sufficiently small time-scale (like the seen throw in a baseball game or the heard spoken word) such that the object is given with an earlier/later directionality without past, present, or future phases, it is still the case that the *entire* temporal object is experienced to be present, it is given *presently*.

In the end, then, we are left to conclude that what is most apparent when we try to apply Husserl's analyses to the question of the dependence of tenseless relations upon tense is the increased complexity that the question assumes. In order to better understand the implications of this complexity for the debate about tense, and in particular the implications of differences between constitutional levels, as well as of this inescapable presentness which seems to accompany all temporal experience, we need to turn more directly to problems concerning presentness and the absolute flow which emerged in Chapter 1 in relation to McTaggart's paradox and the experience of temporal becoming.

5.

The Flow of Time: Linking Phenomenological and Contemporary Metaphysical Perspectives

It is the goal of this chapter to address the deepest connections between Husserl's work on inner time-consciousness and the contemporary metaphysical debate about tense. I hope to show that there are surprising parallels between the structures of the two discussions, which bring into sharp relief the most vexing questions about time. Additionally, it is my conviction that by showing the deep overlap between these two discussions we can gain better insight into both phenomenological and metaphysical understandings of time than we could by sticking to one paradigm or the other. I maintain both that certain of Husserl's reflections point the way forward for the debate about tense, as well as that questions asked in this debate sharpen the phenomenological questions with which Husserl struggled.

5.1 McTaggart's Paradox and Varieties of Presentness

The best path for reaching these deeper parallels begins with the second area of overlap between the two approaches which was identified in the previous chapter. This is the connection between Husserl's account of the different ways that we experience presentness and the impasse in the debate over McTaggart's paradox. Husserl's reflections on the distinction and relationship between the presentness of temporal objects and the presentness of our own experiential perspective on those objects has implications for the debate over McTaggart's paradox. In order to make these implications clear, we need a brief reminder of what that supposed paradox consists in.

A restatement of the problem

McTaggart's paradox is really an argument against the conceptual coherence of describing the objective world as having tensed attributes. The argument begins from the premise that if tense is real then it must be the case that any given moment or event (that is not at the beginning or end of time) must really be past, present, and future. However, the argument goes on, since past, present, and future are incompatible attributes, no single moment or event can have more than one of them, so tense cannot really characterize moments or events. McTaggart, of course, anticipates the objection that no event has all three attributes at the same time, but, rather, that it has these attributes successively—being future at some times, present at others, and past at still others. According to McTaggart, however, such an objection is either circular or lands one in a vicious regress since it can only eliminate the contradiction inherent in the concept of tense by making use of a conception of temporal succession which itself relies on a change in tense for its meaning.

In Chapter 1, we also considered a reformulation of this paradox put forward by Mellor. He claims that essentially the same problem with tense can be exhibited by considering the function of tensed truth conditions. One would think, according to Mellor, that if tense were real, then the tensed attributes of moments or events would provide the truth conditions for tensed *tokens* such as the utterance in 1950 of the sentence S: "The year 2000 lies in the future." That is to say, a tenseser would be expected to hold that what makes this 1950 token true is the fact that the year 2000 has the attribute of being in the future. However, Mellor argues, tensed facts such as the futurity of the year 2000 cannot reliably serve as the truth condition for such a sentence token. This is because we should expect the truth value of this sentence *token* to remain the same over time. That is, the 1950 utterance of S should still be true in 2010, even if a 2010 utterance of the sentence would not be. Yet, in 2010, it is *not* the case that the year 2000 lies in the future. So, according to Mellor, it cannot be the case that tensed attributes such as the futurity of the year 2000 provide the truth conditions for tensed sentence tokens. Rather we need tenseless token-reflexive truth conditions such as "The 1950 utterance of S is true iff this utterance occurs before the year 2000." This fact shows, on Mellor's view, that contradictions

occur when we insist that tense is a real attribute of the world and attempt to allow it to perform what would seem to be its natural logical role as such.

A position outside of time: the issue of perspective

In Chapter 1, we considered a number of tensor objections to these arguments, as well as detenser rebuttals. We found that the debate appeared to be stuck for a simple reason. Each side began its argumentation by implicitly assuming that a central aspect of its own theory was true. Those who argue (generally detensers) that McTaggart's paradox poses a significant problem for tensed theories of time assume that one can take up a perspective "outside" of time, as it were—a perspective which ranges across an objectively ordered time-series without attributing a privileged perspective to any particular position in time. Those who dismiss McTaggart's paradox, on the other hand, assume that one must argue from the perspective of a particular, actual present time.

If one considers McTaggart's argument from a tenseless perspective according to which there is no privileged time, then it makes perfect sense to say that if tense were real, then any given moment would have to be past, present, and future. From an "outside" perspective which ranges over all times without being located at any one of them, all moments appear to be equal. To say that a given moment is past as opposed to present, or future as opposed to past, would be to privilege a certain temporal perspective. All one can say from this outside, objective point of view is that a certain moment is past, for example, *relative to a later speech act or experience*. But this does not make that moment *really* and objectively *past*. From a point of view which takes in the whole of time from outside, it does not make sense to say that any one moment could really and objectively have a certain tense. The same thing goes for Mellor's formulation of the paradox. From a perspective which ranges over times without privileging any of them, it is clearly the case that a tensed token is made true or false by its being earlier than, simultaneous with, or later than the particular time or event to which it refers, not by its being *really* past, present, or future.

On the other hand, from a tensed perspective, which assumes that one particular time *is actually* present, it does not make sense to say that any given moment must be past, present, *and* future. Rather, one should only say of such a moment that it must be one of the three: future

(and thus that it will be present later on and past even later than that), *or* present (and thus that it has been future and will be past), *or* past (and thus that it was present and was future before that). From the perspective of being at a certain present time, it is simply not the case that any given event is past, present, *and* future. A similar consideration applies to Mellor's formulation as well. From the perspective of actually being at different positions in time, it is not the case that nothing about the truth value of a 1950 utterance of the sentence "The year 2000 lies in the future" changes. Rather, as Smith points out, in 1950 this utterance *is* true, but in 2010, the utterance *was* true.

When we make the assumptions of each side explicit in his way, it is easy to see that they will not come to an agreement over the significance of McTaggart's paradox without addressing the issue of whether or not one can and should take up a perspective "outside" of time in thinking about the paradox. Unfortunately, as we've seen, each side takes a position on this issue based upon its own underlying view about the metaphysics of time. If tense is not real, then no moment is really present, and so at the most fundamental metaphysical level, all times must be equivalent. If tense is real, then some particular moment is actually present, and all times are not in fact equivalent.

