



# Subjectivity and Temporariness

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Abstract

Non-reductivists about phenomenal consciousness believe that physical facts are insufficient to ground the existence of phenomenal consciousness. It will be argued that if one is going to be a non-reductivist, then one should not limit oneself to expanding one's catalogue of the world's basic features, as recommended in the paradigmatic non-reductivist approach developed by David Chalmers. One should rather take a realist stance towards subjectivity. A realist about subjectivity thinks that at least some of the propositions needed to state how things are in reality are such that their truth-value is capable of changing 'from one subject to another'. Realism about subjectivity will be introduced by means of an analogy with the so called 'A-theory' of time. An A-theorist claims that at least some of the propositions needed to state how things are in reality are such that their truth-value is capable of changing 'from one time to another'. It turns out that a robust notion of metaphysical reality is necessary to make sense of both realism about subjectivity and the A-theories of time.

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## Introduction

Here's a puzzle. Ben says: "There is something it is like when Ben has a headache". Bill instead says: "There is nothing it is like when *Ben* has a headache. There's something it is like when *Bill* has a headache". Who's right? Whose headaches are conscious headaches?

There are two ways out of this puzzle, a conciliatory and a non-conciliatory one. According to the non-conciliatory solution, Ben and Bill are in genuine disagreement and we have to decide who's right and who's wrong: either Ben's headaches are conscious or they are not. In the first case, Bill is blatantly wrong, in the second Ben is what is sometimes called a 'zombie'.

Many, I suppose, will prefer a more conciliatory strategy. This involves saying that Ben and Bill are not really disagreeing: if Ben says "There is something it is like when Ben has a headache", he means "There is something it is like *for me* when Ben has a headache". This might not be exactly what Bill wants to deny: what Bill wants to deny might rather be that there is something it is like *for him* when Ben has a headache. No disagreement between Ben and Bill, then: just a little misunderstanding (at least if the two do take themselves to be disagreeing, of course).

There's a picture of reality that accords well with the conciliatory solution. On this picture, Ben's headache and Bill's headache are distinct events, both of which have whatever properties are necessary for being qualified as conscious headaches (what these properties are, we shall not here attempt to say): what makes Bill say that there is nothing it is like when Ben has a headache is simply the fact that Bill *does not have* Ben's headaches or, equivalently, that Ben's headaches do not *happen to* Bill. This picture invites a

somewhat deflationary interpretation of the claim that one's headaches are 'subjective'.

This deflationary interpretation is well expressed by Herbert Feigl in his pioneering paper

*The 'Mental' and the 'Physical'*:

The juxtaposition of "subjective" and "objective" has been the source of endless and badly confused controversies throughout the ages. There is nevertheless something significant and worth preserving in this distinction. To say that a twinge of pain experienced by person A is "subjective" [...] may simply mean *that another person B [...] does not have it.* [...] Dentists do not *have* the toothaches of their patients.

(1967, 30-31, my emphasis)

According to Feigl, subjectivity consists just in this: that numerically distinct individuals undergo numerically (and most of the times not just numerically, but also qualitatively) different experiential events. Ben's headache is 'subjective' in the sense that there's a numerically distinct entity, Bill, that does not have it.

These ideas have proven to be extremely influential. Nowadays, physicalists or not, we all tend to presuppose Feigl's deflationary analysis of subjectivity, based on the principle 'distinct individuals, distinct experiences'.<sup>1</sup> Can we be completely satisfied with this analysis and with the kind of conciliatory solution to the puzzle of subjectivity that this analysis supports? Maybe not. Maybe we should try to do better justice to Bill's claim that there is nothing it is like when Ben has a headache. After all, from his point of view, there's *really* nothing it is like when Ben has a headache. *Reality, for him, is truly different from how reality is from Ben's point of view.* In this research, I ask myself what kind of

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<sup>1</sup> There of course are other, more specific uses of 'subjective'. Sometimes, for example, it is said that my headache is 'subjective' in the sense that I have a privileged access to it. This, however, presupposes Feigl's seminal treatment of subjectivity, according to which the headache is 'mine' because it happens *to me* but not to other, numerically distinct subjects. For a review of the different senses associated with 'subjectivity', see Lycan (1990) and De Sousa (2004).

metaphysics is required in order to take subjectivity very seriously, more seriously than Feigl's analysis can allow.

An analogy with a certain infamous puzzle in the philosophy of time will be of some help. Ted says 'It's thundering', but Fred disagrees and says: 'It's not thundering'. Who's right? Is it thundering or not? Again, we have a conciliatory and a non-conciliatory answer. The non-conciliatory answer involves deciding who's right and who's wrong between Ted and Fred. A conciliatory solution is possible if we take Ted and Fred to be talking at two distinct times,  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . By saying "It's thundering", Ted would mean something like "It's thundering *at*  $t_1$ ". Fred would not be denying this: he would simply be saying that it's not thundering *at*  $t_2$ . Again, there's a picture of reality that accords well with the conciliatory approach. It's a picture on which the 'temporariness' of meteorology consists just in this: that numerically distinct times correspond to distinct meteorological events. Not everybody likes this picture, however. Some think that the principle 'distinct times, distinct meteorological events' does not take the phenomenon of temporariness seriously enough. These 'friends of temporariness' (or A-theorists, as they are sometimes called) propose a different solution to the puzzle and it is from this solution, I will argue, that we should take inspiration if we want to go more serious about subjectivity.

The thesis divides into three parts. In Chapter I, I introduce the central question of the metaphysics of consciousness ('What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?') and distinguish two kinds of answers to that question, the reductivist and the non-reductivist ones. I will concentrate on the non-reductivist approaches and argue they can only succeed if they take subjectivity seriously, more seriously than Feigl's principle can allow. Chapter II contains a long digression: I will turn my attention to the temporal case, to look at what it takes to go beyond the principle 'distinct times, distinct meteorological events'. The result is a view that I shall call 'Realism about Temporariness'. It is by analogy with this view that, in Chapter III, I define what it is to be a 'realist about

subjectivity'. Only with this definition in mind will it be possible to sketch three non-reductive approaches to consciousness designed to take subjectivity very seriously.

## Chapter I : The Metaphysics of Consciousness

### *1. A metaphysics for consciousness*

I believe that phenomenal consciousness exists. Philosophers define phenomenal consciousness as the experiential aspect of our mental lives, where the experiential aspect of a state *s* is classically defined as what it is like for someone subjectively to undergo *s*. Many will find this definition obscure. I concede this, but a certain amount of nebulosity cannot be avoided, if one wants to ‘point’ towards a certain phenomenon, while remaining as silent as possible on its metaphysical nature. Others will say that nothing satisfies this definition. I do not have any argument to offer against these ‘eliminativists’: in what follows, I simply assume, contra the eliminativists, that ‘phenomenal consciousness’ (hereafter simply ‘consciousness’) exists and is a suitable object of philosophical inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

The question we are concerned with when we inquire into the metaphysics of consciousness is: ‘*What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?*’. This question is not without parallels in other areas of philosophy. We can ask the same sort of question with regard to many natural and metaphysical phenomena. Standard examples from the first category include heat, colours and solidity. In metaphysics, one can ask what reality must be like in order for time to flow, for some facts to obtain only contingently or for some individuals to qualitatively resemble one another.

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<sup>2</sup> For other uses of ‘consciousness’, see Van Gulick (2009) and Güzeldere (1997). For scepticism on the notion of phenomenal consciousness, see Churchland (1983).

It is a notorious fact that a robust notion of ‘reality’ is required for this sort of questions to be of any interest or even to make sense. Metaphysicians employ a robust notion of reality when they distinguish what the vulgar say from what is ‘strictly speaking’ the case. In their non-philosophical moments, they are all inclined to acknowledge that there are prime numbers between 1 and 4. But many of them retract this claim when asked to speak ‘with metaphysical rigor’ about numbers and other abstract entities. We might follow this practice and call ‘*metaphysical reality*’ the totality of what is strictly speaking the case or strictly speaking true.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, however, the notion of metaphysical reality is of little use in the present context. If the question ‘What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?’ were understood in terms of this notion, the answer would simply be ‘It is for it to be the case that consciousness exists’ (at least if it is assumed, as I am doing here, that, strictly speaking, there is consciousness).

Is the answer to that question trivial then, once eliminativism is jettisoned? Certainly not. In raising that question, we can presuppose that certain facts- facts that we are perfectly willing to acknowledge, even when we talk ‘with metaphysical rigor’- are nonetheless less than *fundamental*. We can say that these facts ‘obtain-in-virtue-of’, ‘reduce-to’, ‘are-grounded-by’ or ‘consist-in-nothing-but’ the obtaining of another more fundamental fact or set of facts.<sup>4</sup> We may also assume that there are some truly fundamental facts, which do not obtain in virtue of any more fundamental fact or set of facts.<sup>5</sup> Suppose we then call ‘*fundamental reality*’ that part of metaphysical reality that

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<sup>3</sup> This would correspond to what Fine (2001) qualifies as ‘factual’. Many other philosophers speak of what is true ‘in the philosophy room’. The peculiar expression ‘in metaphysical rigor’ is recurrent in the writings of Leibniz.

<sup>4</sup> The current debate on fundamentality is deeply influenced by Lewis (1983). Recent proponents of the ‘in-virtue-of’ relation include Cameron (2008), Fine (2001, 2005) and Schaffer (2009). I here follow Fine in treating it as a relation among facts, rather than among entities. There are also approaches to fundamentality, based on the notion of truthmaking, where the relation is said to hold between truths and states of affairs.

<sup>5</sup> The idea of an infinite descent of more and more fundamental facts is discussed by Schaffer (2003) and Cameron (2008). Sider (forthcoming) rejects this idea, but also rejects the ‘in-virtue-of’ relation and other comparative relations of fundamentality: he prefers a non-comparative notion of ‘fundamental structure’. An altogether sceptical approach to these matters can be found in Hofweber (2009).

includes all and only such fundamental facts. The question ‘What must fundamental reality be like in order for x to exist?’ has a clear and interesting meaning: is x fundamental? And if not, what fundamental fact or facts ground x? This is more or less the spirit in which I will tackle the question ‘What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?’.

Different accounts have been proposed of what it is for a certain fact A to be grounded by or to obtain in virtue of another fact B. There seems to be a certain agreement that the relation between A and B should be irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive: no facts ground themselves; if A is grounded by B, B cannot be grounded by A; if A is grounded by B and B is grounded by C, then A is grounded by C. It is also regarded as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, if a less than fundamental fact A is the case, then some other fact (B, for example) must also be the case and, again as a matter of metaphysical necessity, whenever this latter fact holds, A automatically obtains. To be sure, there are further requirements that B needs to satisfy in order to ‘ground’ A, but what these additional requirements are is a matter of controversy. Some have argued that the concepts contained in the proposition that A is the case should be *definable* or *analyzable* in terms of the concepts contained in the proposition that B is the case. Others have instead suggested that, though the requirement of conceptual analyzability is too extreme, we should at least expect the proposition that A is the case to be *a priori entailed* by the proposition that B is the case.<sup>6</sup> Again, this proposal has encountered opposition.<sup>7</sup> As to the suggestion that one should be able to *explain* A on the basis of B, this requirement seems to be far too vague and, in certain respects, too strict.<sup>8</sup>

The question ‘*What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?*’ has long been regarded as an important and interesting one. In what follows, I presuppose that

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<sup>6</sup> Chalmers and Jackson (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Block and Stalnaker (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Some think that facts of consciousness are grounded by physical facts, even though, due to our particular cognitive architecture, we will never be able to understand any explanation of consciousness in terms of physical facts. See, for example, Van Gulick (1995) and McGinn (1991).

we can make good sense of this question, in spite of the scepticism surrounding the notion of fundamentality as well as the very notion of phenomenal consciousness. I start by distinguishing reductive and non-reductive approaches to the metaphysics of consciousness (§ 2). In § 3, I will take the non-reductive approach developed by Chalmers (1996) as a study case. What will interest me is to show that the main duty of a non-reductivist is to correctly describe or model the phenomenon of consciousness. I will argue that Chalmers's approach- and any approach akin to it- fails to do this, by failing to do adequate justice to one essential feature of consciousness: its irreducibly subjective nature.

## 2. *A non-reductive metaphysics for consciousness*

Physical facts have long been regarded as very plausible candidates to play the role of fundamental facts.<sup>9</sup> Some philosophers have gone one step further and endorsed a view called 'physicalism', according to which *all* fundamental facts are physical facts. If physicalism is true, then the existence of consciousness is either itself a fundamental physical fact (as, for example, the 'quantum theories' of consciousness might be taken to suggest) or else a fact that obtains only in virtue of certain fundamental physical facts (perhaps with some other facts playing the role of intermediaries). In this sense, accepting the truth of physicalism commits one to endorsing a *reductive metaphysics of consciousness*, one on which the answer to the question 'What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?' turns on the answer to the a different question: 'What must reality be like in order for physics to be true?'. Setting aside eliminativism, reductive views

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<sup>9</sup> There are notorious difficulties involved in providing a definition of 'physical fact'. Here I assume that physical facts are facts of the sort that fundamental physics takes as its object of study: this theory-based characterization is not unproblematic, but it will do for our present purposes. For a discussion, see Stoljar (2009).

of consciousness include modern variants of the identity theories of mind, but also functionalism and those theories of consciousness that present themselves as broadly speaking compatible with it.<sup>10</sup>

My interest in this research lies primarily with those philosophical views that support a *non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness*. A non-reductivist takes consciousness to be a phenomenon whose existence is neither identical with nor grounded exclusively by physical facts. Two possibilities seem to be open for the non-reductivist: one is that the existence of phenomenal consciousness is itself a fundamental non-physical fact, the other is that the existence of phenomenal consciousness is grounded by more fundamental, yet still non-physical, ‘protophenomenal’ facts. I take it that substance- and property-dualisms, but also (though less clearly) panpsychist and ‘neutral monistic’ theories should count as examples of non-reductive views of consciousness. I do not, however, think that these views are in any way representative of the entire range of possibilities available to the non-reductivist. The final chapter of this research will be devoted to explore what seems to me some more promising non-reductive alternatives.

I do not here intend to go into the detail of the reasons that have been adduced in favour of a non-reductive approach to consciousness, but I suppose they must at least be mentioned briefly. According to a well-known and much debated argument advanced by Jackson (1982), facts of consciousness must be taken as fundamental because knowledge of these facts is not guaranteed by knowledge of physical facts, however complete this latter knowledge might be. According to Chalmers (1996), Jackson’s argument trades on the more general point that neither the existence of consciousness nor its peculiar character are a priori entailed by physical truths, not even when these latter are considered in their totality and complemented with the sort of information normally required to deduce from

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Place (1956), Smart (1959) and Lewis (1966). Notice that adopting a reductive *metaphysics* is compatible with thinking that the *conceptual* and theoretical resources of fundamental physics are not adequate for doing psychology or other ‘special sciences’ (see Fodor 1974).

them a complete description of the world. The conceivability of a zombie-world (a world that is physically like ours, but where consciousness does not exist) is taken by Chalmers to reveal unequivocally the failure of this a priori entailment. At bottom, all non-reductive views are sceptical about the possibility of understanding consciousness on the basis of physical facts. To use a famous expression coined by Levine (1983), these views diagnose the existence of an “explanatory gap” between the physical and the conscious level and regard this explanatory gap as the symptom of an underlying metaphysical gap.

Admittedly, none of these considerations are even close to providing conclusive evidence in support of a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness. But I think we should reflect carefully on the fact that, in matters of metaphysics, we are rarely in possession of the kind of straightforward and incontrovertible ‘evidence’ that is demanded in the case of consciousness. Consider, for instance, the debate between reductive and non-reductive views of modality. Some think that modal facts are to be grounded in non-modal ones, facts like the existence of a plurality of concrete worlds spatiotemporally unrelated to one another. Non-reductivists claim that this project is doomed to failure. Interestingly though, they seldom sustain this claim by saying that one can know all non-modal facts about Lewisian worlds without knowing modal facts: many of them think that this would simply be begging the question against their opponents. Often, the main appeal of a non-reductive approach is supposed to lie in its doing better justice to our intuitions about a certain phenomenon, like modality or contingency in this case. This is not to say that we should not expect a non-reductivist to provide ‘arguments’ and ‘evidence’ in favour of his view. But arguments and evidence will not necessarily be decisive in settling the controversy. At least, it is reasonable to expect that they will not be as decisive as they have been usually thought to be in the debate about consciousness.

The task of constructing a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness has so far received only little attention compared to its delicacy and importance. Efforts have been

mainly concentrated on arguing against reductive approaches and the few tentative steps taken in the direction of a non-reductive metaphysics have been inspired by a sort of ‘conservative’ spirit. The central dogma of this ‘conservative’ spirit is that consciousness must be either a substance or a property. From a non-reductive perspective, this entails that consciousness must either be a nonphysical substance (a soul or a spirit) or a nonphysical property. Now, since the first alternative is largely regarded as unpalatable,<sup>11</sup> the fate of a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness has been closely tied to that of property dualism. We find a chief example of this move in the highly influential approach to consciousness advocated by David Chalmers in *The Conscious Mind* (1996).

### 3. Chalmers’s non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness

In the final (and most speculative) part of *The Conscious Mind*, Chalmers lays down the bases of a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness. To begin with, we are told that “the cornerstone of a [non-reductive] theory of consciousness will be a set of psychophysical laws governing the relationship between consciousness and physical systems” (213). Although these psychophysical laws will initially take the form of little more than lawful generalizations, we should ultimately expect to find the fundamental principles underlying them, some truly *fundamental* laws that, “combined with the physical facts about a system, should enable us to perfectly predict the phenomenal facts about the system” (277).

