

Contemporary metaphysics of time is shaped by the opposition between A-theorists and B-theorists. B-theorists claim that there are no monadic temporal properties like presentness or pastness or futurity – instead there are only dyadic temporal relations like simultaneity and succession. They typically also hold that all times exist equally (a thesis also known as eternalism) and that there are, fundamentally, no tensed facts (such as the fact that it is Monday) but only tenseless facts (such as the fact that this is (tenselessly) written on a Monday). A-theorists come in many varieties, but they all deny one or more of these claims. One of the most popular kinds of A-theories is presentism, which is the view that (necessarily), only present things exist. Other well-known A-theoretic views include the growing block view, which says that only the past and the present exist, and the moving spotlight theory, which says that all times exist but they become present successively.

For obvious reasons, the A versus B-debate is often taken, in part, to be a debate about whether or not time has a dynamic aspect, i.e. whether or not time passes. Thus, A-theorists are seen as vindicating the claim that time passes by providing robust metaphysical accounts of what its passing consists in, while B-theorists typically deny that time passes.

In this paper, I aim to raise some doubts about this construal of the debate. I offer an interpretation and partial defense of Kit Fine's 'argument from passage', which is situated within his reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox. Fine argues that existing A-theoretic approaches to passage are no more dynamic, i.e. capture passage no better, than does the B-theory. I argue that this comparative claim is correct. However unlike Fine, and unlike others who advance McTaggartian arguments, I take McTaggart's paradox to indicate neither the need for a more dynamic theory of passage nor that time does not pass. No more dynamic theory is possible: Fine's non-standard realism amounts to no more than a conceptual gesture. But instead of concluding that time doesn't pass, one should conclude that theories of passage cannot deliver the dynamicity of our intuitive picture. For this reason, a B-theoretic account of passage that simply identifies passage with the succession of times, is a serious contender.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I briefly expound Fine's reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox and his argument from passage. In the second section, I defend that argument and interpret it as concerning two opposed elements of what I call our 'intuitive picture of passage'. In the third section, I argue against Fine's non-standard realist approach to passage. In the fourth and final section, I apply the argument from passage to two prominent existing A-theoretic views, namely presentism and the growing block view.

As I briefly summarise in the first section, the upshot of Fine's reconstruction of McTaggart's paradox is that any view of temporal reality must reject (at least) one of the following four principles:

*Realism*: Reality is composed of tensed facts.

*Neutrality*: No time is privileged, the facts that compose reality are not oriented towards one time as opposed to another.

*Absolutism*: The composition of reality is not irreducibly relative, i.e. its relative composition by the facts must be explained in terms of its absolute composition by the facts.

*Coherence*: Reality is not irreducibly incoherent, i.e. its composition by incompatible facts must be explained in terms of its composition by compatible facts.

Fine's 'argument from passage' against standard realism, the view that upholds all of the above except Neutrality, is that the standard realist view, with its collection of tensed facts oriented towards the special time that is present, amounts to no more than the anti-realist view with a privileged center (anti-realism is the view that upholds all of the above except Realism). It is the result of adding such a center to the anti-realist view. So given (as Fine assumes) that the anti-realist view is static, we have no reason to think of the standard realist view as any more dynamic. This argument strikes many as problematic. The problematic claim, it seems, is that the standard realist view 'amounts to no more than' the anti-realist view with a privileged center.

I concede to Fine's critics that standard realism is not static, but I defend his comparative claim that it is no more dynamic than the B-theory – B-theorists, I argue should simply identify passage with succession. The key to understanding Fine's point lies in taking it to concern what I call 'our intuitive picture of passage', which has two opposed elements. Not only do we tend to invest the time we are at with metaphysical significance, thereby positing a lack of parity between times, but we also tend to think of all times as fundamentally on a par, because they all become present in turn. Each time has a special metaphysical privilege, we imagine, but each time loses the privilege and each eventually gains it. In Fine's terms, our picture of passage requires both Neutrality, and Realism.

Fine's own theory is intended to do justice to the picture, by combining Realism with Neutrality. I argue that the result is at best a kind of conceptual gesture in the direction of what we might have wanted from an account of passage.

I then examine two prominent A-theoretic approaches to passage, presentism and the growing block theory, and apply the argument from passage to them (I concentrate on ersatzist presentism, as defended by e.g. Ned Markosian and Thomas Crisp, and growing block views which take tense to be fundamental, as defended by Tim Button). The upshot is that such approaches are typically either versions of standard realism, which is dynamic but no more so than the B-theory, or akin to Fine's non-standard realism, which is not intelligible when taken literally.