One might try to approach this fundamental disagreement from a more phenomenological point of view by criticizing the detenser position on the grounds that we do in fact always find ourselves located at a particular time and that one cannot really imagine experiencing time from a perspective of not being at a certain time. If possible experience is the final court of appeal, then it would seem to be the case that the tensor position on McTaggart's paradox is less problematic than the detenser position. If we stick to experience, we are always at a particular time, and, therefore, it is never the case that we actually experience a moment or event being past, present, and future.

While it may well be the case that this observation about our experience poses a problem for the detenser position on McTaggart's paradox, it does not get at the core issue between tensors and detensers. This is because tensors are not in fact committed to the idea that we must always only think about time from a perspective which is itself located within time. It is only because tensors assume that there is a fact of the matter about which moment is present that they are able to dismiss McTaggart's paradox by limiting themselves to the perspective of a particular temporal position. In point of fact, tensed theories of time do *not* want to reinforce the notion

that there is any kind of essential connection between the presentness of a moment and our ability to imagine a subjective perspective being located at that moment.

Ultimately, tenses are as committed as detenses to the ideal of a complete and objective theory of real time. They do not want experience or subjective perspectives to be part of any objective description of what tensed time is in itself. While they may be willing to take advantage of the apparent implication of their theory that we can't fully specify the temporal attributes of the world without specifying where we are temporally positioned, one might argue that they in fact leave such a perspective behind when they assert the transition or movement of the present along the moments of the B-series.

If we were truly to limit ourselves to the perspective of an actually present time, we could not assert the objective motion or transition of the Now. We could, it is true, assert that we have experienced other events and moments being present and that we have experienced events going from being expected as future to being present to being past, and that we have experienced anticipating this sort of transition and then having it come to pass. However, such an assertion is not necessarily equivalent to the assertion of the movement of the Now along an objective B-series. The model of the moving Now, it seems to me, suggests that there is some way that I could experience the transition of tenses as an outside observer, so to speak—that I could imagine myself stepping out of the flow of time to experience it as itself some kind of present motion. From what temporal perspective, we might ask, am I able to observe the real transition of the Now from one objectively fixed moment to another? For a tensed theory of time, temporal becoming cannot be reduced to the experience of one event happening after another. Such an experience must be the result of some kind of fundamental objective movement or transition of tense along the B-series.

Because both sides ultimately want an objective theory of real time as a whole, I do not think adjudicating the significance of McTaggart's paradox for the debate about tense is a matter of deciding precisely how "objective" or "timeless" a perspective is legitimate in this debate. However, the question of the legitimacy of perspective has raised a deep difficulty for the question of the reality of tense.

On one hand, both sides are trying to assert something that is objectively true about the nature of time in general. In doing so, they cannot bind themselves to the perspective of being at one particular time. When we want to gain an objective and comprehensive theory of something,

there is no question that we must consider that entity from as many different perspectives as possible. Since we have certainly experienced things happening at many different times, and we can imagine things happening or ourselves being located at many different possible times, of course this must be part of our theory of what time is. If we did not experience a multitude of changing temporal attributes, there would be nothing even to form a theory of. It is precisely because we can range over past and future times in our memory, expectation, and imagination—and imagine any of those times being present in a formally equivalent way—that we can even conceptualize the B-series and take it that there is some objective and consistent structure of time to be explicated.

On the other hand, McTaggart's paradox and the question of perspective raise the difficulty of how to deal with the fact that we can't imagine *not* being located at some *particular* time. How do we fit the fact that we can't experience or imagine experiencing anything temporal except from the perspective of a present moment into our objective description of the nature of time? There even though all times are equivalent in the sense that we can imagine being at any of them, they are not equivalent in the sense that in any temporal imagining, there is always a present.

Temporal perspective and the spatial analogy

Now, one might object to the notion that integrating the presentness of perspective into a theory of real time is a problem by making a comparison with space. It is also true, the objection might go, that we can only experience space from a particular point within it. We always have a privileged "here" in any actual experience of spatial attributes. But does really present a problem for the formal equivalence of objective spatial coordinates. We already had occasion to observe in Chapter 4 that the fact that our experience of space is always of something which has its "here" and "there" would not convince most philosophers that "here" and there are "objective" characteristics of spatial reality. So why should we worry that our experience of time is always from the perspective of a present moment when we are trying to describe the mind-independently real structure of time?

This kind of objection to the relevance of perspective is precisely the sort of point a defender would likely make. I do not claim to have a complete answer to it here. However, I

would suggest that there are at least two major questions which should still be raised in the face of such an objection.

First of all, there is the question of the major differences between time and space not mentioned in the objection. Most important is the fact that there is no analogous inexorable “flow” of space. When the position of the spatial “here” changes, it is because we have chosen to move from one point in objective space to another, or have been moved due to some contingent occurrence. We can not only *imagine* being back at the original “here” but can generally choose to *actually* return to that particular location.

The second question is whether one should be so sure that perspective and “hereness” do not in fact raise a difficult issue for our understanding of space. From an Husserlian phenomenological point of view, while it is certainly the case that both in physics and in everyday life we can make use of a conception of objective space which is completely mind-independent, this does not mean that a fully philosophical theory of space will not be founded at the deepest level on the fundamental ways that spatial attributes appear to an experiencing consciousness. That is to say, for a transcendental phenomenologist, no understanding of space can be complete without an understanding of how our objective conception of spatial coordinates is built upon the phenomenological sense of “hereness” and “thereness,” for example, and how these relate to our lived bodies, as well as our ability to move our bodies from place to place. So, even if time is analogous to space in this regard, this does not imply that there are no questions to be asked from a phenomenological perspective about how to fit temporal perspective into a philosophical account of real time (and, ultimately, what it means to give a philosophical account of real time).

Husserl and the ubiquity of “adverbial” presentness

Now that we have a better understanding of the underlying issues in the disagreement over McTaggart’s paradox, we can explore more directly how Husserl’s distinction between the presentness of temporal objects and the presentness of conscious acts is relevant. In discussing McTaggart’s paradox in Chapter 1, we noted that one way the disagreement presented itself was through the notion that a moment or event could be *presently* past or *presently* future. While the tensor Smith argued that the property of presentness inheres in the pastness or futurity of any past

or future events, the detenser Oaklander argued that the inherence of the property of pastness in a past event could not itself be present, because then the event would have to be somehow present—but it is a *past* event. This exchange raises the question of whether there is something problematic or unclear about an event being presently past, for example. What sort of presentness is involved in this *presently*, which on Smith’s view, tenses are committed to ascribing to every past and future event?