As far as the metaphysics is concerned, Chalmers thinks that that the irreducibility of consciousness requires no more than that we treat it as just one additional ingredient of

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<sup>11</sup> There are exceptions: Swinburne (1986), Foster (1996).

the basic furniture of the universe, beside “matter, motion or space and time” (213).<sup>12</sup> We are therefore encouraged to adopt the ‘boring’, but most “straightforward ontology of property dualism, with physical properties, separate phenomenal properties and a lawful connection between the two” (302). Although there might be more interesting and imaginative possibilities, property dualism is “a perfectly adequate way to look at things” (302) when it comes to find a place for consciousness in fundamental metaphysical reality. As for substance dualism, it is not discarded outright, but Chalmers declares himself unclear on what it would ultimately take to be a substance dualist. In the end, he suggests, “all we know is simply that there are properties of individuals in this world- the phenomenal properties- that are ontologically independent of physical properties” (125).

Even when indulging in speculations about a ‘double-aspect’ ontology- an ontology in which everything, from my brain to the tiniest dust particle, has somehow both a physical and an experiential nature- Chalmers never really abandons the metaphysical framework of property dualism. As an illustration of this ‘double-aspect’ ontology, we are invited to consider an account of the world based on the notion of information. On this picture, every physical or phenomenal state present in the world is regarded as an information-state. Moreover, it is said that “the information spaces required by physics are themselves grounded in phenomenal or proto-phenomenal” (305) information spaces. In other words, all the differences in nature are ultimately all and only phenomenal or micro-phenomenal differences: for each of the physical information-states that my thermostat can occupy, there is a corresponding phenomenal state, that is to say, there is something it is like for that thermostat subjectively to undergo that state. Interestingly, when it comes to put metaphysical flesh on this picture, Chalmers falls back on talk of physical and nonphysical properties. We are told, for instance, that “every time a feature such as mass

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<sup>12</sup> See also Chalmers (2003): “If the arguments against materialism are correct [...] we need to *expand our catalog of the world’s basic features*” (123, my italics).

and charge is realized, there is an intrinsic property behind it: a phenomenal or protophenomenal property” (305). This indicates clearly that Chalmers’s overall strategy is unchanged: the general moral behind this strategy is still that a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness should simply include consciousness as a primitive ontological component of metaphysical reality, a non-physical property of some sort. What is wrong with this strategy?

Let me start from one sort of complaint that is frequently voiced in the literature about consciousness, but does not seem to me to be to get at the heart of the problem. This is the complaint that any ontology, however ‘revised’ and expanded to include nonphysical properties or entities, leaves things exactly as they were for what concerns the ‘explanatory gap’ between physical and experiential facts. In a spirit consonant with this complaint, Güzeldere (1997) writes: “I fail to see how the most steadfast belief in a thus-expanded new ontology would leave one *less puzzled* about just how consciousness relates to its physical underpinnings, hence diminishing the explanatory gap” (45).

This criticism misses the whole point of Chalmers’s non-reductivist project and of non-reductivist projects in general. The purpose of a non-reductivist has never been to ‘explain’ consciousness or to ‘bridge’ the explanatory gap: one of the chief reasons for adopting a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness is precisely that one holds facts of consciousness to be unexplainable on the basis of physical or otherwise non-conscious facts. By the non-reductivist’s lights, the purpose of a non-reductive metaphysics is to correctly *describe* or to *model*, not to *explain* the phenomenon of consciousness.

Expanding the fundamental ontology of the world is just one way of acknowledging and reasserting the fact that the phenomenon called ‘consciousness’ exists. In other words, what confronts the non-reductivist is, essentially, a matter of descriptive metaphysics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A non-reductive theory of consciousness “will not explain the existence of consciousness in the sense of telling us ‘why consciousness exists’”, Chalmers acknowledges (1996, 214).

Given that I do not wish to discuss the reasons in favour of adopting a non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness and that I do not believe that any such non-reductive metaphysics should in any way explain consciousness, my criticisms of Chalmers's approach, and of 'conservative' approaches in general, will concentrate on their ability to correctly describe, at a metaphysical level, the phenomenon of consciousness.

I shall start, quite naturally, from my own case. I enjoy phenomenal consciousness. There is something it is like to be me. What must fundamental metaphysical reality be like in order for *this* to be the case? In other words, what is it, at the level of fundamental facts, for my conscious experience to be as it is? Chalmers's answer is that for me to have phenomenal consciousness is for a certain individual *g*, or for some of his states, to instantiate a certain non-physical property *f*.<sup>14</sup> Let me underscore, once again, that the instantiation of *f* by *g* or by *g*'s states at a time *t* is not supposed to *explain* my phenomenal experience, but rather to *describe* or *model* the very fact I call 'phenomenal consciousness'.

A full appreciation of this point sheds light on one sort of difficulty with Chalmers's answer. If I start to reflect carefully on my phenomenal experience, I can easily get myself into a frame of mind in which Chalmers's answer appears completely inappropriate. From my point of view, my phenomenal experience is all there is: it is not as though there was something else- an individual or an organism- having that experience as a property, not even if that 'something else' is the very individual I am. To put it otherwise, if the fact we have decided to take as irreducible, fundamental and not further explainable is my experience *as it is from my perspective* (and from what other 'perspective' could a

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<sup>14</sup> The view that phenomenal properties are properties of *individuals* or *subjects* or else of *states* of individuals and subjects can also be found in Chalmers (2002b) and Chalmers and Bayne (2003). It would be tempting to identify these individuals with physical complexes of some sort, like bodies and brains, but this raises many delicate issues, not least those related to what Unger (2004) calls the 'experiential problem of the many'. I will come back to this latter problem in Chapter III.

non-reductivist ever consider this fact?), then it seems wrong to reconstruct this fact as the fact that there is an individual  $g$ , that is  $f$  or, equivalently, that  $g$  is in a state which, in turn, instantiates  $f$ . My experiencing involves no subjects or organisms, it seems. Subject-less expressions like ‘It is experiencing’ or ‘It is paining’ appear to be more appropriate to describe it than any sentence that makes explicit mention of individuals, organisms and states thereof.

This objection is not without some force. It strikes me as far from obvious that, as Van Gulick (2009) puts it, “experiences [should be] no more able to exist without a self or subject to undergo them than could ocean waves exist without the sea through which they move”. And, in any case, it is one thing to say that the existence of consciousness is necessarily accompanied by the existence of a self or subject and it is another to show that such a self or subject is indispensable for the purpose of expressing or modelling the very fact that consciousness exists. Maybe the existence of a plurality of atoms is necessarily accompanied by the existence of the mereological fusion of those atoms, but this certainly does not imply that metaphysicians have to mention fusions when they characterize a plurality of atoms.

Nevertheless, the objection is ultimately inconclusive. At bottom, it is simply unclear what the objection is all about. Is the claim that phenomenal facts are ‘subjectless’ or ‘subject-free’ facts a claim based on phenomenological evidence and concerning the *content* of my experiences or is it rather a claim regarding the metaphysical nature of the very *fact* that such experiences exist? As a claim about the content of our experiences, it is highly disputable, even though not without supporters: Hume was famous for thinking that no ‘self’ or ‘subject’ makes its appearance in our phenomenology. But his views have encountered fierce opposition and, in any case, an objection based on the content of our experiences would be, in all likelihood, metaphysically harmless. For why should the mere

observation that no ‘self’ features in my phenomenology prove that no self enters as a constituent of the metaphysical fact that I have consciousness?<sup>15</sup>

To make matters worse, even if I were in a position to establish (on phenomenological bases or otherwise) that the metaphysical fact that I have consciousness is a ‘subject-free’ fact, it is not clear that this should count as a decisive objection to property-dualism, rather than to any metaphysics involving individuals and properties. After all, there appears to be no principled obstacle to construing all facts as ‘subject-free’ facts. Instead of saying ‘there is a pebble’, we could say things like ‘It is pebbling’.<sup>16</sup> We could also construe facts in terms of trope-like events or else adopt Chalmers’s ‘double-aspect’ ontology and reduce the world to a ‘pure informational flux’ with no substances and no properties, but only primitive differences.

If it is not its involving individuals and properties, what else is wrong in Chalmers’s reconstruction of the fact that I have phenomenal consciousness? I think that the answer has all to do with the ‘puzzle of subjectivity’ I sketched in the Introduction. I say that the existence of my phenomenal experience is a *subjective fact*, whereas the fact that *g* has *f* or, equivalently, that *g*’s states are *f* is an *objective fact*. What do I mean by this? Well, it is only in Chapter III that I shall try to provide my reader with a decently articulated answer to this question. For the moment, much of what I can say will inevitably sound tentative and metaphoric. An illuminating, though somewhat abused metaphor is the following. Suppose I experience a pain. My experiencing this pain is a subjective fact because it obtains from my *point of view*, but possibly not *from somebody else’s point of view*: my being in pain is a fact whose obtaining or not obtaining depends on what point of view on reality we choose to consider. If you don’t like this metaphor, let me try with a different

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<sup>15</sup> In effect, it is the anti-Humean that might turn the phenomenology in his favour. Suppose we could establish that a metaphysical self enters as a component of the content of our experiences. We might then have some basis for arguing, in an externalist spirit, that that metaphysical self is literally a *constituent* of the fact that we have those experiences.

<sup>16</sup> See O’Leary-Hawthorne and Cortens (1995).

one. Suppose that a thunderstorm took place in Cancun on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1500. I presume everybody will understand me if I say that this fact is an objective fact. If God had a book in which every (fundamental and less-than-fundamental) fact about the world as seen from his all-encompassing, objective perspective is meticulously noted, the thunderstorm that took place in Cancun on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1500 would no doubt figure in that book. And so will infinitely many other objective facts: presumably all physical facts, but also all logical, modal, maybe even moral facts, according to some. But my painful experience would not, in this respect, be analogous to the thunderstorm in Cancun. And this is not, or not only, because my painful experience involves the instantiation of properties that are not of the kind normally observed and studied by physicists. It is because it is a subjective fact: if this fact is on anybody's book, it will be on my personal or subjective book.<sup>17</sup> Notice that I am not saying that my painful experience would figure in God's book, if only God could *know* about this fact. Nor am I suggesting that the subjectivity of my painful experience consists in its being *knowable* or *known* only by me. What I am saying is that an absolutely central feature of the particular fact that corresponds to my being consciously in pain is its *obtaining*, or its *being a fact* for me and maybe only for me, or- to help myself with the abused metaphor- from my point of view.

How might this work, at a metaphysical level? Intuitively, *reality itself* should be allowed to vary from one subject to another: from my point of view, reality should contain facts that do not obtain from your point of view. *Pace* Chalmers, this cannot be achieved by simply expanding the ontology. Adding more stuff to reality does not result in a world where phenomenal facts are subjective facts: it simply result in a world where there are more objective facts. There will be different organisms and different events happening to these organisms and some of these events will involve the instantiation of mysterious, non-

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<sup>17</sup> As we shall see in due course, there's a sense in which, by being on my subjective book, my painful experiences have to be on God's book, too. But let's not anticipate too much.

physical properties. But reality will be completely objective. Subjectivity will be reduced to this: that numerically distinct individuals undergo numerically (and most of the times not just numerically, but also qualitatively) different experiential events. Experiences will be, in this respect, like thunderstorms: just as there is a thunderstorm here and a hailstorm there, there will be a (non-physical) painful event here and a (non-physical) pleasurable event elsewhere. But this is *not* how things look from my point of view. In effect, there's simply no room from my 'point of view' in this world. It's a world where there are non-physical properties and, therefore, non-physical facts, but no irreducibly subjective facts.

The project of taking subjectivity seriously has at least been aired in metaphysics,<sup>18</sup> but it seems to have been completely neglected in the debate on phenomenal consciousness. It is particularly surprising that non-reductivists have not even contemplated this project, considering that their enterprise is, I've argued, an essentially descriptive one and that subjectivity appears to be an absolutely central feature of phenomenal consciousness.

How could a non-reductivist do more adequate justice to the alleged 'subjectivity' of conscious experiences? This is the question I intend to explore in this research. My tentative suggestion will be that non-reductivists should try to free themselves from the clutch of the 'conservative' spirit, which makes do with the view that consciousness is either a substance or a property- and more probably the latter than the former. This view encourages a deflationary treatment of subjectivity: if consciousness is just more of what there is, it can vary from one subject to another only in the sense that distinct individuals will have numerically (and, most of the times, not just numerically) different experiences.

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<sup>18</sup> See § III.1.

I propose that non-reductivists take inspiration from what happens in other areas of philosophy, where certain phenomena are acknowledged to be real and irreducible, and yet irreducibility is not, or not necessarily, taken to be synonymous with a revisionary or expanded property ontology. In this connection, the recent dynamic of certain debates in the philosophy of time strikes me as rather illuminating. I am thinking of the way in which philosophers have come to disagree over the reality of the passage of time, or, to use the already classic McTaggartian terminology, the reality of the A-series. Here we have a dispute between realists and anti-realist which, I will argue, cannot be adequately understood as an ontological dispute, a dispute over what substances or what properties there are. In the next Chapter, I will have to ask my reader to momentarily set aside the metaphysics of consciousness and bear with a rather long digression into the metaphysics of ‘sempiternity’ and ‘temporariness’. The relevance of this digression for our inquiry into the nature of subjectivity may at first not be apparent. Hopefully, though, some interesting parallels will not go completely unnoticed by the reader. At any rate, I will make these parallels fully explicit in Chapter III, when I will return to the central focus of this research: the problem of articulating a non-reductive metaphysics capable of accommodating the essentially subjective nature of consciousness.

## Chapter II: Realism about Temporariness

### *1. The friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity*

At first sight, time and subjectivity do not seem to have much to do with one another. There is, or at least there has been in the past, a certain interest in the project of tracing the alleged subjective roots of temporality. But I shall make it very clear that this interest is not what motivates my digression into the metaphysics of time. I am rather moved by the existence of some *prima facie* similarities between the concepts and the arguments used to talk about time and the concepts and arguments used to debate about subjectivity. One striking similarity is the recurrent appeal to the notion of ‘point of view’ or ‘perspective’.<sup>19</sup>

In discussions of metaphysics, this notion is employed with a somewhat pejorative import. Metaphysicians are interested in reality *as it is in itself*, but a perspective represents reality as it is *relative to* something or someone. If I say “The church is to the left of the hospital”, you might object that things by themselves are neither ‘to the left’ nor ‘to the right’ of anything. It is only relative to an oriented observer (myself in this case) that something happens to be ‘on the left’ or ‘on the right’. According to some, something analogous applies to statements like “Winter is over”: some think that ‘being over’ is (at most) a property possessed by a period or an event *relative to* a time.

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<sup>19</sup> See Crane (2003), Mellor (1991), Moore (1997) and Perry (2001).

The comparison, however, is highly tendentious. In effect, it represents the main bone of contention in an infamous and long-lasting philosophical controversy. On the one side, there are those philosophers who think that reality is at bottom capable of varying over time. These insist that ‘being over’, ‘being past’ and ‘being future’ are radically unlike ‘being on the left’ and ‘being on the right’. They agree that nothing is ‘on the left’ or ‘on the right’ independently of our choice of a perspective on things. But if, they say, something is past or future, this has entirely to do with how things are in reality. Since, on this view, many true statements are like “Winter is over” in not always being or having been true, I suggest to call the supporters of this view ‘friends of temporariness’ and the view they support ‘Realism about Temporariness’ (RT, hereafter).

On the other side, there are those who push the analogy between ‘being on the left/right’ and ‘being past/future’ to its limits. According to them, it is perfectly fine to say that ‘winter is over’, but one must not forget that the content expressed by that sentence must somehow be more relational than the appearances may suggest. This is because reality no more contains an absolute distinction between events that are ‘over’ and events that are ‘present’ than between things that are ‘left’ and things that are ‘right’. Since, on this view, reality is most perspicuously described by statements that are always true, if true at all, I propose to call the supporters of this view ‘friends of sempiternity’ and the view they support ‘Anti-realism about Temporariness’.

What is the real crux of the disagreement between the friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity? It’s difficult to say and it will be useful to start our discussion by presenting some popular, but ultimately unsatisfactory answers to this question (§ 2). As for myself, I believe that the dispute between realists and anti-realists can be best cast in terms of propositions, but only on condition that we help ourselves, once again, with a robust notion of reality. As it turns out, what is needed here is not as much the notion of *fundamental reality* as that of *metaphysical reality*: the friends of temporariness and the

friends of sempiternity disagree on what sort of propositions are complete or saturated enough to state how things are ‘strictly speaking’ or ‘in full metaphysical rigor’. The details of this account, based on the notion of metaphysical saturation, will be given in § 3 and it is only in § 4 that I will proceed to classify and compare different versions of realism about temporariness.

Before moving to the substance, a few remarks about the terminology. It is commonplace to call the friends of temporariness ‘tense realists’ or ‘A-theorists’ and the friends of sempiternity ‘tense anti-realists’ or ‘B-theorists’. The friends of temporariness are ‘tense realists’ because they put emphasis on the fact that time passes and the passage of time is expressed in many natural languages with the help of tensed sentences (“Today it *is raining*, but tomorrow it *will be* sunny”). This terminology is somewhat misleading and I will try to avoid it where possible: tense is a linguistic category, whereas the theses we are dealing with here are genuinely metaphysical views about time.

As for the ‘A-theory’/‘B-theory’ opposition, it originated with McTaggart (1908), who famously gave the name ‘A-series’ to “that series of positions which runs from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present through the near future to the far future” (458). The friends of temporariness are ‘A-theorists’ insofar as they take the A-determinations (*past*, *present* and *future*) to be real and absolute. I will occasionally rely on the McTaggartian terminology, but I want to underscore that accepting the reality of the A-series is not, in my view, tantamount to posit primitive *properties* of pastness, presentness and futurity. Some friends of temporariness think that presentness is akin to a property of times or events, but theirs is certainly not the only, nor the most plausible, form of realism about temporariness. More importantly, it is not because they posit a primitive

property called ‘presentness’ that they deserve the qualification of friends of temporariness.<sup>20</sup>

The last terminological remark concerns the notion of sempiternity. It is often said that the B-theorist prefers to describe reality using ‘*atemporal*’ or ‘*timeless*’ propositions like “Winter is over at t”. I have nothing to object to these ways of speaking, insofar as all that is meant with the adjectives ‘*atemporal*’ or ‘*timeless*’ is simply that the proposition that winter is over at t is *sempiternal*, viz. it is such that, necessarily, it is true iff it is always true. Sometimes, though, ‘*atemporal*’ is used in a different and more obscure sense. According to this sense, something is atemporally true if it is somehow true ‘outside of time’. I do not want to say that this sense of ‘*atemporal*’ is completely unintelligible, but it is certainly far from perspicuous and I prefer not to give it any prominent role in my exposition of realism and anti-realism about temporariness.

## 2. *Some false starts*

Let me start to address the problem of stating RT by looking at three kinds of theses that can be easily confused with RT, but have very little, if anything, to do with it.

### 2.1. *A thesis about tensed sentences?*

Realists about temporariness are inclined to give particular prominence to the fact that tensed sentences (“Winter is over”, “The dinner was a great success”, etc.) are not

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<sup>20</sup> On this point, I strongly disagree with Parsons (2002), who affirms that being an A-theorist is a matter of thinking that “there are intrinsic and monadic properties such as *pastness*, *presentness* and *futurity*” (2). I discuss this view in § 4.1 below.

always true, if true at all. They take this fact to indicate that reality itself varies with the passing of time, in such a way that “winter is over” may now be true, while having been false until a few weeks ago.<sup>21</sup> The existence of sentences that change their truth-value over time is not likely to cause any embarrassment to the friends of sempiternity, however. On their view, this is just an instance of the familiar fact that some sentences convey a ‘perspectival’ representation of reality. The sentence “The church is to the left of the hospital” may be true here and false elsewhere, but this does not seem to indicate that reality is so-and-so here and otherwise elsewhere. What pertains to reality is ultimately only a certain spatial position of the church with respect to the hospital and this position does not vary from one place to another.<sup>22</sup>

Some have pointed out that, while sentences conveying spatially perspectival representations (“The church is to the left of the hospital”) can, at least in principle, be dispensed with, tensed sentences are absolutely pervasive in our language and, despite appearances to the contrary, cannot be avoided. A view inspired by this insight and called ‘very serious tensism’ is discussed by Ludlow (2004) and Crisp (2004). Very serious tensism is the thesis that “every natural language predication is inherently tensed” and that, since there are no untensed predications in natural languages, “none can be employed in the semantics for natural language” (Ludlow 2004, 23). A consequence of this view is that every time we attempt to make ‘tenseless’ claims (“Winter is over at t”), we at best manage to make presently-or-otherwise-tensed claims (“Winter *is presently* over at t”).

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that the true *utterance* “Today is Tuesday” will become false tomorrow. Clearly, I do not become a liar tomorrow for having made that utterance today.

<sup>22</sup> The anti-realists can acknowledge “the possibility that one can also give a *complete description* of the world in tensed terms” (Fine 2005, 264). More interestingly (and more controversially), they might deem this tensed description absolutely indispensable for at least some descriptive purposes. But of this, later on.

Notice that very serious tensism is a quite radical and controversial position,<sup>23</sup> but it is not, or not necessarily, a position that realists about temporariness are committed to adopt. RT is supposed to be a metaphysical thesis about time, not an empirical claim to the effect that all predicative sentences of natural languages exhibit a certain feature called ‘tense’ and can only be given a semantic interpretation in a tensed metalanguage. Of course, there is a further question as to whether or not a view like Ludlow’s ‘very serious tensism’ entails the truth or the triviality of RT- or indeed the trivial truth or falsity of any other metaphysical claim about time. But this question, however interesting, need not concern us here.

## 2.2. *A thesis about the propositions expressed by tensed sentences?*

In the light of these considerations, it seems natural to conclude that any thesis regarding sentences, utterances and other linguistic items is unfit to express the distinctive content of realism about temporariness. Perhaps, the friends of temporariness are not so much interested in tensed sentences as in what tense sentences say about reality or, as it is usually put, in the *propositions* they express.

Propositions are naturally regarded as more worthy of metaphysical investigation than sentences. Sentences can be true or false, but this is at least partly in virtue of the fact that they express certain propositions and that these latter are true or false in a more fundamental sense. Sentences are always formulated in a particular language, whereas the same proposition can be expressed in many different ways or be believed or disbelieved by speakers of different languages. In effect, unlike sentences, propositions would exist and

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<sup>23</sup> According to Ludlow (2004), it implies nothing less than the triviality of the claim that “every object exists presently”. Very serious tensism is also empirically controversial, for there seem to be natural languages- Chinese, for example- that do not exhibit tense.

be true or false even in the absence of any speaker or thinker.<sup>24</sup> Maybe RT can be construed as the thesis that some propositions are ‘temporary’, in the sense that they can change from true to false, or viceversa, as time passes. The friend of sempiternity would deny this: he would insist that all propositions are ‘sempiternal’, in the sense that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, they are true iff they are always true.

On this construal, RT would not look too implausible. As Prior (1959) famously argued, when I utter the sentence ‘Thank goodness that’s over!’ after a painful experience, what I am rejoicing in does not seem to be the sort of fact that can be expressed by the sempiternal proposition that my painful experience is over as of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2010. The proposition I am believing when, in the appropriate circumstances, I say “That’s over” must be one that used to be false, but (thank goodness) is now true. Thus, we seem to have prima facie evidence that it makes good sense to speak of temporarily true propositions and that at least some of the propositions we believe or express with our sentences are temporary propositions.

Two problems arise, though. First, it is not clear why what is true of ‘Thank goodness that’s over’ should not also be true of ‘Thank goodness that’s not here’ (as referred to an earthquake, for example). Should the friends of temporariness also believe that some propositions are ‘local’, in the sense that they can be true here and not elsewhere or viceversa? And should they draw from this fact analogous metaphysical conclusions to those they endorse in the case of time? It seems not. But then, what hope can there be of construing RT as the thesis that some propositions are temporary?

The second problem is that there seems to be no reason why, if I am a friend of sempiternity, I cannot believe that some of our propositional attitudes take as their objects propositions or proposition-like entities that can enjoy variation in their truth-value as time

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<sup>24</sup> Maybe not all propositions can exist in the absence of thoughts and sentences (or thinkers and speakers). Arguably, any ‘singular’ proposition about a particular sentence (or speaker) or a particular thought (or thinker) cannot exist without that sentence (or speaker) or that thought (or thinker).

passes. There are various ways in which this intuition can be fleshed out. Sider (2001), for instance, suggests that “a more appropriate object of the attitudes would be what one might call ‘temporal propositions’: functions from times to (atemporal) propositions” (20). In the case of ‘Thank goodness that’s over’, the object of my belief would be the temporal proposition that assigns to any time  $t$  the atemporal (or, in our jargon: sempiternal) proposition that my painful experience ceases immediately before  $t$ . Thus, the object of my belief is not the sempiternal proposition itself, but a function that maps times into sempiternal propositions. One could also think of this function as a property of times, along the lines suggested by Lewis (1979). In any case, the idea is “in a slogan, to build irreducible temporal perspective into psychological attitudes rather than the world” (Sider 2001, 20).

One might complain that the proposition-like entities posited by Lewis and Sider differ in certain fundamental respects from what propositions in general should be like: since they are ‘incomplete’, they simply cannot be true or false unless they are complemented with an argument (if we take them to be functions) or are assigned a bearer (if we prefer to think of them as properties). This raises serious concerns as to whether they can really be proper objects of propositional attitudes. Suppose that the proposition  $p$  that I believe when I believe that the painful experience is over is really a function, as Sider suggests. This seems to be hard to square with the general fact that, if  $x$  believes that  $p$ , then  $x$  believes that  $p$  is true. On Sider’s analysis,  $p$  is simply not the kind of object that can be true or false, just as a function from even numbers to odd numbers is not the kind of object that can be even or odd. For the same reason,  $p$  is not a suitable object of knowledge, if it is assumed, as seems inevitable, that knowledge is factive.

Now, while these complaints are certainly worth of serious consideration, they do not seem to me to get to the heart of the disagreement between the friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity. Maybe these complaints show, contra Zimmerman (2005),

that the friends of sempiternity cannot coherently stick to the view that some of the propositions we believe are temporary propositions. But the crucial point remains that, even if they were in a position to articulate and defend such a view, they could still insist that temporary proposition can only be true in virtue of a reality which is sempiternally so-and-so. In other words, it is not immediate why agreement about what can or cannot be believed or disbelieved about reality should imply agreement about what reality itself is like. And it is this latter agreement which seems to be absent in the controversy between the friends of sempiternity and the friends of temporariness.

### 2.3. *An ontological thesis?*

It is tempting to construe RT as an ontological claim, a claim to the effect that certain entities exist or do not exist. The fact that, unlike the majority of A-theorists, most B-theorists admit in their ontology objects that are wholly in the past or wholly in the future (e.g. the Emperor Trajan or my grand grandson) might be taken to reveal that “the two disputes- over the reality of past and future and over the status of tense- are intimately linked” (Sider 2001, 14). But this is not quite right, for RT is perfectly compatible with the eternalist ontology favoured by the friends of sempiternity. Consider, for instance, the infamous ‘moving spotlight’ view, according to which reality undergoes real change as a primitive property of presentness is successively possessed by different times.<sup>25</sup> Supporters of this view are certainly to be counted among the friends of temporariness, but they would have no difficulty in endorsing all the ontological claims made by an eternalist B-theorist.

A more delicate but closely related question is whether or not the friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity can agree *both* on what objects exist *and* on

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<sup>25</sup> See Broad (1927).

what properties they instantiate. One might argue that being a realist about temporariness is, at least in part, a matter of thinking that some properties are only *temporarily exemplified*. Notice that adopting this formulation will not automatically solve all our problems, for presumably the friend of sempiternity can come up with a spurious notion of ‘temporary exemplification’, more or less in the same way as he came up with a spurious notion of ‘temporarily true proposition’. In the next section, I will argue that these sceptical attacks can be resisted and that, except for a few limit cases, realism about temporariness does depend, for its formulation, on a certain non-negotiable notion of temporary property-exemplification. It seems therefore correct to conclude that, at least as far as properties and property-instantiations are concerned, the friend of temporariness and the friend of sempiternity cannot find themselves in complete agreement.

But does this show that realism about temporariness is an ontological thesis, a thesis about what properties exist? Maybe not. Suppose our two friends make both use of a sparse repertoire of fundamental physical properties: spin, charge, mass and the like. It is true that one of them affirms and the other denies that these properties can be temporarily instantiated. But there’s something strange in the claim that they disagree over what properties there are. In effect, one of them- say the friend of temporariness- could put forward the following conciliatory suggestion: in reality, properties as such are neither temporary nor sempiternal, rather they enter into different sorts of facts, temporary and sempiternal ones. Thus, there’s a single property, ‘having spin up’, and two sorts of facts into which this property can enter: the sempiternal fact ‘particle x has spin up at t’ and the temporary fact ‘particle x has spin up, period’. According to the friend of temporariness, the friend of sempiternity works with the right repertoire of properties, but imposes an unmotivated constraint on what sort of facts reality can be constituted by, by limiting himself to sempiternal facts. Interestingly, the friend of sempiternity could say something analogous about his opponent: according to him, too, the friend of temporariness works

with the right range of properties, but he wrongly takes some pseudo-facts (namely, what he calls ‘temporary facts’) to be genuine facts.<sup>26</sup>

The conclusion I am pointing at is that, if RT is a thesis about properties, it is primarily a thesis about what it is for a property to be instantiated or what sorts of facts property-instantiations are. In any case, it seems to me that RT cannot be reduced to an ontological claim, a claim about what objects or what properties there are.

### 3. *Stating Realism about Temporariness*

#### 3.1. *Metaphysical saturation and temporary truth*

I have so far considered a few unsuccessful attempts to identify the distinctive subject matter of the dispute between the friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity. I have argued that this dispute should not be construed as a controversy over the truth and ineliminability of tensed sentences, the availability of temporarily true propositions as objects of propositional attitudes or the existence of certain objects or certain properties.

It is time now to be constructive. In this section, I wish to illustrate a way of construing realism about temporariness and its denial that has recently put forward, in its most explicit form, by Sider (forthcoming), but traces of which can be found Fine (2001, 2005, 2006), Zimmerman (2005) and Williamson (1998, 2002). As we shall see, the proposed solution involves appealing to a robust notion of ‘reality’. It turns out that this notion is that of *metaphysical reality*, which I’ve already, though only briefly, mentioned at the beginning of Chapter I.

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<sup>26</sup> More on this view in § 4.1 below.

We've learnt in the last section that the friends of sempiternity have a peculiar way of accounting for the 'perspectival' contents of our beliefs about time. Their strategy involves positing certain proposition-like entities which can be seen alternatively as properties of times or else as functions from times to full-blooded propositions. We've also seen that the 'incompleteness' of these proposition-like entities represents a major ground of complaint against this strategy. It would be nice if the friends of temporariness could come up with a somewhat more precise articulation of this complaint. The idea might then be to identify the friends of temporariness as those for which even some genuinely *complete* propositions are capable of changing from true to false, or viceversa, over time.

One could start by saying that a proposition is *complete* or *saturated* only whenever all of its variables and parameters have been assigned a value. This, however, immediately raises the problem of providing a criterion on the basis of which to judge whether or not a given proposition is saturated. Take, for instance, Sider's 'temporal propositions'. In a quite obvious sense, they are not saturated, as we defined them as functions and functions are typically 'incomplete' entities, waiting to be assigned a value. But in another sense, they are saturated enough to play the role of objects of our propositional attitudes. In this latter sense, *all* of their variables and parameters have been assigned a value, that is to say: all the variables and parameters that, on Sider's analysis, are necessary for that thing to be a suitable candidate to be believed or disbelieved by someone.

This is where, it's been suggested, some robust concept of reality needs to be called into play. Sider's temporal propositions may very well be qualified as 'complete' by some other standards, but Sider himself will acknowledge that they are not complete or saturated *by the standards of reality*. To illustrate this, let me consider again the familiar sentence:

(1) The church is to the left of the hospital.

Suppose that, in the appropriate circumstances, I truthfully utter (1): what sort of content do I believe? We know that, as far as reality is concerned, there's no question of a church being to the left or the right of a hospital *simpliciter*. Saying that the church is to the left of the hospital amounts to saying absolutely nothing about reality, unless a further parameter is explicitly supplemented or implicitly presupposed: namely, the standpoint relative to which the church is to the left of the hospital. One might therefore suggest that the content of my belief is better expressed by (2):

(2) The church is to the left of the hospital *relative to me*.

Yet, just as the content of "That painful experience is over" is not perfectly captured by the proposition that that painful experience is over as of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, similarly (2) does not seem to adequately represent the content of the belief I normally express by uttering (1). What we have here is a very delicate puzzle, that I cannot attempt to solve. I shall limit myself to the following, conditional line of reasoning: *if*, as it seems, (1) and (2) correspond to distinct believable contents and *if* one is happy to characterize these distinct contents in terms of distinct *propositions* (a big 'if', as we've seen in § 2.2), then one has to say that, while the distinct propositions expressed by (1) and (2) are both suitable candidates to be believed or disbelieved by someone, only one of them is 'saturated' or 'complete' by the standards of reality. The same goes for Sider's temporal propositions. One may insist that they really are believable *propositions*, but it must at least be conceded that, by the lights of any B-theorist, they are not 'saturated' *by the standards of reality*: they are not capable of stating something true or false *of reality*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> More precisely: they are not capable of stating something true *and* capable of stating something false of metaphysical reality. This clarification is meant to exclude cases where a proposition is capable of stating something true, but incapable of stating something false (e.g. 'p  $\vee$  q', with p metaphysically saturated and q metaphysically unsaturated).

What we have here is a distinctive notion of saturation, defined by reference to the concept of reality. What concept of reality? Metaphysical reality? Or fundamental metaphysical reality? Or maybe neither of the two? My suggestion is that it is *metaphysical reality* that we are concerned with when we call into doubt the saturation of Sider's temporal propositions. In all likelihood, it is not a fundamental fact that the church is to the left of the hospital. But fundamentality is not even to be contemplated in this context: that the church is to the left of the hospital *simpliciter* is simply not to be regarded as a fact, let alone a fundamental one, at least if we speak with metaphysical rigor.

The friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity are both interested in *metaphysically saturated propositions*, propositions that are complete enough to be capable of stating something true or false of metaphysical reality. What they disagree about is whether or not metaphysically saturated propositions can change from true to false, or viceversa, over time. Let's see what this means.

According to the friends of sempiternity, all metaphysically saturated propositions are sempiternal. I've already anticipated that a proposition is sempiternal if it satisfies the following definition:

$p$  is sempiternal =<sub>def</sub> necessarily [ $p$  is true iff it is always true]

By the sempiternalist's lights, only sempiternal propositions are capable of saying something complete about metaphysical reality. A fortiori, then, all propositions that are true of metaphysical reality will be *sempiternally true*, viz. true and sempiternal. Notice that the only sense in which a sempiternal proposition can 'change' from true to false (or viceversa) is by enjoying variation in truth value with variation in the value of the time parameter. Thus, suppose I say that 'The painful experience is over'. When invited to

provide a metaphysically saturated proposition in the semantic vicinity of what I've said, a friend of sempiternity will go for something like (3):

(3) The painful experience is over as of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2010.

On his analysis, the only sense in which the painful experience has not always been over is that, if we replace 'the 25<sup>th</sup> of February' with a different date, we might obtain a proposition that differs in truth value from (3). But (3), as it stands, with all its parameters saturated, is such that necessarily, it is true if and only if it is always true. According to the friend of sempiternity, all metaphysically saturated propositions resemble (3) in this respect.

The friends of temporariness disagree with this analysis. On their view, we only do justice to the reality of the passage of time if we allow some metaphysically saturated propositions to be genuinely temporary. The definition of temporariness will be, of course, the following:

$p$  is temporary=<sub>def</sub> it is metaphysically possible that  $p$  is true without being always true.