Husserl’s reflections on the distinction between the presentness of temporal objects or events and the presentness of conscious acts can help us get a better sense of just what this “adverbial” presentness consists in. Broadly speaking, Husserl’s absolute flow—what he later came to call the living present—is essentially equivalent to the “adverbial” presentness at issue in the debate. As something which is apparently present but, according to Husserl, in the final consideration not temporal at all, the absolute flow can help us begin to understand the complex nature of this “presentness” which appears to accompany all futurity and pastness. In addition, its controversial role in the foundations of Husserlian phenomenology can shed light on why the question of the relationship between tense and subjective perspective is so vexing.

From an Husserlian perspective, one of the reasons that the disagreement over McTaggart’s paradox remains intractable is that it assumes that the kind of presentness which one might attribute to a flash of lightning or a tone in a sounding melody is taken to be the same as the presentness involved in asserting that last night’s lightning is *presently* past. Husserl’s reflections upon the way that something can be presently past point us towards the difference between the way our conscious remembering or perceiving is present to us and the way that an event in the world can be present to us.

Now, we should admit at the outset that from the perspective of the debate, the idea of multiple kinds of presentness seems far-fetched. Since the debate about tense concerns the question of whether tensed attributes are mind-independently real or not, if one identifies different types of tensed attributes, it simply multiplies the problem: now we have to ask whether or not two or more different kinds of presentness are real or not. In addition, the idea of multiple senses of presentness is particularly problematic for tenses and detenses who all assume that the question is whether a particular moment or event has, in addition to the attribute of being at a certain location in the B-series, also the attribute of being really present or really past or really future. For them, real tense would need to correlate with the positions along the B-series in such

a regular, predictable way, that to suggest that there might be a kind of presentness which is not the kind that can be grafted on to the B-series in such a manner would seem to be irrelevant.

Furthermore, the idea that the “adverbial” presentness which a tensor like Smith attributes to all events and moments might be something having to do with consciousness or subjectivity would be unacceptable to him. The participants in the debate about tense are only really interested in presentness (and the other tenses) insofar as it can be considered to be a temporal attribute of something in the “real” (as opposed to mental) world. For them, a presentness that was somehow dependent for its being upon consciousness or subjective perspective would simply be the kind of tense that B-theorists recognize: the subjective, mind-dependent result of the interaction of conscious experience with the B-series. This is not the kind of real tense that tensors believe in and detensors dismiss.

Nevertheless, I intend to show that the different levels of presentness which we drew out from Husserl’s reflections on time-consciousness in Chapters 2 and 3 are helpful in understanding what we mean when we say that an event is *presently* past, *presently* present, or *presently* future. As we will see, though we begin from Husserl’s distinction between the temporality of an object or event and the temporality of consciousness itself, the situation is not as simple as identifying one type of temporality or presentness with subjectivity and the other with objectivity (as the participants in the debate about tense would understand these terms).

The first step, then, is to remember that Husserl identifies more than one level of immanence in his discussion of temporal constitution. In addition to the empirical objects in world-time—such as trees, sounding notes, flashing lightning—Husserl distinguishes two levels of temporal constitution within consciousness. One is the level of immanent temporal objects such as the tone as heard. These objects have their own unity in enduring, but it is a pre-empirical unity—they are not apperceived on this level as belonging to the external world with its objective world-time. In our discussion of this level of temporal constitution in Chapter 3, we noted that conscious acts, taken as immanent unities, should as well be placed at this level. My judgment yesterday that it would be smart to bring my umbrella with me was something that can be identified as a unified happening within my internal stream of consciousness. This is also true of sense perceptions, though here things become a bit more confusing because, to a certain degree, Husserl appears to identify the perceiving of a certain sense-content with that content as appearing. In any case, I can identify somewhat discrete and unified events within my immanent

living which have their order in a pre-empirical time. While these immanent temporal unities are not empirical or worldly or objective, they do have an authentic temporality, and they can be experienced to be past, present, or future in a way very similar to (and largely responsible for the constitution of) the way that worldly events and objects are experienced as tensed.

If we recall our discussion in Chapter 2 of Husserl's reflections on what is involved in taking a temporal object to have temporal duration and phases which are earlier and later than one another, we will remember that these phases were constituted as now, just past, or about to arrive through the operation of impressional, retentional, and protentional moments of intentionality. We then faced the tricky issue of how to think about what is present or past according to such a theory. We were able to speak of the entire duration of the temporal object unfolding as present, or of the now-phase constituted by primal impression as present, or even perhaps of some durationally defined "original temporal field" as being present. And in Chapter 3, we considered how the transition of the presentness and pastness of temporal objects and their phases helps to constitute the objective time-series along with perhaps, a more worldly conception of presentness.

However, when we consider the question at issue in the debate over McTaggart's paradox, it is not the presentness (or pastness/futurity) of immanent temporal objects—even when these objects are taken to be acts of consciousness—that can help us to understand the way that anything past must be in some sense *presently* past. To find an parallel to this "adverbial" presentness we need to focus on the deepest level of constitution and immanence that Husserl identifies: the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness. Whenever we experience a temporal object or one of its phases to be past, present, or future, this experiencing itself, on Husserl's view, is originally given to us as a "flow" which constitutes its object as temporal. This is true even if the immanent temporal object being constituted as past, present, or future is a discrete conscious act within the stream of consciousness. That is to say, whenever I remember making a judgment or am aware of hearing a song playing on the radio, it is also the case that I can become aware of an underlying flowing which is what intends that judgment or that hearing as an act of consciousness.

This absolute flow is nothing other than the activity of retention, protention, and primal impression mentioned above. The crucial point for us to remember here is that Husserl struggled mightily over the question of whether this absolute flow—this activity of retaining, protending,

and impressing—is itself temporal. When I reflect upon the experience of hearing a sounding tone or of remembering a previous judgment, it seems natural to conclude that the hearing and the remembering are happening presently. But we need to go think about this more precisely.

Consider Husserl's favorite example of hearing a series of tones in a short melodic phrase. After living in the experience of listening to the tones and taking them as an enduring and unified temporal object with a beginning middle and end, I can reflect upon what I experienced. It seems that I can break the experience down into certain phases of consciousness corresponding to the succeeding tones. At a given phase corresponding to the third sounding tone, according to Husserl, I can say that I am retaining the tones which have already just passed by, anticipating the coming finish to the melody, and having an impression of the currently sounding tone. The question Husserl asks is whether this retaining, protending, and having of an impression are simultaneous with one another and with the currently sounding third tone. Once again, the common sense answer would seem to be yes. Isn't my holding onto the tones that have come before simultaneous with my having this tone before me now?