If you're an A-theorist, you believe that any analysis of temporariness along the lines suggested by the friend of sempiternity ("temporariness is just variation in truth value with variation in the time parameter") fails to capture the crucial fact that *reality itself* changes as time passes.<sup>28</sup> And since you believe that some temporary propositions are capable of saying how things are in metaphysical reality, you'll also believe that some metaphysically

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<sup>28</sup> There's an obvious parallel between the A-theoretic rejection of the B-theoretic analysis of temporariness and the rejection of Lewis's analysis of contingency by those who take the modal operators 'seriously' (see Williamson 2002).

saturated propositions are *temporarily true*, viz. true and temporary. I therefore suggest that we define *Realism about Temporariness* as follows:

[RT] Some metaphysically saturated propositions are temporarily true.

Notice that, on this way of construing realism about temporariness, the friend of temporariness and the friend of sempiternity need not necessarily disagree on what particular propositions are true and metaphysically saturated. In some cases, their disagreement will be purely over whether or not a certain metaphysically saturated true proposition is temporary or sempiternal. For example, many B-theorists would regard (4) as expressing a metaphysically saturated and sempiternally true proposition:

(4) Some region of space-time contains dinosaurs.

Some friends of temporariness (the so called ‘Growing Block’ theorists) may agree that the proposition expressed by (4) is metaphysically saturated and true, but insist that it is only temporarily true, because it is possible that, a long time ago, space-time did not use to contain any dinosaur.

### 3.2. *Alternative formulations: unrelativized truth and temporary property-exemplification*

It is worth comparing [RT] with two alternative formulations, recently proposed by Zimmerman (2005). The first formulation appeals to the notion of a statement or a proposition being true *simpliciter*, not merely true *at a time* or *relative to a time*. The idea is that “the A-theorist may distinguish between, on the one hand, various kinds of relative

truth- true-at-a-time, true-simultaneously-with-such-and-such-event, etc.- and, on the other, a kind of truth that is not relative to anything”. Notice that this would allow the A-theorist to discriminate between genuine propositions and proposition-like entities à la Sider and Lewis, given that the former, but not the latter can be bearers of unrelativized truth. The A-theorist may then “insist that some of these things [that] are true simpliciter include ones that will become or once were false” (433). Realism about temporariness would therefore be identified with the thesis that:

[RT]\* Some objects (statements, propositions,...) that are bearers of *unrelativized truth* are only *temporarily true*.

As Zimmerman himself points out, one of the problems of this approach is that it offers no relief to an A-theorist who believes that the truth predicate is eliminable through deflationary schemes like ‘*p* is true iff *p*’. Such an A-theorist will ultimately have to say something about *p* and it is difficult to see what he could say in order to distinguish himself from the B-theorist, except that *p* is both temporary and *metaphysically saturated*, in the sense I have tried to sketch above. Of course, deflationism about the truth predicate might be a false doctrine, but it is not clear that its falsity should be a straightforward commitment of any friend of temporariness.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, [RT] seems to me preferable to [RT]\* as a formulation of realism about temporariness.

The second formulation involves saying that “some genuinely monadic properties can be had by things that change with respect to those properties” (Zimmerman 2005, 435). The idea here is to put weight on the fact that some properties are only temporarily possessed by their bearers. Clearly, the notion of *temporary exemplification* should not be

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<sup>29</sup> Metaphysical saturation was defined above in terms of the capacity of a proposition to state something *true* or *false* of metaphysical reality. But there is no principled impediment to taking the notion of metaphysical saturation, or some notion akin to it, as primitive. See, for example, Fine (2005).

reducible to that of exemplification *relative to* some times and not to others, on pain of contradicting, in the relevant cases, the monadicity of the properties in question. Following this suggestion, we could define RT as follows:

[RT]\*\* Some monadic properties can be *temporarily* exemplified.

Zimmerman discusses this solution at length and concludes that it is vulnerable to sceptical attacks: an A-theorist, he thinks, will have trouble distinguishing the desired notion of ‘temporary exemplification’ from other spurious notions that lie in its vicinity. More specifically, a B-theorist who believes in enduring individuals could suggest that [ $g + m$ ], the mereological sum of an enduring individual  $g$  and a monadic property  $m$ , constitutes an exemplification-like thing that, though in itself complete, obtains only *relative to* a specified time. This eccentric B-theorist seems to be in a position to pay lip service to [RT]\*\* while remaining an anti-realist about temporariness. Maybe the whole point is that, on this view, it is not true *simpliciter* that  $g$  exemplifies  $m$ . But this seems to take us back to the first solution, based on the notion of unrelativized truth. Zimmerman’s (admittedly tentative) conclusion is that some appeal to a robust notion of truth might be inevitable for the friends of temporariness.

It seems to me that a defence of [RT]\*\* from sceptical attacks can and should be achieved on purely metaphysical ground. A friend of temporariness should insist that an exemplification-like thing is not a property-exemplification: we know the difference between the two, otherwise we would not know what a property is. Nevertheless, I think there are reasons for preferring [RT] to [RT]\*\*. Although [RT] is certainly not devoid of metaphysical commitments (the first and most outstanding being a commitment to the existence of propositions), someone who embraces [RT] need not believe that reality is structured in any particular way in order for it to be the case that some metaphysically

saturated propositions are only temporarily true. Maybe reality is ultimately constituted by enduring individuals and temporary monadic properties, as [RT]\*\* implies. But believing that reality is so structured does not seem to be necessary for being a friend of temporariness. Suppose I believe that metaphysical reality is such that nothing exists presently but something will exist in the future. It seems quite natural to say that what I believe is the A-theoretic claim that it is only temporarily true that:

(5) Nothing exists.

Believing that, strictly speaking, (5) is true and will be false seems to be sufficient to be qualified as a friend of temporariness. But one could believe that (5) is only temporarily true without having any view whatsoever about individuals (enduring or not), properties (monadic or not) and property-exemplifications. For this reason, my preference goes to [RT], although I concede that most of those who endorse [RT] will also endorse [RT]\*\*.

#### *4. Varieties of Realism about Temporariness*

In the last section, Realism about Temporariness has been defined as the view that at least some metaphysically saturated propositions are only temporarily true. We have also seen that, on the view advocated by the friends of temporariness, the temporary truth of a proposition should not be reduced to the sensitivity of its truth value to the variation of one of its parameters (namely, the time parameter). To say that  $p$  is *temporarily true* is rather to say that  $p$  is true and temporary, where a proposition is temporary if it can be true without being always true. If we use what Prior (1968c) calls a ‘Boolean always’, i.e. if we

so read ‘It is always true that-’ as to make it equivalent to ‘It is never false that-’, then the temporary truth of  $p$  comes down to the following:

$p$  is temporarily true =<sub>def</sub> (i)  $p$  is true, and (ii) it is metaphysically possible that [ $p \wedge \text{WAS} \sim p$ ] or it is metaphysically possible that [ $p \wedge \text{WILL} \sim p$ ]<sup>30</sup>

WAS and WILL are sometimes called *tense operators* and their intended meanings are, respectively, ‘It was the case that...’ and ‘It will be the case that...’. Needless to say, the friends of temporariness take these or other, similar operators as primitive and not further analyzable.

In this section, I wish to distinguish and classify different varieties of Realism about Temporariness. My aim in doing this is to provide a general overview of the different positions available to the friends of temporariness. I do not here intend to embark on a detailed critique of these positions, nor to conclusively assess their respective costs and benefits. It will rather be important to highlight the diversity of these views and the compatibility of each of them with the claim that some metaphysically saturated propositions are only temporarily true. This catalogue will also be of some help when, in the next chapter, I will put forward a view called ‘Realism about Subjectivity’: as we shall see, many of the views sketched in this section will, *mutatis mutandis*, offer us a guide in the search of a plausible theory of subjectivity.

As it is natural to expect, the friends of temporariness are not in unanimous agreement among themselves on many issues. They all agree that metaphysical reality can change over time, but, as we all know, things can change in one respect while remaining

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<sup>30</sup> Correspondingly, we define temporary exemplification as follows:  $x$  temporarily exemplifies  $P$  =<sub>def</sub> (i)  $x$  exemplifies  $P$ , and (ii) it is metaphysically possible that [ $x$  exemplifies  $P$  and  $\text{WILL} \sim (x \text{ exemplifies } P)$ ] or it is metaphysically possible that [ $x$  exemplifies  $P$  and  $\text{WAS} \sim (x \text{ exemplifies } P)$ ]. A nice feature of this formulation is that it allows us to say that an object  $x$  temporarily exemplifies  $P$  even if  $x$  exemplifies  $P$  throughout its existence, but ceases to exist at some point in the future. On this point, see Rea (2005). On the choice of a Boolean ALWAYS, see Prior (1968d).

the same in another. Moving a comma is sufficient to change a book, but the change will not be quite as radical as if one rewrites an entire paragraph or an entire chapter. How radical a change can reality undergo, according to the friends of temporariness? Well, the answer depends on ‘how temporary’ is the particular version of realism about temporariness they endorse.

Let’s say that a view  $T$  is *more temporary than* a view  $\tau$  if, for every (fundamental or less-than-fundamental) fact that  $\tau$  expresses with a temporarily true proposition,  $T$  also expresses that fact with a temporarily true proposition, but not vice versa. The relation ‘more-temporary-than’ is, I take it, fairly straightforward and intuitive. It is not, however, completely unproblematic. Even supposing that we can make good sense of what it is for a proposition to express a ‘fact’, it will often be difficult to decide whether  $T$  and  $\tau$  disagree simply on how a certain fact  $f$  should be expressed or, rather, on whether or not  $f$  is a fact. And in the absence of a minimal agreement on what facts need to be expressed propositionally, comparing the degree of temporariness of different views of reality becomes much more complicated. There are, I believe, interesting alternatives, but I shall delve into them here. In the present context, my purpose is just to present the different variants of realism about temporariness in a sensible and philosophically significant order: the partial ordering relation ‘more temporary than’ will certainly do for this modest purpose.

One important genre of facts that the friends of temporariness can decide to take as either temporary or sempiternal are facts of existence. Is reality so temporary that things can come into and go out of existence? The answer to these questions depends on the truth or falsity of the following sempiternal schemata, known as *temporal Barcan formulas*:

(i) ALWAYS (WAS  $\exists x \alpha \Rightarrow \exists x$  WAS  $\alpha$ )

(ii) ALWAYS (WILL  $\exists x \alpha \Rightarrow \exists x$  WILL  $\alpha$ )

(iii) ALWAYS  $(\exists x \text{ WAS } \alpha \Rightarrow \text{WAS } \exists x \alpha)$

(iv) ALWAYS  $(\exists x \text{ WILL } \alpha \Rightarrow \text{WILL } \exists x \alpha)$

In order to guarantee the truth of (i), one has to say that nothing existed in the past that does not exist anymore.<sup>31</sup> Symmetrically, acceptance of (ii) implies that nothing that will ever exist in the future does not presently exist. The truth of (iii) and (iv), on the other hand, ensures that present objects have always existed and always will exist.<sup>32</sup> In short, these formulas can only be guaranteed to be all true if the domain of quantification remains invariant across time, viz. if there neither were nor will be more or fewer entities than there presently are.

One way in which the temporal Barcan formulas can be guaranteed to be true is by assuming that all the entities that exist, existed or will exist are *sempiternal existents*, viz. entities whose existence is a sempiternal fact (necessarily, they exist iff they always exist). This gives us a view that might be called the *Invariable Domain View* of temporariness.<sup>33</sup> An Invariable Domain theorist express all facts of existence with sempiternal propositions. In all likelihood, most friends of temporariness hold a view that is more temporary than any form of Invariable Domain View. At the same time, the Invariable Domain View is hardly more temporary than any other view in the philosophy of time, except, of course,

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<sup>31</sup> Suppose that yesterday there was an object P (i.e.  $\text{WAS } \exists x Px$ ). If that object exists also today, there is an object that has the property of having been P yesterday (i.e.  $\exists x \text{ WAS } Px$ ). But if that object does not exist today, there can be no guarantee that an object that was P yesterday exists today. That is to say, there is no guarantee that (i) is true.

<sup>32</sup> Let's see how this works in the case of (iv). Suppose there exists something that will not exist tomorrow (i.e.  $\exists x \text{ WILL } \sim \exists y (x = y)$ ). This supposition, together with (iv), would yield the unacceptable consequence that tomorrow there will be an object such that nothing will be identical to it (i.e.  $\text{WILL } \exists x \sim \exists y (x = y)$ ).

<sup>33</sup> Notice that the Invariable Domain theorist might think that *temporary existents* are at least possible, even if not actual. He might hold the Barcan formulas to be only contingently true. It should also be noted that the temporal Barcan formulas might happen to be (contingently) true in a world that contains, contained or will contain some temporary existents. Given space, however, I shall limit myself to the Invariable Domain views.

anti-realism about temporariness. What better place, then, to begin our survey than this minimally temporary variant of realism about temporariness?

#### 4.1. *The Invariable Domain Views*

The most famous example of Invariable Domain View is, arguably, the *Moving Spotlight Theory*. Supporters of this theory think that almost all facts about the world can be expressed through sempiternal propositions of various kinds. Not only everything that exists exists sempiternally, but the distribution of properties on the constant domain is also unchanging, that is to say, it can be given through the sort of propositions that the friends of sempiternity classically accept (e.g. “I am sitting-at- $t$  and standing-at- $t_2$ ” or “Temporal part  $t$  is sitting and temporal part  $t_2$  is standing”, depending on what sempiternalist ideology is preferred). In effect, there’s just one exception, one tiny fact that allows the moving spotlight theorist to differentiate himself from the anti-realists about temporariness: it is the fact that a certain time *is the present*. This fact is to be expressed via a temporarily true proposition. More precisely, we should think of presentness as a primitive property, one that is successively possessed by different times or events or portions of the four-dimensional spacetime manifold.

Criticisms of the Moving Spotlight View abound,<sup>34</sup> but I shall dwell here on only one problematic aspect: the role played by the property of presentness. We can posit a primitive temporary property and label it ‘presentness’, but this does not mean that we have any intuitive grasp of what sort of property this label might pick out. Notice that presentness is not to be identified with concreteness or existence or reality, for the Moving

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Sider (2001) and Merricks (2006).

Spotlight theorist likes to define himself as an ‘eternalist’, one who thinks that past dinosaurs exist and are as real and concrete as any object located in the region of spacetime we occupy.

What is presentness then? Confronted with this question, the Moving Spotlight theorist might protest that presentness is simply the property of what is present and that being an A-theorist and a friend of temporariness is partly a matter of understanding what ‘being present’ means. But this protest is not entirely justified. One thing we know about the A-theoretic notion of ‘being present’ is that everything that is the case is- by definition, one could say- presently the case.<sup>35</sup> Even if there are entities located in remote regions of spacetime (regions that we call ‘past’ and ‘future’), it makes no sense for the true friend of temporariness to say that they are sempiternally or temporarily so-and-so, unless they also exist *presently* and are *presently* so-and-so. In this sense, present facts include the temporary instantiation of the property called ‘presentness’ by certain times and not others, but also all other temporary and sempiternal facts about the universe. Surely the Moving Spotlight theorist does not want to say that all these facts are present in the sense that they instantiate presentness. The problem therefore remains for him to explain what this mysterious property of presentness is.<sup>36</sup>

These concerns might put the Moving Spotlight theory in a dubious light, but they do not disqualify the Invariable Domain view as such. Consider, for example, the view Sider (forthcoming) calls ‘Williamsonian passage’. This view is *more temporary than* the Moving Spotlight theory, because it combines a commitment to a framework of sempiternal enduring objects with the claim that not one property, but rather most, if not all

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<sup>35</sup> The point is quite familiar. Prior (1968a), a friend of temporariness, expresses it by saying that “whatever the proposition that *p* might be, the proposition that *it is (now) the case that p* is the very same proposition as the proposition that *p*” (101). Sider (forthcoming), a friend of sempiternity, points out that “the defender of passage [...] must say that the fundamental facts are facts from the present perspective” (268).

<sup>36</sup> Prima facie, it is also not immediate why any property should behave the way presentness behaves according to the Moving Spotlight theorist. Why can’t this property be simultaneously instantiated by different portions of spacetime? Why does it move inexorably as time passes? For other sources of concern, see Craig (1997).

of the properties we are normally interested in are only temporarily exemplified. On this picture, it is still true, in accordance with the Invariable Domain assumption, that my existence is a sempiternal fact. It is also true that some of the properties I exemplify are always exemplified, if exemplified at all. For instance, I have always exemplified and always will exemplify the property of ‘being an x such that *either* x is alive *or* x was alive *or* x will be alive’. But with respect to more familiar properties- properties like ‘being alive’- my changes can be as radical as one likes. Today, I am a living organism who studies philosophy. Tomorrow, I will be a living organism who studied philosophy. And one day I will just be an x which, at some point in the past, used to be a living organism and study philosophy: all my properties will be, as it were, ‘past-directed’.

The Invariable Domain views I’ve considered so far share the assumption that a property is either temporary or sempiternal. For the Moving Spotlight theorist all standard properties are sempiternal, except for a mysterious property called presentness, which is temporary. For the defender of Williamsonian passage, most properties are temporary, except for some rather derivative sempiternal attributes. It might be, however, that it is fundamentally wrong to think of a property as either temporary or sempiternal. Maybe, as I’ve already suggested earlier on (§ 2.3), there are reasons to think properties as such are neutral with respect to this distinction: they are neither essentially sempiternal, nor essentially temporary. Rather, they enter as constituents of two radically different kinds of facts, temporary and sempiternal ones. Thus, corresponding to my current being sitting, metaphysical reality contains two distinct facts, two different ways for the property of ‘being sitting’ to be exemplified or instantiated. The first is expressed by the sempiternally true proposition expressed by (6):

(6) I am sitting at 16:09 pm

The second corresponds to the temporarily true proposition expressed by (7):

(7) I am sitting

Of course, (6) and (7) must not be mutually interderivable, if the view is to make any sense.<sup>37</sup> The ‘Double-Fact’ view is rather bizarre, for it suggests that there are “two facts covering the very same metaphysical ground” (Fine 2005, 309). This result has some interesting consequences. The view advocated by the defenders of Williamsonian passage is not more temporary than the Double-Fact view, nor is the Double-Fact view more temporary than Williamsonian passage. But suppose we say that a view  $\Sigma$  is *more sempiternal than* a view  $\sigma$  if, for every (fundamental or less-than-fundamental) fact that  $\sigma$  expresses with a sempiternally true proposition,  $\Sigma$  also expresses that fact with a sempiternally true proposition, but not vice versa. Then, we would have to say that the Double-Fact view is more sempiternal than Williamsonian Passage, despite being equally temporary. This should come as no surprise, for the Double-Fact theorist thinks that metaphysical reality is ‘richer’ than the friends of temporariness and the friends of sempiternity can admit. No wonder, then, that his reality can be, at the same time, more sempiternal and more temporary than they think.

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<sup>37</sup> There are several ways to ensure this. One thing the double-fact theorist might do is to treat ‘at 16:09 pm’ as a function that takes monadic properties like ‘being sitting’ as arguments and returns monadic properties like ‘being sitting at 16:09’. Thus, the logical form of (6) would not be ‘ $\exists e (e \text{ is a sitting} \wedge \dots \wedge e \text{ is at 16:09 pm})$ ’ but rather ‘ $\exists e ((\text{sitting (at 16:09)}) e)$ ’

#### 4.2. *The Variable Domain Views*

If we assume that the world contains, contained or will contain temporary existents (i.e. entities such that, possibly, they exist but did not or will not exist), the versions of RT we obtain are *more temporary* than the ones so far examined. Moreover, some of the temporal Barcan formulas can turn out to be false. Let's briefly look at some variants of what might be called the *Variable Domain View*.

We can start from considering a variant according to which (i)-(iv) are all false. Let us call it the *Varying Domain* theory. Most friends of pure temporariness who declare themselves presentists embrace this theory: they say that among the things that presently exist there are things that did not exist in the past and will not exist in the future, contra (iii) and (iv). They also say that there were and there will be things that do not currently exist, contra (i) and (ii). In brief, their domain of quantification varies over time: things come into and go out of existence. Properties are, for the most part,<sup>38</sup> temporarily exemplified, at the very least because their bearers do not sempiternally exist (not to mention the fact that they might successively exemplify different properties, provided that they persist over time by enduring).

Instead of denying the truth of all the temporal Barcan formulas indiscriminately, a supporter of the Variable Domain View might choose to be more selective. He might think that our domain of quantification does indeed change, but only in a rather systematic and unidirectional fashion, by growing or shrinking as time passes. Let's start from considering the first of these options, which gives us the *Growing Domain* theory. It is not difficult to see that this must be a view according to which (i) and (iv) are true, while (ii) and (iii) are false. In order to guarantee the truth of (i) and (iv), a Growing Domain theorist has to say that, as a general rule, once an entity has come into existence, it never ceases to exist. By

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<sup>38</sup> Some properties (e.g. properties of the entire world) might represent an exception.

declaring (ii) and (iii) false, on the other hand, he concedes that new entities start to exist, now or in the future.

The friends of pure temporariness who accept (ii) and (iii) and reject (i) and (iv) hold a view that is perfectly symmetrical to the Growing Domain theory, but could instead be called *Shrinking Domain View*. They think that the world currently contains every object there will be in the future. Moreover, they deny that any new objects ever come into existence. Thus, the domain of quantification does not become bigger: it only shrinks as time passes.

Notice that none of these view is so temporary as to deny that that at least some metaphysically saturated propositions are sempiternally true. For one thing, any friend of temporariness will admit some necessarily true propositions and any necessarily true proposition is, of course, sempiternally true. But even if we restrict ourselves to the contingent realm, it is not difficult to find some propositions that must be recognized as sempiternally true. Consider, for instance, (8):

(8) (There are dinosaurs)  $\vee$  WILL (There are dinosaurs)  $\vee$  WAS (There are dinosaurs)

(8) expresses a rather important fact about our world. It says that we live in a ‘dinosaurical’ world, a world where, at some point in history, there were, are or will be dinosaurs. However temporary your view is, it’s difficult not to see that this fact should be expressed via a sempiternal proposition, one that must be always true, if true at all.

## 5. *Relativist and Fragmentalist Variations*

The varieties of Realism about Temporariness we have so far examined differ greatly in what they take to be *temporarily* the case. But they appear to have an important element in common: the assumption that reality contains only one present time, only one ‘now’. Since ‘now’ is, on these views, the time at which the totality of temporary (and, of course, sempiternal) facts obtain, this assumption amounts to the denial of a thesis that Fine (2005, 271) calls ‘Neutrality’:

[Neutrality] There is no privileged time  $t$  for which the totality of tensed [i.e. temporary] facts constituting metaphysical reality are ones that obtain at  $t$ .<sup>39</sup>

Is it possible to embrace Neutrality while remaining a realist about Temporariness? In other words, can one be a friend of temporariness and yet deny that reality contains only one ‘now’? There are at least two reasons why I am here interested in this question. The first is that a positive answer would have an obvious and immediate bearing on our understanding of the dispute between realists and anti-realists about temporariness. It might turn out that combining Neutrality with RT results in an utterly implausible view. But if this implausible view were at least logically possible, this would show that, contrary to what is widely believed, the existence of a privileged ‘now’ is not a straightforward consequence of an A-theory of time. The second reason is that a problem largely analogous to that of reconciling RT with Neutrality will confront us in the next chapter, when the focus will return to the problem of subjectivity. The possibility of being a ‘realist about

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<sup>39</sup> Any friend of temporariness thinks that temporary facts obtain *simpliciter*, not *at a time*. Thus, the claim that the views we’ve so far examined deny Neutrality should not be taken too literally. Upon reflection, this is just an instance of the kind of problems that arise when one attempts to reconcile RT with some principle in the vicinity of Fine’s Neutrality.

subjectivity' while making room for more than one 'I' might turn out to be far from chimerical, provided that the admittedly extravagant solutions explored in this section can be successfully adapted to that context. For the moment being, though, let us stick to the temporal case. I wish to start by briefly illustrating the appeal of Neutrality as well as the obstacles to reconciling it with RT.

We can start by saying that the existence of a unique 'now' is held by many to be in conflict with the spirit, if not with the letter of the theory of special relativity. Imagine a red and a green light bulb, located at a certain distance from one another. It seems that, according to the friends of temporariness, the following temporary proposition might be metaphysically saturated and true:

(9) (The red light is on)  $\wedge$  (The green light is on)

The truth of (9) implies that the red light and the green light are both presently on. If the two lights are both *presently* on, they must be *simultaneously* on. Therefore, the truth of (9) seems to imply the truth of (10):

(10) The red light and the green light are simultaneously on.

Now, according to the theory of special relativity, two inertial frames of reference in relative motion are bound to disagree on which events are simultaneous. Thus, two observers in relative motion might find themselves in disagreement over the truth of (9) and (10): one of them will judge the two lights to be simultaneously on, while, according to the other, the red light might flash before the green one. For this latter observer, the following temporary proposition is therefore metaphysically saturated and true:

$$(11) (\text{The red light is on}) \wedge \sim (\text{The green light is on})$$

The problem is that, if there is only one ‘now’, one of the two observers must be right and the other must be wrong. In other words, only one of the two frames of reference must be the one yielding the correct description of metaphysical reality. According to some, this result is doubly unfortunate. On the one hand, it appears to contradict the spirit of the theory of special relativity, by implying that there is a privileged frame of reference and a metaphysical fact of the matter as to which events are simultaneous. On the other hand, it raises serious epistemological concerns. For how are we going to *know* which inertial frame of reference should be trusted as a guide to metaphysical reality?

Notice that, even if we put aside these relativistic worries, the problem of the knowability of metaphysical reality appears to be quite general and is particularly acute for some of the views encountered in the previous sections. I am referring in particular to those variants of RT according to which other spatiotemporal regions contain plenty of deceived people who believe they are in the region called ‘present’ and have exactly the same evidence as we have for believing so. This is at least the case of the Moving Spotlight View as well as of some versions of the Growing and the Shrinking Domain View.<sup>40</sup> In all these cases, the existence of a unique ‘now’ entails that, notwithstanding the sameness of evidence, only an ludicrous minority of those who believe temporary propositions happen to believe the *correct* temporary propositions about metaphysical reality. Once again then, the sceptical question arises as to what confidence *we* may have that *we* know any temporarily true, metaphysically saturated proposition.

These worries seem to invite the friends of temporariness to reconcile their views with some principle in the vicinity of Neutrality. The problem is that it is not at all clear that any such reconciliation is plausible or even imaginable. How could reality contain two

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<sup>40</sup> See Merricks (2006).

or more ‘nows’? How could contradictory propositions like (9) and (11) both be metaphysically saturated and presently true? Fine (2005, 2006) illustrates two attempts to cope with these questions.

### 5.1. *External Relativism*

The first is a view that Fine (2005) calls ‘external relativism’. On this view, “reality is indeed composed of the tensed [i.e. temporary] fact that I am sitting and also the tensed [i.e. temporary] fact that I am standing, but it is composed of these facts through being constituted by them at different times. [...] Reality is *irreducibly* relative” (279). What does it mean to say that reality is ‘irreducibly relative’? If I understand Fine’s proposal, the idea is that a proposition like (12) is indeed true and metaphysically saturated:

(12) I am sitting

Yet, the reality (12) portrays is just one of many *alternative realities*- or alternative ‘nows’- each of which is indexed to a time (or, if we are in a relativistic setting, to a time and an inertial frame of reference). On this picture, reality at another time (or at another time-frame) “is neither a facet of the one true reality nor a hypothetical determination of the one true reality, but another reality on an equal footing with the current reality” (279). Each reality-at-a-time (or at-a-time-frame) presents itself as the whole of reality and the metaphysically saturated, temporary propositions that are true of it are likely to be

incompatible with the metaphysically saturated, temporary propositions that are true of reality-at-a-different-time (or time-frame).<sup>41</sup>

Notice that the external relativist need not adopt a different notion of metaphysical saturation. He can still say that a proposition is metaphysically saturated if it is complete enough to be capable of stating something (true or false) of metaphysical reality. It is rather the very concept of ‘metaphysical reality’ that calls for a revision. This is because, according to the external relativist, the irreducibly relative notion of reality-at-a-time is conceptually and metaphysically more fundamental than the simple notion of reality.

This cannot be the place for a systematic discussion of external relativism. I will limit myself to point out three major difficulties that this view encounters. First of all, the external relativist must be careful at distinguishing his position from that of some friends of sempiternity, according to whom, if we consider things in metaphysical rigor, it can be neither true nor false that I am sitting, for it can only be true that:

(13) I am sitting at t

If he wants to be a friend of temporariness, the external relativist must deny that metaphysical reality can only be correctly portrayed by sempiternal propositions modelled on (13), although, on his view, it might be true that, relative to t, reality is such that ‘I am sitting’ is true and metaphysically saturated. Hence, the success and the tenability of external relativism depends on the success and the tenability of the distinction between “reality’s being a-certain-way-at-a-time and its being a-certain-way, at the time (or whatever the standpoint might be)” (310). Given the subtlety of this distinction, the risk exists that external relativism collapses into a form of anti-realism about temporariness.

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<sup>41</sup> From this point of view, these alternative realities are radically unlike Lewisian worlds. Given that Lewis works with world-bound individuals, “the facts from within one world are perfectly compatible with the facts from within any other world” (Fine 2005, 283).

A somewhat related problem is that of the status of what Fine suggestively calls ‘über-reality’, an alleged single and all-comprehensive reality to which all the alternative realities belong. In what sense can this über-reality said to exist? Once again, the external relativist position appears to be ambiguous. On the one hand, there’s clearly a sense in which reality-at-t, reality-at-t2, etc., are all existing realities. This seems to encourage the conclusion that an all-encompassing reality exists behind or beyond the particular realities-at-a-time. On the other hand, if an über-reality exists, some propositions will presumably be true of it, propositions like (14):

(14) Reality-at-t is such that the proposition ‘I am sitting’ is true of it

Now, not only does (14) look like a sempiternal proposition, but it is natural to think that, once we are given the totality of sempiternal propositions about über-reality, we can do without the temporary propositions about reality-at-t. By admitting the existence of an über-reality, the external relativist runs the risk of appearing a friend of sempiternity in disguise.

Finally, there is the problem of providing a proper characterization of the ‘standpoints’ to which metaphysical reality is supposed to be indexed. Fine notes that “if the indexing is to have any significance, [...] we [must] have an independent conception of the frame-times, one that gives them an identity that is separate from the space-times to which they give rise” (306). Now, it is already difficult to imagine how entities like times and frames of reference might be conceived in a way that does not make them conceptually or metaphysically dependent on the corresponding ‘relative’ realities. This task appears to be even more difficult for the external relativist, who cannot accept the existence of an über-reality, on pain of being accused of anti-realism about temporariness.

## 5.2. *Fragmentalism*

The second view discussed by Fine goes under the name of ‘fragmentalism’. On this view, the contradiction existing between the truth of propositions like (9) and (11) is not resolved, but taken to be inherent to metaphysical reality. In other words, “it is taken to lie in the character of reality that certain apparently contradictory aspects of it cannot be explained away. Reality may be *irredeemably* incoherent. [...] Certain of the facts constituting reality will ‘cohere’ and some will not. Any fact is plausibly taken to belong to a fragment or maximally coherent collection of facts” (281). In contrast with the external relativist, the fragmentalist friend of temporariness does not have to worry about the metaphysical status of times and frames of reference. He does not even have to admit the existence of such entities or indeed of any other standpoints relative to which reality is temporarily so-and-so. On the fragmentalist picture, the standpoints will simply dissolve, as it were, into the set of temporary facts of which they were previously regarded as the source.

Once again, a full discussion of fragmentalism goes well beyond our present scopes. The costs and the limits of this view must not be underestimated or go unnoticed, however. The first and most evident is the admission that reality contains plenty of contradictions. It seems to me that Fine’s critique fails to put the correct weight on this aspect of the fragmentalist picture. According to Fine, “although there is a sense in which the fragmentalist takes reality to be contradictory, her position should not be seen as an invitation to accept contradictions” (282). This is because, at any time, it will only be correct to assert that  $p$  if the fact that  $p$  ‘coheres’ with or belong to the same ‘fragment of reality’ as the assertion itself. Let’s see how this might work.

One can, I suppose, think of a fragmentalist as one who employs a primitive operator  $\Phi$ , whose intended meaning would be something like ‘It belongs to some

fragment of reality that-'. As I understand it, Fragmentalism cannot prevent a contradictory propositions like (15) to be deducible- by virtue of simple logic- from the proposition that the green light is on and the proposition that the green light is not on (both of which propositions are, I take it, true of a single, 'irredeemably incoherent' metaphysical reality):

$$(15) (\text{The green light is on}) \wedge \sim (\text{The green light is on})$$

All the fragmentalist can do is to reject the inference from (16) and (17) to (18):

$$(16) \Phi (\text{The green light is on})$$

$$(17) \Phi (\sim (\text{The green light is on}))$$

$$(18) \Phi ((\text{The green light is on}) \wedge \sim (\text{The green light is on}))$$

In other terms, a fragmentalist can say that contradictions exist and are true, except that there is no fragment of reality in which they arise. Moreover, the conditions for the assertibility of contradictions are also never satisfied. For, given any contradiction  $k$ , the fragmentalist will in any case deny that  $k$  coheres with any fragment of reality, and, a fortiori, with any fragment of reality in which someone asserts that  $k$ . The impression here is that the fragmentalist would like to have his cake and eat it too: for him, contradiction are never true, although in some sense they always are. But let's move on.

The very notion of coherence is also far from unproblematic. Fine does not want to construe fragmentalism as the view that *any non-contradictory* set of metaphysically saturated, temporarily true propositions corresponds to a fragment of reality. Fragments cannot be arbitrarily assembled from any set of temporary facts whatsoever. On the contrary, we should expect to find "various substantive 'rules of coherence' concerning the

conditions under which a set of facts would be coherent and the way in which the coherence of one set of facts might constrain the coherence of another set” (281). This project raises various concerns. First of all, the existence of substantive ‘rules of coherence’ presupposes an equally substantive ontology of facts. These facts have to be ‘atomic’ or ‘minimal’ if we do not want to impose unprincipled constraints on the possible recombinations allowed by the rules of coherence. Furthermore, even if we find a viable notion of atomic temporary fact, the doubt remains that the rules of coherence may end up yielding more or fewer fragments than desired. Suppose, for example, that reality contains temporary contradictions. What general rules of coherence might be devised that would allow for some fragments to contain contradictions without thereby allowing for absolute arbitrariness in the assembling of fragments? All in all, the fragmentalist project faces formidable challenges and it is far from clear that its conceptual foundations are ‘more secure’ than those of external relativism, as Fine (2005) suggests.

Fragmentalism and external relativism conclude our digression into the metaphysics of time. In this chapter, I’ve introduced and discussed a view called *Realism about Temporariness*. I’ve argued that, in order to provide a formulation of RT, we need to avail ourselves of two important notions. The first is the notion of metaphysical reality, by reference to which we can define what it is for a proposition to be *metaphysically saturated*. The second is the very notion of temporariness, which applies to a metaphysically saturated proposition *p* if and only if it is metaphysically possible that *p* was false before being true or that it *will* be false after having been true. With these two notions in place, I’ve proposed to define realism about temporariness as the view that:

[RT] Some metaphysically saturated propositions are temporarily true.

As we've seen, being a friend of temporariness requires taking the so called 'present perspective' so seriously as to think that it is not a perspective at all. This is *prima facie* compatible with thinking that there is not just *one* present perspective. The cost, in this case, is a quite radical revision of our conception of reality as unitary and non-contradictory, at least if external relativism and fragmentalism are the only practicable routes in the direction of a 'neutral' form of realism about temporariness.