We concluded in Chapter 3, however, that Husserl's ultimate answer to this question is no. While he often allows himself to be persuaded by the thought that the consciousness of the now must itself be now, in the end he decides that this cannot be the case. Not only does he recognize that such a view would lead to a problematic constitutional regress (if retention/primal impression/protention are indeed temporal then don't we need another level of retention/primal impression/protention to constitute them as such?), but Husserl also claims that it is impossible to think of the phases of the flow of consciousness as forming some kind of process with a rate and the possibility of any given phase being expanded into a longer extent. Essentially, what Husserl is saying here is that we are not to think of the flow, of the moments of retention, protention, and primal impression, as little slices of conscious processing which could be assigned a certain duration (even if it is only an immanently experienced duration). The absolute flow itself is not a process which takes up a certain amount of time—it is rather that in terms of which anything genuinely temporal must be constituted. The same thing, we should note, can be said about the flow of time in general, whether we think of it as absolute subjectivity or as the flowing of something real in the world. This is precisely the problem that tensors face in trying to describe how time could be said to really flow when it seems to be absurd to assign that flowing any rate.

But what is really going on here? Can't my hearing of a tone last for a certain period of time? Doesn't it appear to be present to me when the tone is present to me and then past when the tone is past? Absolutely. However, Husserl is suggesting that there are at least two different ways that we can think about what we mean by "hearing" when we consider this question. When we take "hearing" to refer to an act of consciousness which has its place in the before and after ordering of the stream of consciousness then it is certainly something temporal which can be present or past and which has its own (perhaps pre-objective) extent of time. However, on Husserl's view, we can identify a deeper level of temporal constitution at play in the act of hearing (and in all of our conscious life) which is ultimately the most original source of the temporal characteristics of both the tone and the act of hearing as an immanent temporal object within the stream of consciousness. This absolute flow—or as Husserl will later call it, this "living present" or "primordium"—is not something that can be assigned predicates such as past or present, nor is it something with phases that can be expanded to fill any extent of time. It is ultimately a flow that does not flow away. It is the *nunc stans* or the standing-streaming which is "always" there—in a very real sense it *is* the there.²⁴

It is this absolute flow or living present, which, despite its enigmatic character, can perhaps give us some insight into the "adverbial" presentness which became an issue in the discussion of McTaggart's paradox. According to the tensor Smith's argument, we should accept that every event or moment is not only past, present, or future, but is also "presently" past, "presently" present, or "presently" future. For a participant in the debate about tense, this seems odd. If tenses are real attributes of temporal items which are assignable based upon which moment of objective time is objectively present, which are past, and which are future, why should presentness have this odd ability to reach out from itself and characterize all events and moments? Husserl's reflections on the living present give us a way of talking about why this might be so.

If we distinguish between the "presentness" of the living present and the presentness which can characterize events and objects in the world, then we can say that it is really the living present which reaches out beyond itself to characterize—or, from an Husserlian point of view, to help constitute—all moments or events. All temporal constitution is accomplished ultimately

²⁴ See Brough (2010, 45) for a discussion of some of the terms used to describe the absolute flow in Husserl's later writings.

through the absolute flow or living present. As Husserl remarks in his later writings, “Times, objects, worlds of every sense ultimately have their origin in the primal flowing of the living present . . .”²⁵

According to Husserl’s account, this living present, which appears to be functionally equivalent to the “adverbial” presentness at issue in the debate, is not only distinguishable from the presentness one might attribute to a flash of lightning or a sounding tone, but it is not even temporal in an authentic sense. Furthermore, the living present is also not present in the way that a mental event locatable within the stream of consciousness can be said to be present when it occurs. Together, these observations suggest an Husserlian alternative to both Smith’s and Oaklander’s perspectives on McTaggart’s paradox. According to this alternative, at some given time, it is not the case that a past event is actually present in the way that a currently occurring event is, as Smith is accused of implying. However, it is also not the case that we can ignore the fact that there appears to be a present perspective given along with any experience of pastness or futurity. Rather, we need to recognize that this apparent presentness is not the kind of presentness that can be located along an objective time-series or be compared to the presentness or pastness of some event or moment. It is rather the fundamental manner in which any temporal item must appear. A flash of lightning can be experienced as happening now or as having just occurred, or we can experience the anticipation of the lightning about to flash. But this being given to some perspective, this “appearing to,” in its purest form—before it is reflected upon or taken itself as a certain kind of special event—is “always” there to establish, to underlie, the temporal positioning that is part of what characterizes any occurrence in the world or in the stream of my mental life.

The problem, from an Husserlian perspective, with the way that the discussion of McTaggart’s paradox has been set up is that the two sides identify the living present, the appearing of temporal items, with either the objective presentness of a moment along the B-series or else with the coincidence of a mental event with a certain moment in the B-series. They miss the original fact of the temporal appearing. On Husserl’s view, both the B-series, as well as any “objective” presentness which could be said to move along it, depend for their being there, or at least for their conceptualization, on this original fact of the living present. When a tensor like Smith identifies the living present with the “objective” presentness of a particular moment or

²⁵ Hua Mat VIII, 4, as translated and quoted in Brough 2010, 44.

event, he essentially tries to step outside of this living perspective to objectify it. But once it is an objective moment of the world which can be located at a certain position along the objective series of earlier and later moments, then it is hard to understand how it can be something which reaches out beyond itself to characterize the pastness or futurity of other moments. And it is also hard to understand how such a temporal determination can “move” from moment to moment when that “movement” is really not distinguishable from what originally defines those moments as successive temporal locations to begin with.

On the other hand, when a detenser like Oaklander reduces the living present to the being located of a mental event or subjective experience somewhere along the objective B-series, then it becomes difficult to say what perspective we are taking up when we assert all possible B-series positions to be essentially equivalent. From what perspective do I assert that each event must be past, present, and future? Certainly not from the perspective of being located at one particular time in the B-series. In addition, identifying the presentness of any act of experiencing with its simultaneity with an event occurring at the present time does little to account for what it means for that particular time to be present. All of my past experiences are located at particular times, but why does *this* time appear to be present, and what does this have to do with the nature of experience?

As indicated earlier, the participants in the debate about tense would be likely to object here that to hold that the existence of time is somehow dependent upon Husserl’s concept of the living present is to imply that time is a subjective phenomenon that has no mind-independent reality. Therefore, the living present should not be relevant to a debate which assumes a certain degree of realism about time. There is, of course, something to this objection insofar as Husserl sees himself as a transcendental idealist and insofar as Husserlian phenomenology certainly places a different emphasis on consciousness and experience than does contemporary analytic metaphysics, in general. In a sense, what the living present does bring to the debate over McTaggart’s paradox is the ineliminability of a kind of perspectival quality to time. However, I think that dismissing the Husserlian point of view as subjectivist ignores the distinction that he develops between the absolute flow or living present and the stream of consciousness thought of as a psychological phenomenon.