## Chapter III: Realism about Subjectivity

### *1. The friends of temporariness and the friends of subjectivity*

In Chapter I, I argued there that a non-reductive approach to phenomenal consciousness involves what can be seen as an essentially descriptive enterprise: in a nutshell, doing justice to the *subjective* nature of conscious experience. Chapter I ended with a question: what can a non-reductivist do to correctly describe the phenomenon of consciousness and its subjectivity else than positing fundamental non-physical properties? The debate between realists and anti-realists about temporariness may be instructive in answering this question. As we've seen in the last chapter, a friend of temporariness thinks that reality contains some facts that are capable of varying from one time to another. An adequate description of these facts may very well require that we posit additional entities or properties- a primitive property of presentness, for instance. But whether or not a fact is a 'temporary' fact turned out to be quite independent of what sort of properties are involved in the obtaining of that fact. The dispute between the friends of temporariness and the friends of subjectivity need not be an ontological dispute (although it can certainly and quite easily become one).

This conclusion can be rather important for our inquiry into the metaphysics of consciousness. It seems to me that, while a non-reductivist about consciousness must certainly be prepared, if necessary, to adopt a more generous property ontology, one of his main concerns should be with the observation that facts of consciousness are essentially subjective, in the sense that they are capable of varying *from one subject to another* in the

same way as temporary facts *vary from one time to another*. A non-reductivist about consciousness should, first and foremost, declare himself a friend of subjectivity, and it's far from clear that positing fundamental non-physical properties is sufficient (or even, though more controversially, necessary) for being a friend of subjectivity.

How can we be realists about subjectivity? This is the question that will occupy us in this chapter. In § 2, I will define a view called 'Realism about Subjectivity' (hereafter: RS) and illustrate some interesting respects in which its formulation parallels that of realism about temporariness. I will then discuss two constraints that we might want to impose on a plausible theory of subjectivity (§ 3). Once these constraints are in place, it will be possible to survey and compare three candidate non-reductive theories of consciousness (§ 4), all of which are committed to the truth of RS.

The view I call 'Realism about Subjectivity' is not at all unprecedented. Prior (1968a, 1968b) famously invented a stylised logical language, which he called 'Egocentric', in which properties are located in individuals in the same way as events are located in times by means of tenses. More recently, Fine (2005) has discussed a view called 'First-Personalism', which he compares with other kinds of aspectual realism, notably 'tense realism' and realism about modal operators. The formal differences between RS and these other Priorian and Finean views are not huge, but the spirit in which I invite my reader to take RS is quite different. In its creator's intentions, Egocentric Logic is no more than a consistent and comprehensive language, with no particular metaphysical significance. Prior himself declares that he "find[s] it hard to believe that individuals really are just propositions of a certain sort, or just 'points of view', or that the real world of individuals is just a logical construction out of such points of view" (1968b, 200). Fine too is not "concerned to defend first-personal realism", mainly because he "do[es] not know what to think on the question" (2005, 311). My attitude towards RS is less metaphysically disengaged. For one thing, I take the consequences of RS to be not quite as outrageous as

Prior and Fine seem to suggest. I believe that once we're clear on what is meant by saying that the real world is just a logical construction out of 'points of view', we might find the thought less implausible than it at first sounds. And in any case, it does not seem to me to be a straightforward consequence of RS that the world is just a logical construction out of 'points of view'. Moreover, while Fine and Prior regard egocentric views as unmotivated and needlessly eccentric, I think there is, in metaphysical reality, a phenomenon-consciousness- that desperately calls for the adoption of a realist stance towards subjectivity.

One of the variants of Realism about Subjectivity I will discuss in § 4 exhibits more than superficial affinities with a view Hare (2009) calls Egocentric Presentism. Hare seems to take Egocentric Presentism much more seriously than Prior his 'egocentric logic' or Fine his 'first-personal realism' (although it cannot be stressed enough that Hare's original motivations for the view are quite unlike those of Prior and Fine). If I am an egocentric presentist, I believe that all that exists is a world in which the experiences of just *one* person, the person I call 'me', have a monadic property called 'presence'. Egocentric presentists deny that other people have 'present' experiences (i.e. experiences with presence). Moreover, they deny that any other world exists in which the experiences of other people than me instantiate presence.<sup>42</sup> I do not think that Egocentric Presentism can form the basis of a plausible non-reductive theory of consciousness, not least because I regard it as highly plausible that no subject is privileged or special, while Egocentric Presentism is committed to the claim that "one person is privileged (such that all and only his or her perceptual objects are present)" (46). It is true that Hare's machinery is designed to allow that some proposition like *'From Leibniz's point of view, Leibniz's experiences*

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<sup>42</sup> I find this aspect of Egocentric Presentism rather perplexing. Hare defines a subject world as "a world in which some things are present, and all those things are perceptual objects of one creature" (23). He then goes on to say that "an egocentric presentist believes that only one subject world exists. There are no other subject worlds" (41). So formulated, Hare's view seems to imply- or at least tell strongly in favour of- the falsity of Lewis's modal realism. By contrast, the thesis I will propose- realism about subjectivity- is absolutely neutral among different accounts of modality.

are present' comes out true. But I feel like we should not be satisfied with this sort of concessions. Why should it be simply true that Hare's experiences are present, whereas in Leibniz's case- or in your and my case- it is only true that *from such-and-such's point of view*, such-and-such's experiences are present? This is just not fair. As we shall see, the varieties of Realism about Subjectivity I will be interested in are meant to avoid this and other similarly 'unfair' results.

## 2. Stating Realism about Subjectivity

### 2.1. Subjectivity

Where should a realist about subjectivity start from? Let's take the strategy of the friends of temporariness as a model for inspiration. Simplifying a little, this strategy involves three steps or, if you like, three precepts:

- (1) Describe the world as it *presently* is;
- (2) Say that this description is only *temporarily true*;
- (3) Insist that this description is *strictly speaking* true, and true simpliciter (or, equivalently, deny that this description is just a 'perspective' on metaphysical reality).

Each of these steps, and especially the last two, requires that we buy into a bit of the ideology of temporariness. When a friend of temporariness says that a proposition *p* is *temporarily true*, he does not mean to be understood as saying that there are entities called 'times' such that *p* can be *true at* some, but not all of them. The temporariness of a proposition is defined by reference to its possible future or past falsity and the future or past falsity of a proposition is expressed by certain 'modalizings' of that proposition,

typically via the primitive operators WAS or WILL. When, on the other hand, he says that certain temporary propositions are *strictly speaking* true, the friend of temporariness helps himself with a notion of metaphysical saturation: by his lights, temporary propositions are ‘saturated’ by the standards of metaphysical reality, in the sense that they are capable of saying something true or false of it.

(1), (2) and (3) should form our roadmap for the formulation of realism about subjectivity. A realist about temporariness wants to take the present perspective as fundamental: what we shall try to do here is taking the first-personal perspective fundamental. Whose first-personal perspective? I shall begin, most naturally, with my own case. Just as any friend of temporariness identifies reality with reality from the present perspective, I will give you the impression of thinking that reality simply *is* reality from *my* first-personal point of view. After all, isn’t this exactly what it is like to be me? Do I not live my perspective as the only perspective on reality or, even better, as *not* a perspective at all? For the moment being, let’s ignore the fact that there are many ‘points of view’ that we need to do justice to: we can postpone the problem of how to be ‘neutral’ or ‘impartial’ among many subjective realities or viewpoints to the next section. I will aim instead at the simplest possible model of realism about subjectivity, a view on which what is first-personally true is true, as it were, of a single privileged subject: myself. All I need to do is to:

- (1) Describe the world as it *first-personally* is;
- (2) Say that this description is only *subjectively true*;
- (3) Insist that this description is *strictly speaking* true, and true simpliciter (or, equivalently, deny that this description is just a ‘perspective’ on metaphysical reality).

Let’s begin with (1). Suppose I have a painful conscious experience. What will be *first-personally* true of the world? Intuitively, something along the following lines:

(19) There is a pain.

In saying that there is a pain, I do not mean to be understood as saying that there is a subject, an individual or an organism *with whom* it is the case that there is a pain. Nor do I want to be taken as suggesting that there is a subject, an individual or an organism that *has* or *undergoes* a painful event. As friends of subjectivity, we should be suspicious of both these readings, just as a friend of temporariness is suspicious of any reading of the sentence “It’s sunny” on which that sentence ultimately means that there is a time *at which* it is sunny or that there’s a time which sempiternally instantiates the property of ‘being-sunny-ish’. Of course, a friend of subjectivity is perfectly entitled to quantify over subjects or individuals, if he fancies it. Analogously, there’s nothing wrong in the fact that certain friends of temporariness (e.g. the moving spotlight theorists) quantify over times and events. What they should reject is simply any reconstruction of the propositions they take to be metaphysically saturated and temporarily or subjectively true on which these propositions are demoted to mere ‘perspectives’: properties, functions or metaphysically unsaturated entities of any kind.

On the toy version of realism about subjectivity I’m sketching here, the proposition expressed by (19) is metaphysically saturated and subjectively true. But what does it mean to say that it is only *subjectively true* that there is an experiencing? Intuitively, we want to say a proposition *s* is subjective if and only if it is such that, once all variables and parameters have been filled in, there is still the possibility that *s*, though true, is not true *at every subject*. In the case at hand: it is strictly speaking true that there is an experiencing, but this might not be true *at every subject*.<sup>43</sup> Thus, let us suppose that the proposition

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<sup>43</sup> I prefer to speak of a proposition being true ‘at’ a subject rather than ‘for’ a subject. In ordinary contexts, expressions like ‘For x, p is the case’ seem to indicate an epistemic relation between x and the proposition that p is the case: x believes that p, knows that p,...etc. This is not the sense in which ‘There is a pain’ might

expressed by (19) is a proposition which quantifies over events and says that there exists an event which is a pain. A little more formally:

$$(20) \exists e (\text{pain}(e))$$

By saying that (19), and therefore (20), are only subjectively true, I am saying that it is true that there is an event which is a pain, but it is possible that this is false *at another subject*, either because, at some other subject, that event does not exist or because, at some other subject, that event is not a pain.

These formulations are not completely satisfactory, however, for just as the definition of temporariness does not involve any ontological commitment to times, similarly the definition of subjectivity should not imply any ontological commitment to ‘subjects’. Moreover, it is misleading to speak of truth ‘at another subject’ or ‘at every subject’, for what a realist about subjectivity is interested in is truth simpliciter, not ‘truth-at’, ‘truth-for’, ‘truth-with’ or any other truth-based relation. What we need here is some language akin to Prior’s egocentric, a language in which “individuals must not be directly mentioned, but the propositions [...] will be understood as directly or indirectly characterizing the speaker” (1968b, 193). In such a language, “the only way that a speaker of his language would have of describing the activities of other people would be by certain ‘modalizings’ of his sentences which presented the activities of others as being, in a sense, indirect activities of his own” (1968b, 213). Given that my purposes here are quite unlike Prior’s,<sup>44</sup> my version of Egocentric is rather different from his and, for certain respects, much simpler. I propose that we adopt a single sentential operator, OTHER, that is meant to inform us about what is the case with someone other than the subject, more or less in the

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be true ‘for’ me, but not ‘for’ everybody. That *from my point of view* there is a pain should not mean that I *know* or *believe* that there is a pain: it should simply mean that from my point of view, the fact that there is a pain *obtains*.

<sup>44</sup> In Prior’s Egocentric, sentential operators are employed to model Leibniz’s monadological system.

same way in which WILL and WAS are meant to inform us about what is the case at times other than the present. Just like ‘WILL  $p$ ’ indicates that it is presently the case that it will once be the case that  $p$ , so ‘OTHER  $p$ ’ indicates that it is first-personally the case that, other-personally,  $p$  is the case.

The functioning of OTHER is quite simple and I shall note here just some of its features. Suppose that someone else than me is in pain. Then I say that, *other-personally*, there is pain:

(21) OTHER (There is pain)

Suppose that someone else than me is not in pain. Then I will go:

(22) OTHER  $\sim$  (There is pain)

Clearly, I am not entitled to conclude, on the basis of (21) and (22), that there’s someone else who’s *both* in pain *and* not in pain. But if someone else is both happy and excited, it is *both* true that someone else is happy *and* that someone else is excited. Only the first of the following schemata must therefore be satisfied by OTHER (let ‘ $\mathcal{O}$ ’ indicate any sentential operator):

$$\mathcal{O} (p \wedge q) \Rightarrow \mathcal{O}p \wedge \mathcal{O}q$$

$$\mathcal{O}p \wedge \mathcal{O}q \Rightarrow \mathcal{O} (p \wedge q)$$

By contrast, the proposition that *either* someone else is in pain *or* someone else is bored entails and is entailed by the proposition that someone else is *either* in pain *or* bored. This suggests that OTHER satisfies both the schemata:

$$\mathcal{O}(p \vee q) \Rightarrow \mathcal{O}p \vee \mathcal{O}q$$

$$\mathcal{O}p \vee \mathcal{O}q \Rightarrow \mathcal{O}(p \vee q)$$

One can observe that the truth of (22) does not preclude the possibility that (21) is true.

This shows that it is not generally true that *if* ‘OTHER  $\sim p$ ’ *then* ‘ $\sim$  OTHER  $p$ ’. We can ask whether the reverse is true and the answer seems, once again, negative: the fact that nobody else is in pain is not sufficient to establish that somebody else is not in pain, for it might simply be the case that there’s no ‘else’ and, therefore, nothing is other-personally true (in such a solipsistic scenario, ‘ $\sim$  OTHER  $p$ ’ would be true for all propositions  $p$ , even logically true ones).<sup>45</sup> SOME and ALL can easily be defined using OTHER. ‘SOME  $p$ ’ means that  $p$  is the case *at somebody*, which is equivalent to ‘ $p \vee$  OTHER  $p$ ’ ( $p$  is either first-personally or other-personally the case). Given our modest purposes, we can use a Boolean ALL (analogous to the Boolean ALWAYS defined in § II.4): ‘ALL  $p$ ’ will be equivalent to ‘ $\sim$  SOME  $\sim p$ ’ ( $p$  is *at everybody* the case if it is not at someone the case that  $\sim p$ ).<sup>46</sup>

The relatively simple machinery of this egocentric language allows us to define, in a more appropriate fashion, what it is for a proposition to be subjective:

$$s \text{ is } \underline{\text{subjective}}_{\text{=def}} \text{ it is metaphysically possible that } (s \wedge \text{OTHER } \sim s)$$

We can also say that a proposition is *subjectively true* when it is true and subjective. With these definitions in hand, we arrive at the following way of stating realism about

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<sup>45</sup> Solipsistic worlds are in certain respects similar to what Prior (1968d) calls ‘worlds of ending time’.

<sup>46</sup> Notice that ALL and OTHER are not duals: it is not true that ‘OTHER  $p$  iff  $\sim$  ALL  $\sim p$ ’. The right-to-left direction fails in a solipsistic world where  $p$  is first-personally true.

subjectivity (the wording here is purposely reminiscent of [RT], the formulation of realism about temporariness given in Chapter II):

[RS] Some metaphysically saturated propositions are subjectively true.

By endorsing [RS], a friend of subjectivity implies that metaphysical reality includes facts that are capable of varying from one subject to another. An anti-realist about subjectivity, on the contrary, denies that a subjective proposition can be metaphysically saturated. By his lights, to say something true or false of metaphysical reality, one needs propositions that are ‘objective’, in the sense that, necessarily, they obtain if and only if there’s nobody for whom they fail to obtain:

$s$  is objective<sub>=def</sub> necessarily ( $s$  is true iff ALL  $s$ )<sup>47</sup>

A fortiori, then, the only true propositions admitted by a friend of objectivity will be *objectively true*, viz. true and objective.

There’s an alternative way of stating realism about subjectivity. Instead of using propositions, we can appeal to the fact that certain genuinely monadic properties are instantiated by entities (e.g. events or states) that differ *subjectively* with respect to those properties.<sup>48</sup> Consider, for example, the token event of my experiencing a pain. On some accounts, this event might have a number of objective properties: for example, a particular physical profile. We know, however, that this event is also a painful experience. But is it *objectively* a painful experience? The friend of subjectivity is in a position to answer this question negatively. He might say that it is only in a subjective fashion that that event

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<sup>47</sup> Some might protest that a fact is objective if it obtains without obtaining from *any* point of view, not if it obtains from *all* points of view. But this is simply what the definition just given entails, given the ‘Boolean’ reading of ALL recommended above.

<sup>48</sup> I here bracket the issue as to whether or not ‘monadic’ properties are in fact relations to times.

exemplifies the monadic property of being a pain. Of course, he will also insist that the notion of subjective exemplification cannot be reduced to that of exemplification *relative to* some, but not all subjects, on pain of contradicting the monadicity of the property in question. His preferred notion of *subjective exemplification* is, rather, something along the following lines:

$x$  subjectively exemplifies a property  $P =_{\text{def}}$  (i)  $x$  exemplifies  $P$ ; (ii) it is metaphysically possible that ( $x$  exemplifies  $P \wedge \text{OTHER} \sim (x \text{ exemplifies } P)$ )

On this picture, realism about subjectivity takes the following form:

[RS]\*\* Some monadic properties can be subjectively exemplified.

Once again, there are interesting parallels between [RS]\*\* and [RT]\*\*, the formulation of realism about temporariness based on the notion of temporary exemplification. There are also, I think, reasons for favouring [RS] over [RS]\*\*,<sup>49</sup> even though, in most cases, those who endorse [RS] will have no difficulty in endorsing [RS]\*\*, too.

## 2.2. The Subjective Barcan Formulas

Just like realism about temporariness, realism about subjectivity is completely silent on matters of ontology. In this connection, one important question that [RS] leaves unsettled is whether or not the domain of quantification varies from one subject to another, in the same way in which it changes from one time to another according to certain friends

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<sup>49</sup> The same considerations developed in § II.3.2 against [RT]\*\* apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of subjectivity.

of temporariness. To answer this question, we need to consider the following schemata, which I shall call, with no claim to imaginativeness, *subjective Barcan formulas*:

(si) ALL ( $\exists x$  OTHER  $\alpha \Rightarrow$  OTHER  $\exists x \alpha$ )

(sii) ALL (OTHER  $\exists x \alpha \Rightarrow \exists x$  OTHER  $\alpha$ )

Just like the temporal Barcan formulas are supposed to be *always* true, if true at all, so the subjective Barcan formulas are intended to be true *at everybody*, if true simpliciter: this is what the sentential operators ALWAYS and ALL are meant to indicate. Let us see what the consequences of affirming or denying (si) and (sii) are.

Let us start with (si). Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that (si) is true. If (si) is true, there are no ‘egocentric existents’, entities that exist first-personally, but fail to exceptionlessly exist other-personally. To see why, let me suppose that  $e$ , the event of my being in pain, is an egocentric existent, an event whose existence is a fact without being a fact *at everybody*. Any egocentric existent like  $e$  verifies, by definition, the following formula:

(23) ( $\exists x$  OTHER  $\sim \exists y (x = y)$ )

Notice that (23), together with (si), entails the baffling proposition that it is other-personally the case that something fails to be self-identical:

(24) OTHER ( $\exists x \sim \exists y (x = y)$ )

If we want to avoid these unfortunate results and stick to the truth of (si), we need to reject the idea that *e*, or indeed any other entity, first-personally exists without existing at everybody.

The consequences of accepting (sii) are symmetrical to those of accepting (si). If (sii) is true, there are not ‘heterocentric existents’, entities that exist other-personally without existing first-personally. Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that another subject undergoes a pleasurable event. I should say that there other-personally exists a pleasurable event:

$$(25) \text{ OTHER } \exists e (\text{pleasure } (e))$$

If the event whose other-personal existence counts for the truth of (25) is what I’ve called an heterocentric existent, there is no guarantee that some event first-personally exists and is an instance of *other-personal pleasure*.<sup>50</sup> This means that there can be no guarantee that (26) is true whenever (25) is, as (sii) would dictate:

$$(26) \exists e \text{ OTHER } (\text{pleasure } (e))$$

In brief, someone who accepts (si) thinks that every event occurring first-personally also occurs other-personally, whereas someone who accepts (sii) holds that every event occurring other-personally occurs first-personally, too.

Under close examination, however, the relation between (si) and (sii) turns out to be even tighter. This is because of the important fact that the subjective Barcan formulas, as stated above, are supposed to be true *from everyone’s point of view*, as the ‘ALL’ operator indicates. This puts considerable pressure on anyone who endorses one of the two

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<sup>50</sup> One can think of the property of ‘being an other-personal pleasure’ by analogy with past- and future-directed properties like ‘being a past infant’ or ‘being a future soldier’.

principles to accept them both (or, equivalently, to reject them both, if one of them is rejected). If I know that the event *e* of my being in pain is, contra (si), an egocentric existent, I should no doubt think that, *from someone else's point of view*, there is at least one heterocentric existent (in this case, a painful event that happens other-personally, but not first-personally). On the other hand, if, from my point of view, a certain pleasurable event is an heterocentric existent, it is rational for me to conclude that, *from someone else's point of view* there is an egocentric pleasurable existent. In either case, I end up contradicting both the subjective Barcan formulas. I conclude that (si) and (sii) should stand or fall together, at least as far as their formulation is the one given above.

It seems to me that the question as to whether or not the subjective Barcan formulas hold should be left as an open matter of debate among realists about subjectivity. Many considerations may be brought to bear on this question, not least, I suppose, one's views on the ontology of the mental (especially if, as is to be expected, one's reason for being a realist about subjectivity have mainly to do with one's views in philosophy of mind). Suppose I am a realist about subjectivity who believes that, in our world, matters of existence are *objective*. Then I will believe that (si) and (sii) are both true and that, though there are subjective facts, these have their place within an objective framework of entities. By contrast, a friend of subjectivity who accepts subjective existents (i.e. entities such that, possibly, they first- or other-personally exist without existing at everybody) is in a position to deny the truth of the subjective Barcan formulas.<sup>51</sup> For now, though, let us set these issues aside and concentrate on the very view I've called *Realism about Subjectivity*: is this view any plausible? And what sort of constraints shall we put on a plausible version of it? These and other questions will occupy us in the next section.

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<sup>51</sup> This view gives a new meaning to Searle's claim that "the mental is an irreducibly first-person ontology" (1992, 95). For the modal status of the Barcan formulas, see § II.4 above.

### 3. *Subjectivity, Minimal Objectivity, Impartiality*

The project of taking subjectivity seriously faces two major worries. First, even conceding that reality is in part subjective- in the technical sense defined above- we have a strong intuition that reality is not exhausted by subjectivity: it contains *objective* as well as subjective facts. To have a minimum of credibility, a realist about subjectivity must say something about the status and the nature of objective facts vis-a-vis subjective ones. Not only does he have to admit that there are objective facts: he also needs to recognize their prominent role in any plausible characterization of metaphysical reality. Second, I presume that no theory of subjectivity would sound reasonable if it implied that all subjectively true propositions express subjective facts concerning my point of view on reality. A plausible form of realism about subjectivity has to make room for the metaphysically saturated, subjectively true propositions corresponding to your, my and many others' subjective experiences. In response to these two worries, I submit that a realist about subjectivity should complement [RS] with two constraining principles, which I shall call *Minimal Objectivity* and *Impartiality*. Let me introduce and discuss them in turn.

#### 3.1. *Minimal Objectivity*

We can start by considering a certain principle of *Objectivity*:

[Objectivity] Some metaphysically saturated propositions are objectively true.

As we've seen, a proposition is objective when, in all possible worlds, its truth entails and is entailed by its truth *at everyone*. The principle of Objectivity implies that metaphysical reality contains some facts or aspects that only objectively true propositions can adequately express.

Notice that a realist about subjectivity can accept Objectivity and yet think that the world is outrageously 'subjective'. Suppose, for instance, I think that almost every fact about the world is subjective: not only the facts of my phenomenal life, but also particular facts like the thunderstorm that took place in Cancun on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1500 and even more general facts such as what laws of nature govern the universe. Even if I think that all these facts are subjective- in the sense that they can vary from one subject to another- I will have no difficulty in accepting Objectivity. For given any subjective fact *s*, I will always be willing to admit that:

$$(27) s \vee \text{OTHER } s$$

(27) says that it is *at someone* the case that *s*. Just as a good case can be made that propositions like 'WAS  $p \vee p \vee$  WILL  $p$ ' are sempiternal, there's an equally good case for the claim that (27) is objective. Therefore, if all that is required by Objectivity is the existence of metaphysically saturated, objectively true propositions, compliance with Objectivity will simply not be sufficient to rule out 'outrageously' subjective views like the one just considered. We need to look for something else.

One thing to consider is excluding those views on which (fundamental and less-than-fundamental) physical facts are treated as merely subjective. As I've noted in Chapter I, there's no universal agreement on what it means for a fact to be physical, but we all more or less know which facts should be included in the catalogue: intuitively, all the facts described by fundamental physics. Treating these facts as 'subjective' is not just

inappropriate: it seems to betray a partial failure to understand what kind of facts these facts are. Thus, it is more than reasonable to ask the friends of subjectivity to accept not just Objectivity, but also the following principle:

[Minimal Objectivity] Any plausible form of realism about subjectivity should express all physical facts with objectively true propositions.

Two things need to be noted. Let us assume, as seems highly plausible, that physical facts can *only* be expressed with objectively true propositions. Assume, further, that the same is true of all facts grounded exclusively by physical facts. From these assumptions and from Minimal Objectivity, it follows that any plausible form of realism about subjectivity violates physicalism, the doctrine that all fundamental facts are physical facts of some sort. But this is just what was to be expected: any friend of subjectivity thinks that the world contains subjective facts, and it's difficult to see how these could be identical with or grounded by physical facts, given that these latter are objective facts par excellence.

The second point to remark is that any friend of subjectivity who accepts Minimal Objectivity holds a view which is not just 'more subjective', but also, in a sense, 'more objective' than any form of physicalism. Let's say that a view  $\Omega$  is *more objective than* a view  $\omega$  if, for every (fundamental or less-than-fundamental) fact that  $\omega$  expresses with an objectively true proposition,  $\Omega$  also expresses that fact with an objectively true proposition, but not vice versa. A friend of subjectivity who accepts Minimal Objectivity accepts all physical facts and express them with objectively true propositions. But he also admits some subjectively true proposition  $s$  and, therefore, some objectively true proposition of

the form ' $s \vee \text{OTHER } s$ '.<sup>52</sup> The fact he expresses with this latter proposition is simply not contemplated by any standard physicalist: his view is, therefore, more objective than any variants of physicalism, according to the straightforward definition just given.

### 3.2. *Impartiality*

The second principle I wish to recommend to the consideration of a realist about subjectivity is the principle of *Impartiality*. This principle can be understood by analogy with a thesis I discussed in § II.4.3, called 'Neutrality'. Just as Neutrality denies that reality contains only one 'now', Impartiality is supposed to ensure that our world can accommodate more than one 'I'.

As it will be recalled, the motivations for endorsing Neutrality had mainly to do with the need to reconcile realism about temporariness with the theory of special relativity, while also guaranteeing the knowability of metaphysical reality. The reasons for combining [RS] with Impartiality are, in a way, far more obvious and intuitive. We do not want realism about subjectivity to collapse into a radically egotistic view, a view on which all propositions that are true are first-personally true from the viewpoint of a single privileged subject. Non-impartial accounts are not incoherent, but they are difficult to believe. Take, for instance, Hare's 'Egocentric Presentism': I cannot help myself from thinking that the world I live in is not a world in which Caspar Hare's experiences, and *only* Caspar Hare's experiences, have a special property called 'presence'. Maybe Hare has better reasons to endorse Egocentric Presentism than I do, but I think we'd better look for more impartial solutions.

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<sup>52</sup> This explains the sense in which, if a fact figures in my subjective book, it has to figure on God's objective book, too. See § I.3 above.

For obvious reasons- determined by the fact that, in any egocentric language, subjects must not be directly mentioned- Impartiality cannot be formulated in an egocentric-friendly way. We have to limit ourselves to provide a formulation like the following:

[Impartiality] There is no privileged subject  $s$  for which the totality of subjective facts expressed by metaphysically saturated, subjectively true propositions are ones that obtain from  $s$ 's point of view.

Combining RS with Impartiality generates significant tensions. For let us assume that metaphysical reality contains both your and my subjective facts. In principle, there is no reason why your facts and my facts might not be expressed by subjectively true propositions that are not mutually incompatible. In practice, though, we should expect to get loads of conflicting metaphysically saturated, subjectively true propositions. There will be a metaphysically saturated proposition corresponding to your current phenomenal boredom:

(28)  $\exists e$  (boring (e))

And another one corresponding to the fact that my mental life is currently free of phenomenally boring events:

(29)  $\sim \exists e$  (boring (e))

Now the question is: how could mutually contradictory propositions like the ones expressed by (28) and (29) both be metaphysically saturated and first-personally true?

Recall that we've encountered an analogous problem earlier on, when discussing the non-standard variations of realism about temporariness (§ II.4.3). There, the problem

was one of remaining neutral among different temporary descriptions of reality: today's description, according to which "It's sunny", and tomorrow's description, according to which "It's not sunny". How can a realist about temporariness hold that these conflicting descriptions are both true, given the crucial fact that he does not want to relativize them to times? Two possible solutions were examined. The first is the 'external relativist' one. As it will be recalled, an external relativist is a good friend of temporariness and therefore denies that 'It's sunny' is true *relative to* a time (or, equivalently, denies that the proposition expressed by 'It's sunny' is metaphysically unsaturated). What he thinks is rather that *metaphysical reality itself* is relative to a time (or a time-frame). In other words, an external relativist believes that there is not a single or unique reality, but rather a multiplicity, if not an infinity, of realities-at-a-time (or at-a-time-frame). The second solution is a view called 'fragmentalism'. According to this view, metaphysical reality is irredeemably incoherent, in the sense that many contradictory propositions like the one expressed by "It's sunny and it's not sunny" are metaphysically saturated and true. A fragmentalist, however, is not so much interested in what facts obtain simpliciter as in what facts cohere into a single 'fragment'. He invokes substantive rules of coherence to explain why certain facts cohere and others don't or why contradictions are true and, nonetheless, never assertible.

External relativism and Fragmentalism might sound extravagant and far-fetched views in the temporal case. But can they be adapted to the needs of a realist about subjectivity who wants to remain impartial among different subjective viewpoints? Is the result of combining (RS) with fragmentalism and external relativism any more plausible? There are, I suppose, many reasons for being sceptical, so I shall at least try to convince my reader that the enterprise is worth the effort. I'll start from some intuitions that I find non-negotiable. I am convinced that there is something it is like to be me. When a particular brain, my brain, is properly stimulated, something *subjectively* happens that does

not happen when other brains are similarly stimulated. I am persuaded that these are *facts*, facts belonging to metaphysical reality. I am not willing to acquiesce to any reconstruction of these facts on which they are not facts at all, because the only fact is that *relative to x* or *from x's perspective*, things are so and so. I do not understand these reconstructions, for I do not understand how my subjective life could be just a 'perspective' on reality: when I say that there is something it is like to be me, I'm talking about reality, the only reality I know. These are the reasons why I am a realist about subjectivity and think that any non-reductivist interested in the question 'What must reality be like in order for consciousness to exist?' should be a realist about subjectivity, too. But I understand the appeal of Impartiality. I am prepared to accept that there are other *subjects*: not mere entities on which I quantify when I describe reality, but true *alternative realities*, realities in which there's nothing it is like to be me, but there's something it is like to be someone else. In brief I believe that the viability of the non-reductivist project depends on the viability of some form of realism about subjectivity and the plausibility of realism about subjectivity depends on the possibility to accommodate Impartiality. Maybe external relativism and fragmentalism are far-fetched and outlandish views, but then it is the non-reductivist's burden to find an alternative way of doing justice to both subjectivity and impartiality. The whole non-reductivist project, as I understand it, turns on *both* these issues in an absolutely crucial way. Perhaps then, it's worth giving external relativism and fragmentalism a second chance.

### 3.3. *Subjects as fragments, subjects as realities*

Fragmentalism and external relativism give us radically different accounts of what it means for the world to contain subjects. For a fragmentalist, the world contains

contradicting subjective features: if you're happy and I'm not, then the contradictory proposition expressed by "There is boredom and there is not boredom" is subjectively true and metaphysically saturated. On this picture, subjects are no more than coherent *fragments* or *bundles* of subjective facts. For an external relativist, on the other hand, reality is not contradictory. "There is boredom" and "there is not boredom" are both true, but they are literally true of *different realities*: reality-relative-to-you and reality-relative-to-me. Subjects, on this account, play a role analogous to times or time-frames: they can be thought of as standpoints, relative to which different metaphysical realities arise or obtain.

In the context of his (purely speculative) investigation of 'First-personalism', Fine (2005) expresses a preference for a fragmentalist approach to the problems posed by Impartiality. I am not completely hostile to fragmentalism and the views I will present in the next section are in principle liable to both fragmentalist and external relativist variations. But I wish to explain why my preference goes to external relativism.

To begin with, I am not particularly moved by Fine's arguments against external relativism. In effect, these arguments seem to me to cut in both directions. Take, for example, the complaint that an external relativist has to commit himself to a plurality of metaphysical selves "that stand outside the world and yet [are] that by which the world (or the subjective world) is given" (314). According to Fine, the whole idea of a pure metaphysical self is barely intelligible and one of the virtues of Fragmentalism is that it allows us to get rid of this idea, by dissolving the metaphysical self "into the sea of facts of which it was previously regarded as the source" (314). Now, it is true that a fragmentalist need not posit metaphysical selves at the rock bottom of his metaphysical architecture. But we know that he has to help himself with substantive rules of coherence, instead. And the status of these rules is by and large similar to that of metaphysical selves: they must exist 'outside the world', while being that by which the different fragments are given. Hence, I

do not see what the advantages of Fragmentalism are supposed to be, at least when it comes to avoiding the shallows of transcendence.

I am equally unconvinced by Fine's claim that external relativism runs the risk of collapsing into a form of anti-realism about subjectivity, whereas "fragmentalism [...] avoids this difficulty" and has "more secure" conceptual foundations (310). I have already pointed out elsewhere that the tenability of external relativism depends on an extremely fragile distinction between reality's containing relative facts and aspects and reality's being itself relative. But fragmentalists are not better off, in this respect. Their position, too, oscillates between two poles: on the one side, the claim that reality is ultimately constituted by contradictory subjective facts; on the other, the reassuring picture on which these contradictory facts are said to inhere in different coherent fragments.

Fragmentalism and external relativism share many virtues and many vices, and Fine's arguments do not seem to me sufficient to settle the dispute one way or the other.<sup>53</sup> Only a fully-developed theory of subjectivity will tell us if Impartiality can indeed be reconciled with RS and if external relativism and fragmentalism represent viable solutions in that direction. Here, I shall limit myself to providing some considerations that might turn the scale slightly in favour of external relativism.

Let's start by briefly considering what Unger (2004) calls the 'Experiential Problem of the Many'. This problem arises for those (reductivist or non-reductivist) 'conservative' accounts according to which a particular physical complex (e.g. an organism or a brain) 'promotes' phenomenal consciousness in virtue of the (physical or non-physical) properties it possesses. Unger points out that, for each of the physical complexes that are candidate to be the 'promoters' of our conscious experiences, there are very many mutually overlapping

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<sup>53</sup> In Chapter II, I argued that Fine is unreasonably benevolent towards fragmentalism: the costs of fragmentalism include not only the truth of contradictory propositions, but also a dubious ontology of 'atomic' or 'minimal' facts. The problems I raised there in this connection apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of subjectivity.

physical complexes which are practically indistinguishable from one another, were it not for tiny and in all likelihood insignificant differences in their microscopic composition. Human brains, for instance, are composed by something like  $10^{11}$  neurons. It is implausible to think that depriving an individual of one of these neurons would drastically impair his mental capacities. We are therefore inclined to think that, for every human brain, it is possible to individuate many quasi-identical, mutually overlapping neuronal complexes, each of which seems an equally good candidate to be a bearer of psychophysical properties. Unger finds this thought deeply puzzling. His fear is that the existence of vastly many functioning brains, all located within the boundaries of the same skull, supports a rather incredible conclusion: that there are “vastly many experiencing thinkers, each with a protracted illusion of being, in this very present situation, quite singular and unique” (200).