For Husserl, the living present is in no way merely subjective. Though it may be something that I discover by reflecting upon my own conscious experience, it is actually that

which gives rise both to the temporality of the external world, as well as to the temporality of my own subjective, egoic being. On Husserl's view, the living present is anonymous and pre-egoic. In James Mensch's book on Husserl's account of time, for example, he quotes the Husserl of 1930 as describing the absolute flow as the "pre-being that bears [or supports] all being, including the being of the acts and the being of the ego."²⁶ Mensch also calls attention to a passage from 1933 where Husserl writes that the original present "leads us back to the radically pre-egological through a consequent inquiry back to that which makes possible sedimented activity. . ."²⁷

Passages such as these make it clear that the absolute flow or the living present are not to be equated with my own personal stream of consciousness. It does not occur at any particular time but is rather the generation, the constitution, of all time. The living present is not really present as opposed to past or future. It is rather that which allows present or past or future events to appear as such. For Husserl, this living present, which he discovers through a careful reflection on our basic experiences of enduring temporal objects, is the transcendental absolute.

McTaggart and the living present: conclusions and questions

What we can conclude, then, from our insertion of Husserl's notion of the living present into the debate over McTaggart's paradox is not that there is some clear resolution to the paradox. Rather we can see what difficult matters the paradox points toward. What the Husserlian contribution does seem to make clear is that the two sides arguing over the paradox have failed to make explicit what kind of experiential perspective on time they are presupposing when they present their arguments over the debate. By failing to focus on the fact that one can always ask about the *experience* in which any tensed moment or event gives itself, they are at a loss to say how it is that a past or future event always appears to be somehow *presently* past or *presently* future, and yet cannot be both present and past or present and future at the same time. This *presently* should signal to participants in the debate that the connection between tense and experience or perspective needs to be thought about from a point of view which does not

²⁶ Ms. C 17, p. 64b, August 1930, *Zur Phänomenologischen Reduktion*, p. 184. In Mensch 2010, 131.

²⁷ Ms. E III 9, Sept. 1933; *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Dritter Teil*, p. 598. In Mensch 2010, 168-169.

automatically equate temporal perspective with the location of an objectified mental act along the B-series.

Husserl shows us that there is a difference between recognizing that we are not bound to the perspective of one particular time and ignoring the fact that there is always some kind of “givenness for” and apparent presentness to whatever perspective we do imagine taking up. There is no view from no-time. Yet Husserl also shows us that this apparent presence to any temporal perspective we can imagine is not the same thing as the kind of presentness that can be attributed to the moments or events which are always given to it as past, present, or future. This apparent presentness, this ultimate perspective, this constant flow, is the conundrum.

It must be admitted that Husserl’s notion of the living present raises at least as many questions as it helps to resolve. We argued above that the living present should not be thought of as a merely subjective phenomenon since it is the transcendental absolute for Husserl—the as yet undifferentiated source of all subjective and objective temporality. Such a statement raises all kinds of questions not only from the perspective of analytic metaphysics but also from the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology. How is it possible for a phenomenologist to grasp or talk about something so fundamental, something that is not an aspect of the subjective experience of an individual but is somehow implied by it? Is it really possible for the absolute flow to be constituted by itself and to appear to itself? Is the absolute flow not really some kind of transcendental construct? Is it the product of a strange brand of metaphysical speculation masquerading as phenomenology? Is the notion of a phenomenological absolute coherent or helpful?

In addition to these large questions about the legitimacy of the concept of the living present, there are also the important questions raised by the very terms that Husserl uses to name it. We have already touched on the issue of to what degree the living present is really “present.” But there is also the question, central to the final part of this work, as to in what sense the absolute flow can be said to “flow.” In trying to distinguish the absolute flow from the level of constituted immanent objects, we noted that one key difference between the two is that the immanent temporal objects have phases that could in principle be expanded to last for longer or shorter times. The absolute flow, by contrast, consists in the constituting of these objects and their phases through a constant streaming which, as Husserl puts it, flows as it flows and can be neither sped up nor slowed down. In other words, in Husserl’s theory of time, the absolute flow

plays the role of pure temporal becoming itself. It is the engine of temporal newness. Without the constant originality of the emerging primal impressions and the constant fading away of retentions, nothing like an enduring immanent object could be constituted—there could be no earlier or later events, nor any expected future occurrences or remembered past events. But how are we to understand this source of all succession and duration as a *flow* with no rate, and as something which *generates* past, present, and future without itself being genuinely any of them?

These questions lead us directly to the two remaining issues in the debate about tense that were identified as somehow stuck in Chapter 1: the presence of experience and the experience of temporal becoming.

5.2 The Presence of Experience Revisited

Our discussion of McTaggart's paradox and the parallel between the "adverbial" type of presentness we found to be at issue there and Husserl's notion of the living present has already brought into focus the central problem of the presence of experience. The question at issue for the debate about tense was whether the fact that there seems to be some kind of special relationship between experience and presentness poses a problem for detensers or not. While the problem has generally been stated in terms of the detensers' alleged inability to account for the fact that experience is always present, our discussion showed that this was a misleading way to pose the issue. Rather, we concluded that both tenses and detensers have trouble accounting properly for the relationship between presentness and experience.

On one hand, tenses can't give a good explanation for the fact that we directly experience events and their phases to be present when they occur. Events appear to us to be present because they are happening now, not because we deduce or infer their presentness somehow from the fact of their simultaneity with our mental events of experiencing them. On the other hand, we found that tenses do not have a good account for the close connection between experience and presentness. Specifically, it seems difficult for them to explain why it is that my only access to past and future experiences or events is through a present experiencing of them.

Our discussion of the living present in relation to McTaggart's paradox has already suggested how it could provide an alternative to tensor and detensor approaches to the connection between experience and presentness. Basically, the living present offers a different kind of "presentness" to which experience might bear a special relationship. On my interpretation of Husserl's view, it is not the case that our experiencing is always present in the way in which an event or moment can be present. What is true instead is that there is no possible experience of any temporal object or any tense at all without a concomitant awareness of the living present or absolute flow being possible.

Imagine watching a thunderstorm rage outside your window. When you see a third flash of lightning, that lightning appears to be happening now. In addition, upon reflection, you would probably also say that your seeing of the lightning was happening at the same time as the lightning itself. So one could say that both the lightning's flash and your experience of it are present when they occur. But this doesn't mean that all of your experiences of lightning are present any more than every flash of lightning is present. After all, your seeing the first two flashes from the storm now appear to you to be past. And you can anticipate seeing further flashes of lightning in the near future. It is true that your experience of the lightning is always present when it occurs. But this is just as true of the lightning itself; it is also always present when it occurs.

Husserl and tensed theorists would agree, I think, that the flash of lightning is straightforwardly experienced to be present when we see it flash. It is not because I take the lightning to be simultaneous with my seeing of it that I then conclude or infer its presentness. It is quite simply given as happening now. The same thing might be said of my seeing of the lightning (although we should be careful about what we mean by my "seeing"): it simply appears to me to be happening now. Husserl would agree with the tensors, in other words, that events and their phases are simply given to us with the attribute of being present or past or yet to occur without us having to compare their temporal location along the B-series with the temporal location of our subjective experiences of them.

However, while the tensors are at a loss to explain why experience and perspective do appear to have something to do with presentness, Husserl can substitute the notion of the living present—the standing-streaming perspective we must always take up to experience or imagine anything temporal at all—for that of objective presentness. According to the Husserlian

perspective we have been developing, the reason that we are tempted to assert things like “experience is always present” is that the pastness, presentness, or futurity of any moment, event, or experience (as an immanent temporal object) can only appear from the perspective of the living present. On this view, the intuition that there is something special about the connection between experience and presentness is not really about genuine temporal presentness at all. It is rather a recognition of the fact that we can always become aware of the flowing life to which temporal objects are given. It is an implicit recognition that the world is a constant appearing-to, a correlate of some kind of transcendental happening.

Husserl’s notion of the absolute flow or the living present does, I think, give us some insight into what motivates the back and forth over the presence of experience in the debate about tense. His transcendental-phenomenological perspective turns out to be the key in seeing why each side has trouble accounting for all the phenomena relevant to the presence of experience. But it is certainly not the case that the Husserlian contribution clarifies things once and for all. In fact, in my view, some of the same tension between seeing presentness as a relation between subject and event and seeing it as a real determination of events is reproduced in a different register with Husserl’s notion of the living present. The concept of the living present, after all, has more than one difficult question built into itself. The fact that it is not truly tensed or temporal and yet is sort of “present;” the fact that it is absolute subjectivity and yet is anonymous, pre-personal, and even pre-being; the fact that it is both standing and streaming—all of these incongruous attributes represent not only difficult questions to be asked but also reflect some of the very same problems that we have encountered in the debate about tense.

5.3 The Living Present and Temporal Becoming

In order to further delineate these parallel problems, as well as to see what progress can be made with them, we must turn more directly to the third problematic area we identified in the debate about tense: making sense of the experience of temporal becoming itself. We found in Chapter 1 that neither tenseless nor tensed theories seemed able to develop a metaphysical model of time that accounts for our experience of events and moments passing by without imputing some kind of problematic movement either to the now/present or else to the subject along the B-series. In order to see what an Husserlian point of view might have to offer in regard to this

problem, we can begin from where we left off with the tensions inherent in the concept of the living present.

How are we to understand the fact that the living present is not really temporal and, yet, is the source of all temporality and something that Husserl at least *associates* with a kind of presentness? And how are we to understand it as a flowing or streaming which does not have successive phases or a rate of motion? These questions should be dealt with together.

The living present cannot be treated as any stretch of time or even as a slice of consciousness located at one particular time. We saw in Chapter 3 that Husserl talks about the absolute flow in terms of it being a “flowing now-point” with phases preceding it or yet to come. He also talks of a “point of actuality” or “source-point” along with moments of reverberation. He struggles with these attempts at description and admits that “for all this, we have no names” (1991, 382).

There is certainly something about the living present that makes it the source of all things and somehow the location of actuality. Yet, to speak of the living present as a “point” or as something with “preceding” phases is misleading. If the absolute flow is really pre-temporal in the way that Husserl indicates, it cannot be thought of as positioned in time in any way. One cannot think of it as making up one particular “slice” or “phase” or “point” of consciousness which is then replaced by another slice or phase. To do so would be to think of the living present as broken up into succeeding parts spread out in time.

Husserl underscores this point in a passage from 1930 that Mensch calls attention to: “The streaming living present is ‘continuous’ being as streaming and yet is not such in being apart, not such in spatial-temporal (world-spatial) being or in ‘immanent’ temporal being; thus, not such in any apartness that is termed succession—succession in the sense of an apartness of positions in what properly can be called time.”²⁸

One of the big problems in trying to understand the living present lies in figuring out exactly how it relates to experiences taken as unified temporal objects within immanent time. When we think about the experience of hearing a tone sounding, for example, and try to focus on the activity of retaining, protending, and having in primal impression the various temporal profiles of the tone, it is tempting to think of discrete episodes of this activity belonging to each

²⁸ Ms. C 3, 4a, summer 1930; *Zur Phänomenologischen Reduktion*, p. 187. In Mensch 2010, 127.

succeeding slice of consciousness. What makes this lowest level of temporal constitution a “flow,” according to this line of thought, is that the slices of consciousness—each of which is fundamentally made up of retention/primal impression/protention—run off into the past just like the phases of the temporal object being constituted. Therefore, I can turn my attention back to the slices of consciousness, of the absolute flow itself, which have become pushed-back, and I can take them in their unity as a just-past act of consciousness with its corresponding temporal object.

This kind of view is, in fact, suggested to some degree by Husserl’s discussion of horizontal and transverse intentionality. Horizontal intentionality describes my ability to direct my attention along the flow by attending to the way that each retaining of a phase of the temporal object being constituted also retains that retaining activity itself. In other words, in hearing a tone I can become aware not only of the just-past phases of the tone (transverse intentionality) but also the chain of retentions of retentions running throughout the experience.

I believe that this way of speaking is, however, ultimately misleading. If the living present and the retention/primal impression/protention structure it presumably encompasses are not really present, they cannot be pushed back into the past in any meaningful sense either. The absolute flow cannot be thought of as a process whose phases can be pieced together into some kind of temporal unity. Therefore, it is a mistake to imagine that slices of the absolute flow are objectivated into a unified act of consciousness. It may even be a mistake, I think, to talk in terms of retaining the prior retentional moments of the flow itself—though we have seen that Husserl often does so. If we are to stick strictly to the idea that the flow is not successive or past/present/future in the way that parts of the stream of consciousness are—if we are to take seriously the idea that it is purely the *constituting* of this kind of immanent temporal extension—then we cannot think of phases of the flow as having passed by at all. The flow is always with us—in a way it *is* us. It is always that which is prior to any distinction between past, present, and future.

This means, I think, that we should not make a sharp distinction on such a model between immanent temporal objects and acts of consciousness. They are simply the same thing. The tone as heard and the hearing of the tone are, on this view, simply the same immanent content. They are genuinely immanently temporal and are constituted in the living present, in the constant flow that does not really flow off at all but always is what it is. But it is constantly what it is only, as

Husserl would point out, in the stream of ever new content.²⁹ The newness or originality of this content is, on his view, a special kind of newness which is precisely that which gives rise to any possibility of change or stasis. It is only because whatever comes to appearance through this constant flow is constituted as a new moment that we can ask whether the process or object being constituted is one which shows some kind of qualitative change. In other words, this flow, like time itself considered from a metaphysical perspective, is not something which changes or has a rate, but is rather that in terms of which any rate or change or duration or process becomes conceivable.

This is not to say that the idea of horizontal intentionality cannot help us in a certain way to understand how it is that the absolute flow appears for itself. I have explained why I think that it is a mistake to imagine the flow holding onto past phases of its own flowing.³⁰ However, in Chapter 3, we saw that Husserl makes the suggestion at least once that horizontal intentionality is dependent upon transverse intentionality—he seems to suggest that it is because retention is precisely a “holding-onto” (of the immanent temporal content) that it also holds onto itself (and therefore appears to itself as flow). While I am wary of the idea that retentions retain portions of the flow (because it suggests a model in which the flow is separated into time-like successive phases), I find productive the thought that the flow appears to itself as flowing only through the very activity of holding onto the temporal content which it itself is not. This is because, if we can grasp or experience the flow at all, it can only be obliquely and peripherally, as it were. Because the flow is always turned towards the temporal objects it is generating, because the flow is always “present” and never something that has passed away (it *is* the passing away), the flow can’t really take itself as an object or as a content. It can only perhaps catch a glimpse of itself—or even perhaps only *imply* its own existence—in its constitution of immanent time.

Interpreters such as Brough and Dan Zahavi have been quick to point out that Husserl does not (or, at least, should not) believe that the absolute flow intends conscious acts in an

²⁹ As Brough points out with regard to the living present: “What ‘stands’ with respect to this present is precisely that it does not stand still” (2010, 44). He also gives us this passage from Husserl: “I exist, actually and concretely, as a constant present; this is my concrete being. It is, however, concrete flowing” (Hua Mat VIII, 129, as quoted in Brough 2010, 44).

³⁰ What it holds onto, on my view, must rather be the phases of the immanent temporal object which are actually the same thing as the acts of consciousness taken as enduring through a segment of the stream of consciousness. On this interpretation, horizontal intentionality is not necessary for us to be able to reflect on our own experiencing and find more or less discrete acts of consciousness in an immanent temporal order. It would only be necessary to explain the self-appearance of the flow as flow.

objectivating, reflective mode. Rather, the absolute flow (or perhaps, on Zahavi's view, the acts themselves) pre-reflectively experiences (*erleben* as opposed to *erfahren*) the acts which make up the stream of consciousness.³¹ The idea is that we are aware of our own experiencing without having explicitly to reflect and take our experiences as objects in the way that trees and cars are taken to be objects. While this emphasis on the pre-reflective and non-objectivating nature of our act-awareness is helpful, it does not fully solve the problems inherent in the idea of the flow grasping itself. This is mostly because the idea of the flow's or the living present's self-appearance is not the same as my awareness of the acts of consciousness constituted by that flow. Since the constitution of the acts of consciousness (as immanent temporal objects) is essentially the same thing as their being brought to appearance, it makes sense that the level of time-consciousness which constitutes them is pre-reflectively aware of their appearance. However, the awareness or appearing of the pure constituting itself—of the flow which is pre-temporal, pre-immanent, and pre-phenomenal—is another matter altogether. Besides the question of how it makes sense according to the logic of Husserlian phenomenology for some aspect of consciousness to constitute or appear to itself, it is also hard to conceptualize how something which is not really temporal and not really a phenomenon can appear at all.

Husserl himself recognizes the extreme difficulties inherent in the idea that the flow can be aware of itself. In his late writings on time, Husserl goes so far as to suggest it may be impossible. Brough calls our attention, for example, to the following passage: “as pre-being, [the flow] is inexperienceable [unerfahrbar], unsayable; as soon as the unsayable and inexperienceable is displayed, hence experienced [erfahren] and made into the theme of a statement, it is precisely ontified”³²

In response to such considerations, Brough considers the possibility that the flow really has no place in phenomenology—that rather than being exhibited in experience, it is a conceptual construction or the conclusion of a transcendental argument. He suggests, however, that Husserl leaves open the possibility that the flow is somehow a “condition” which is pre-reflectively experienced (*erlebt*) in a “shadowy way” and never independently of the phenomena it accompanies (2011, 36). This is precisely, I think what is suggested by Husserl's earlier

³¹ See Brough 2010 and 2011, as well as Zahavi 1999 and 2003.

³² Hua Mat VIII, p. 269, as quoted by Brough 2011, 35.

thought that our experience of the flow as somehow holding onto itself follows from the simple fact that it is a holding-onto in general.

In the end, however, such descriptions are tenuous at best. Husserl seems unable to decide whether the flow, the living present, is something we experience however obliquely, or whether it is something we feel compelled to posit to account for our inner temporality but which actually lies outside the bounds of phenomenology.

Where are we left then in relation to the problems faced by both tensors and detensors in trying to make sense of the experience of temporal becoming? On one hand, I think that Husserl's description of the absolute flow as the source of even immanent temporality and, through it, the objective series of earlier and later moments, shows that there is a way to approach the problem of temporal becoming without assuming a simplistic dichotomy between reality and mind-dependence.

On Husserl's account, the ultimate question of how time can be said to flow is exhibited on a constitutional level which is conceptually prior to the distinction between an objective time series and subjective acts located along it. The problem of the flow of time and the transition from future to present to past is, from an Husserlian point of view, a problem that has to do with the very structure of appearing. This gives us one way of understanding what is going wrong when each side in the debate about tense tries to explain the experience of temporal becoming through models which assume either a completely objectified movement of the Now along a B-series or else the movement of a subject along such a series.

In both cases, what is overlooked is the fact that the passage or flow which the metaphysical models are trying to capture is ultimately that which gives rise to the entities in terms of which those models are built. Both tensors and detensors end up with models according to which there is already some pre-defined series of earlier or later moments along which something can pass or move. For the tensors, this motion is that of the Now or actuality or the leading edge of existence. For the detensors this motion is that of the subject moving from one moment to the next. The problem comes in specifying just what these motions are supposed to be over and above the already presumed successively ordered moments. If a certain moment is already defined as occurring after another moment, what could possibly be added to this "afterness" by the fact that the Now or the subject goes from being located at one to being

located at the other? If temporal becoming is the fundamental sense of passage we experience, then this passage must be what originally gives meaning to the “afterness” at issue here, it cannot be added on to it subsequently.

5.4 Final Thoughts: Parallels, Problems, and Future Directions

The fact that we ended our discussion of Husserl’s concept of the living present with the question of whether it may not have a legitimate phenomenological basis shows not only that difficult problems remain for an Husserlian perspective but also why it is that this part of Husserl’s thought borders on the problems of metaphysicians. Trying to understand how the absolute flow can be something which flows in a non-temporal way and which appears to itself has, I think, helped put us in a position to see how Husserl’s struggles with characterizing the lowest level of temporal constitution reflects essentially the same problems about time at issue in the debate about tense.

Husserl’s discussion of the absolute flow tries to address the question of the fundamental engine of temporal newness itself. Though we may be able to break down the experience of a temporal object into moments of newness, anticipation, and holding onto phases of the object as they are given, how do we account for the fact that these moments pass from one to the other in a regular way? It is not enough just to describe what any given slice or moment of consciousness must intend in order to explain how it is that we can become conscious of enduring temporal objects, we must also then describe each of these slices or moments as passing over into the next. This is the core “passage” that is ultimately necessary for the constitution of all the higher levels of temporality.

However, this description of the absolute flow in terms of moments or phases of consciousness seems to treat it as something which is itself in time. We are locating one phase of the flow at one temporal moment and the next phase at the next. We are forced to do so, it seems, whenever we try to describe how the flow can appear to itself rather than just be the source of all other temporal appearance. But we have already discussed the reasons that Husserl rejects the notion that the flow itself is temporal, that its phases are prior to one another or can be described as past, present, or future in the way that temporal objects can be. So we are left with a problem, torn between two alternatives: 1) describing a flow that we think that we experience

and seems necessary to account for time consciousness in a way that implies it itself is temporal or 2) admitting that this flow is something which does not really appear and is not really temporal and therefore may even be a construction outside the purview of phenomenology.

The core of the problem seems to be that for something to appear for consciousness it needs to appear to be somehow temporal, to be extended in time, even if that time is an immanent one. So could the atemporal source of this temporality ever appear? The debate about tense, I believe, is struggling with the very same problem in different terms. In order to give us a complete metaphysical theory of real time, they must account for tense and the apparent passage of time. However, in order for tense and temporal becoming to be real, it must somehow exist within or as part of time (which they assume to be essentially the B-series). So, instead of the absolute flow of consciousness needing to appear in time in order to appear, temporal becoming needs to exist in time in order to exist. This is why the two sides in the debate end up with problematic theories. The detensers elect the option that temporal becoming does not really exist. Therefore they do not have to explain how it can be added onto B-time. However, they are left unable to explain the fact that we do experience some kind of passage and tense as being part of time. And, when they try to explain this in terms of the motion of the experiencing subject along the B-series, they end up not only assuming an impossible perspective on the B-series which takes it in all at once from the perspective of no-time, but they also impute a mysterious motion to the subject which is hard to explain in the terms of their theory. The tensors, on the other hand, take the view that temporal becoming does exist (analogous to the view that the flow does appear). But then they are left modeling this becoming as some sort of motion or change along or within the B-series, as if there is a second-order time within time itself. This leads to various paradoxes concerning the rate of time's flow etc.

In the end, it is the same ancient philosophical problem of how to say what time is—of how time relates to change, motion, the world, and mind—that drives both Husserlian phenomenology and a central debate in contemporary analytic metaphysics to come up against their own limits. In his investigations of time-consciousness, Husserl finds implied at the core of conscious experience an absolute flow which perhaps cannot be experienced. When he tries to describe how it appears, he ends up either describing it in temporal terms that assume some sort of objective time-line along which the slices or phases of consciousness can be arranged, or else he concludes that it is radically pre-temporal, ungraspable, immortal and eternal. The

contemporary analytic metaphysicians, on the other hand, find it difficult to maintain the foundational contrast between objective, external reality and mental being when it comes to the passage of time. If is the case, then the problem of temporal passage pushes these two disparate approaches to philosophy closer to one another in some ways. Husserlian phenomenology is forced to confront the question of the limits of transcendental subjectivity, and the analytic metaphysicians are forced to consider whether there is not something about the structure of appearing itself which is more fundamental than the rigid distinction between subjectivity and mind-independent reality.

Though I do not have any definitive answer to offer to the problem of making sense of temporal becoming, I will end with a brief suggestion about promising directions for research. Perhaps the most pressing question we are left with after recognizing the parallels between Husserlian and contemporary analytic approaches to temporal becoming is how to make sense of the fact that we seem to need to take up a perspective somehow outside of time and outside of consciousness in order to understand the apparent flowing of time or consciousness itself. Is there some sort of atemporal yet flowing perspective from which to understand time?

In Chapter 2, we considered the idea that retention and protention should not be thought of as belonging to slices of consciousness located at successive positions in the unfolding of a temporal object of a small enough time-scale. Rather, we reflected, in the experience of watching a baseball thrown a short distance or in hearing a spoken word, there seems to be a sense in which the retaining and protending activity is located outside the unfolding of the temporal object. There is a kind of flow from earlier to later in the way the ending of the throw holds its own beginning as having prefigured it. However, there is no sense of being able to put oneself in the middle of the throw such that the beginning is past and the ending future. Thus one might argue that what we experience to be present in the most genuine sense is a kind of stretching from earlier to later which cannot be broken into phases or moments at which consciousness could find itself temporally located.

Perhaps this sort of reflection can provide a place to start in thinking about how to describe an absolute flow which is not temporal in the sense of being able to be broken into successive phases. To speak clumsily and metaphorically: perhaps the flow, the living present, is this constant stepping of consciousness outside of the duration and succession that it constitutes.

Thus, the flow would not be a movement of the Now or of consciousness along a series of ordered moments but rather the stepping-back motion needed to frame the earlier/later stretching at the basis of duration and succession.

In any case, the questions raised in Chapter 2 about the width of the present and the relation between retention and the perception of the earlier/later relation are, I think, an important area for further work on Husserl's theory of time-consciousness. In addition, trying to apply his investigations to the debate about tense has suggested not only that time raises important questions about the relationship of phenomenology to metaphysics, but also that topics important in the debate about tense could do with further phenomenological attention. For example, it seems that more can be said about how Husserl would take account of the motivations discussed by tenses for taking tense to be every bit as objective as earlier/later relations—in particular the disanalogies between times and space. Finally, both Husserl's theory and the debate about tense could profit from further work on the very difficult question of how the perception of temporal objects as discrete and finished unities relates to the apparent formal homogeneity and continuity of time.

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