I am not here interested in discussing the premises or the form of Unger’s argument for this ‘explosive’ conclusion. My aim is rather to show that something analogous to the explosive conclusion is forced upon us if we accept fragmentalism. The idea here is quite simple. On the fragmentalist picture, it is the rules of coherence that dictate which facts cohere to form a ‘subject’ and which don’t. Suppose, for the pure sake of illustration, that the following five claims express just a small subset of the sort of atomic, first-personal facts that the fragmentalists take to form the rock-bottom of metaphysical reality:

(30) There is pain

(31) There is no pain

(32) There is boredom

(33) There is joy

(34) There is hunger

...

The rules of coherence are supposed to tell us which of these facts cohere into a fragment. Each fragment will then correspond to what we would call a ‘subject’. The rules of coherence do not allow any fragment to contain contradictions. So there will be no subject which is both in pain and not in pain. But there will be a fragment which is both hungry and joyful: that’s Tom. And there will be a fragment which is both bored and hungry: that’s John. Notice that the existence of the Tom-fragment and the existence of the John-fragment are not brute facts about the world: Tom’s and John’s existences are inexorably dictated by the rules of coherence.<sup>54</sup> This is an aspect of fragmentalism which I find deeply puzzling, not only because I can’t quite come at peace with the claim that my existence is dictated by ‘rules’, but also because I cannot help thinking that these rules will generate vastly too many experiencers. There will be Tom, there will be John: so why will there not be a subject whose phenomenal life is obtained by mixing Tom’s subjective facts with John’s ones? And more generally, why should there not be a subject whose subjective life resembles mine in almost every respect, except for some completely insignificant subjective minutiae? Of course, the rules of coherence that a fragmentalist may devise can be as specific and ad hoc as one likes. They might be purposely designed to avoid the explosive conclusion and give us just the right list of subjects or experiencers. But highly ad hoc rules are certainly not an elegant or cheap solution.

Are there other strategies? One thing to point out is that the list of first-personal facts will presumably include also negative facts like the fact that nobody is, say, both excited and joyful:

(35) ALL ~ (There is excitement  $\wedge$  There is joy)

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<sup>54</sup> An interesting question that I cannot pursue here is whether fragmentalism has the conceptual resources necessary to allow many numerically distinct, but qualitatively identical fragments.

Can't the fragmentalist say that the exact list of subjects may simply be 'read off' the complete list of first-personal facts? If these latter include the fact that nobody is excited and joyful, one could perhaps conclude that no fragment includes both phenomenal excitement and phenomenal boredom. The same trick could then be used to prevent the existence of too many experiencers.

Will this work? Perhaps not. For just consider what happens in the temporal case. When we work in a relativistic setting, it is commonplace to hear different observers give different accounts of what was, is or will be the case: for a certain observer, it might be true that 'The green light and the red light are never simultaneously', while, for another, it might be temporarily true that 'The green light is on and the red light is on'. According to a fragmentalist, these contradictory statements are both true, but belong to different fragments, corresponding to different time-frames:

(36) The green light is on  $\wedge$  The red light is on

(37) ALWAYS  $\sim$  (The green light is on  $\wedge$  The red light is on)

Now, if the list of temporal fragments could simply be 'read off' the list of tensed facts in the way just suggested, one would have to conclude that there's no fragment in which the green light and the red light are simultaneously on. And this is just the wrong result.

Of course, the situation might be completely different in the case of subjectivity. Maybe subjective facts are generally better-behaved than temporary ones. Maybe there's more harmony among different subjects than there is among different frames-times in a relativistic setting. But this is quite beside the point. For what the case of temporariness suggests is simply that the rules of coherence are not what they are *in virtue of* what propositions are true of metaphysical reality. Not surprisingly, given their somewhat transcendental status, the rules of coherence operate independently of what facts hold in

metaphysical reality. It would therefore be strange for a fragmentalist like Fine to say that, in the case of subjectivity, they are *constrained* by what subjective facts reality contains. If I am right on this point, there might be no other way for a fragmentalist to avoid the explosive conclusion, other than positing extremely specific and highly ad hoc rules of coherence. This would give us one more reason to prefer external relativism over fragmentalism as a solution to the puzzle of Impartiality.

#### *4. Three non-reductive theories of consciousness*

In the last sections, I have defined realism about subjectivity and highlighted its formal similarities with realism about temporariness. I have also argued that any plausible version of RS should be squared with two intuitions: first, that the world contains plenty of objective facts (at least as many as are the physical facts) and, second, that subjective facts are not all ‘ego-centred’ in a single subject. Two principles correspond to these intuitions: *Minimal Objectivity* and *Impartiality*.

I cannot here delve into the many questions surrounding realism about subjectivity.<sup>55</sup> My interest in RS is quite instrumental to the project of developing a subjectivity-friendly, non-reductive approach to the metaphysics of consciousness and it is finally time to come back to that project. In this section, I will sketch three RS-based non-reductive models of consciousness. My purpose is not to provide a full and detailed articulation of these views, nor to defend any of them in particular. The discussion will rather be conducted in an exploratory spirit. Hopefully, some of the theories outlined here

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<sup>55</sup> See the Conclusions, below.

will at least gesture in the direction of a non-reductive theory of consciousness capable of doing adequate justice to subjectivity.

All the three views I will present comply with Minimal Objectivity. They are also in principle compatible with fragmentalism and external relativism. The reader knows what the costs of accommodating Impartiality are and is free to take the views in a non-impartial spirit: in this case, the result will be something vaguely analogous to the non-impartial account defended by Hare (2009).

#### *4.1. The Subjective Spotlight View*

On the Subjective Spotlight View (SSV), the Subjective Barcan formulas examined above are both true: existential quantifiers range over an objective domain of entities and there are no egocentric or heterocentric existents. To put it more simply, for every entity in ‘my’ domain of quantification there exists a corresponding entity in ‘your’ domain, and this is true from everybody’s point of view.

What kind or kinds of entities does this domain include, according to the Subjective Spotlight theorist? There can be more than one possibility, and we need not presuppose any of them in particular. Some (SSV) theorists will quantify over a domain of objective events. This domain may include both mental events and physical events or, if you like, events that can be both mental and physical. Other supporters of (SSV) will favour a more traditional ontology of substances and these substances may be, once again, material or immaterial or maybe neither material nor immaterial. We can even imagine a ‘Spinozian’ Subjective Spotlight theorist that works with a single objective God-like substance.

How does subjectivity make its appearance in such diverse objective frameworks? The Subjective Spotlight theorists think that all properties are objectively exemplified by

their bearers, except for a single, mysterious property, whose exemplification is a subjective matter. To confuse matters a bit, they sometimes call this subjectively exemplified property ‘Consciousness’, but I will try to avoid confusion by speaking of ‘Konsciousness’ with a ‘k’.

To give a sense of the kind of picture endorsed by the Subjective Spotlight theorists, let us assume an objective domain of events and individuals. Let the events include all broadly speaking physical events and let there be just two individuals: Leibniz and Descartes. Suppose, then, that a C-fiber firing takes place in Leibniz’s brain, while Descartes undergoes a stimulation of the corpus callosum. These look like physical events, so- by Minimal Objectivity- the following formulas will express metaphysically saturated and objectively true propositions:

$$(38) \exists e ( \text{C-fiber-firing} (\text{Leibniz}, e) )$$

$$(39) \exists e ( \text{corpus-callosum-stimulation} (\text{Descartes}, e) )$$

We can suppose this world to contain two realities (or two fragments, if you are a fragmentalist rather than an external relativist). Consider first what might be called ‘reality-relative-to-Leibniz’. In that reality, the C-fiber firing is also a ‘konscious’ event, but only subjectively so. In that reality, therefore, (4) expresses a metaphysically saturated, subjectively true proposition:

$$(40) \exists e ( \text{C-fiber-firing} (\text{Leibniz}, e) \wedge \text{Konscious} (e) )$$

(40) is only subjectively true because the C-fiber firing is konscious without being konscious from everybody’s point of view. In Descartes’s reality, the C-fiber firing is not konscious at all, although it has a different non-physical property, the property of ‘being konscious from somebody else’s point of view’, i.e. of being *other-personally konscious*:

(41)  $\exists e (C\text{-fiber-firing}(\text{Leibniz}, e) \wedge \text{OTHER}(\text{Konscious}(e)))$

(SSV) is a very straightforward view and can be easily combined with Fragmentalism: every fragment would correspond to a maximal set of facts with a particular subjective distribution of Konsciousness. But the simplicity of (SSV) comes at a cost. For one thing, it is extremely unclear what the exact nature of Konsciousness should be. For another, the role that this mysterious non-physical property is supposed to play in a fully developed theory of subjectivity is enormous. For it seems that all subjective facts about my C-fiber firing will have to be determined on the sole basis of the physical or otherwise objective features of this event together with the bare fact that it instantiates Konsciousness. A non-reductivist about consciousness might want to look for a richer and more sophisticated account.

#### *4.2. The Subjective Qualia View*

The Subjective Qualia View (SQV) is, in many respects, similar to (SSV). Just like (SSV)-theorists, subjective qualia theorists can endorse the Subjective Barcan formulas and work with a domain of objective entities. But they can equally well admit non-physical entities ('experiences', for instance) that are capable of existing at some subjects without existing at all of them. Moreover, a Subjective Qualia theorist avails himself of a broader and more diverse repertoire of non-physical, subjective properties. The bearers of these properties may be physical or non-physical events, or else states and substances of various kinds. These properties are qualitative and intrinsic just like Chalmers's qualia, but they differ from standard qualia in a crucial respect: they are only subjectively exemplified.

By positing a vast range of subjective qualia rather than a single subjective property, a (SQV)-theorist finds himself in a much better position to develop a rich account of subjectivity. It is not clear, for example, that a Subjective Spotlight theory can accommodate intra-personal and inter-personal inverted spectrum scenarios. For how could the subjective features of a certain event *e* vary, without any variation in *e*'s physical profile or in the distribution of Konsciousness across events? By contrast, a Subjective Qualia theorist is naturally more open to the possibility that one and the same physical event may have different subjective nuances in different possible worlds (or even that the same kind of physical event may instantiate different subjective qualia at different subjects within the same world or at different times at the same subject).

The shortcomings of such a metaphysical profligacy are, I presume, clearly in view. We often hear that phenomenal properties would be causally inert or epiphenomenal, were they not supervenient on and ultimately reducible to their physical realizers. If 'objective' qualia à la Chalmers are epiphenomenal, it seems natural to think that all these subjective qualia will be doubly so.<sup>56</sup> Another aspect of (SQV) that seems to me worth of serious consideration is the abundance of possible recombinations that any supporter of this view seems forced to allow, especially if he accepts some sort of combinatorial account of modality. Every objective event that, from my point of view, instantiates a certain subjective quale could instantiate different qualia in different possible worlds. Now, it is true that non-reductivists about consciousness are often attracted by inverted qualia hypotheses, but it would be nice if the metaphysical possibility of inverted qualia were an optional commitment of a non-reductive theory of consciousness, rather than a consequence directly or indirectly built into it.

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<sup>56</sup> Does a similar problem arise for consciousness? Maybe, but it might not look as acute. The subjective spotlight theorist might protest that the causal inertness of consciousness is not dissimilar from the causal inertness of presentness on the moving spotlight view: nobody has ever complained that 'being present' does not affect the causal powers of an electron that is presently negatively charged.

### 4.3. *The Double-Aspect View*

The Double-Aspect View (DAV) is a very intriguing alternative to the profusion of properties postulated by the Subjective Qualia theorist. It is somewhat reminiscent of the ‘Double-Fact’ theory’ discussed in § II.4.1. The idea there was that properties as such are neither temporary nor sempiternal. Here the suggestion is that properties as such are neither objective nor subjective, but lead a double life by entering as constituents of both objective and subjective facts.

To sketch the contours of this view, let us assume an objective domain of events and an austere repertoire of physical properties characterizing events, properties like ‘being a C-fiber firing’ and ‘being a corpus-callosum-stimulation’. According to the double-aspect theorist, all physical properties lead a double life. On the one hand, they enter into objective facts of the following sort:

$$(42) \exists e ((\text{C-fiber-firing (at Leibniz)}) (e))$$

$$(43) \exists e ((\text{corpus-callosum-stimulation (at Descartes)}) (e))$$

On the other hand, the *same* properties can be subjectively instantiated and thereby give rise to subjective and subject-less facts like the following:

$$(44) \exists e ((\text{C-fiber-firing}) (e))$$

In a world containing just two subjects, Leibniz and Descartes, we can imagine that it is only in reality-relative-to-Leibniz that the physical property of being a C-fiber firing is directly instantiated by a certain event *e*. In Descartes’s reality, *e* is *at Leibniz* a C-fiber-

firing, but it is not a C-fiber-firing. The propositions expressed by (42) and (44) are therefore different and one cannot infer the second from the first, let alone vice versa.<sup>57</sup>

Notice that an anti-realist about subjectivity and a double-aspect theorist may find themselves in rather surprising agreement with each other over a significant range of issues. Not only might they work with the same catalogue of events: they could also share the same repertoire of physical properties. In a sense, they can be said to disagree only on the structure or the ‘richness’ of metaphysically saturated propositions. According to the anti-realist about subjectivity, in order to get a metaphysically saturated proposition, we need to (implicitly or explicitly) include in it as many elements as are necessary for that proposition to be objective. The double-aspect realist about subjectivity thinks that this requirement is unmotivated. According to his lights, for example, the subject-less proposition expressed by (44) is perfectly capable of stating something true or false of metaphysical reality.

The double-aspect view has numerous appealing features. It is incompatible with physicalism, insofar as being a physicalist implies being an anti-realist about subjectivity. But it is compatible with the thesis that the only fundamental properties there are are physical properties. It permits a richly differentiated characterization of subjective facts (at least, as richly differentiated as is the characterization of objective ones). But it does not force us to accept that inverted qualia scenarios are metaphysically possible. It discriminates sharply between subjective and objective facts. But it might come closer than other views to rescuing subjective facts from the threat of epiphenomenalism, given that this threat is often directed against non-physical properties and a double-aspect theorist need not admit any such properties. (DAV) is also vaguely reminiscent of some views that have recently been advanced in the literature about phenomenal properties. I am thinking,

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<sup>57</sup> Just like ‘at 16:09’, ‘at Leibniz’ and ‘at Descartes’ behave like functions taking monadic properties of events as arguments and returning other monadic properties of events.

for example, of the account advocated by Loar (1997), according to which we “may take phenomenal qualities to be identical with physical-functional properties of the sort envisaged by contemporary brain science” (598), while also accepting that the introspective concepts by which we refer to phenomenal qualities are “conceptually irreducible” or “conceptually independent” of all physical-functional concepts. A (DAV)-theorist is likely to agree with Loar’s claim that phenomenal properties *just are* physical properties of some sort. But he may provide some sort of metaphysical account of the irreducibility of introspective phenomenal concepts, for instance by saying that these concepts pick out phenomenal properties *qua* constituents of subjective facts.<sup>58</sup>

Too good to be true, it will be said. In effect, many aspects of the Double-Aspect theory appear to be less than fully convincing. There are, for example, notorious difficulties with Loar’s defence of psychophysical identities. Many have argued that, given what it is for two properties to be identical, and given certain indisputable features of phenomenal and physical concepts, true psychophysical identities should be knowable a priori by us. But they clearly aren’t, so they must not be identities.<sup>59</sup> Similar arguments could easily be adapted against the double-aspect view.

A somewhat related worry regards the problem of distinguishing the thesis that physical and phenomenal concepts both have physical-functional properties as their referents from the panpsychist thesis that the properties referred to by physical and phenomenal concepts are neither purely physical nor purely phenomenal, but physical and phenomenal at the same time.

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<sup>58</sup> As far as concepts are concerned, Loar seems to have something vaguely similar in mind: “Phenomenal concepts are recognitional concepts that pick out certain internal properties. [...] The properties these conceptions *phenomenologically reveal* are physical-functional properties- but not of course under physical-functional descriptions” (602). In the same spirit, Nagel (1998): “These two ways of referring- by the phenomenological concept and the physiological concept- pick out a single referent, in each case rigidly” (350).

<sup>59</sup> See Chalmers (2002b).

Finally, the double-aspect view may appear *prima facie* more respectful of certain physicalistic intuitions, but we must not forget that every time a property is both subjectively and objectively exemplified we are dealing with two distinct facts,<sup>60</sup> “two facts covering the very same metaphysical ground”, to use Fine’s words (2005, 309). It is not clear that a fact-dualism of this kind is any less metaphysically dispendious than a more straightforward RS-based property-dualism.

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<sup>60</sup> Needless to say, this is the crucial point on which a (DAV)-theorist disagrees with Loar (1997).

## Conclusions

There are two things that a metaphysics of consciousness can do: either it explains the existence of phenomenal consciousness or it simply describes it. If what we want our metaphysics to do is to explain the existence of consciousness, the reductive metaphysics of physicalism seems by far the best candidate for the job. But if we think that facts of consciousness have to be taken as fundamental, then the task confronting us is a descriptive one. Not just any metaphysics will do for this task: adding more stuff to our ontology may give us a world where physicalism is false, but it will not give us our world, a world where consciousness exists. A world with consciousness is, I've argued, a world where some facts are essentially subjective. Fundamental reality has to be at least in part subjective in order for phenomenal consciousness to exist.

A world with subjectivity is not just a world where numerically different individuals undergo different events. It's a world where some facts, including the character and perhaps the very existence of certain events, are capable of varying from one subject to another. In such a world, Ben and Bill can be genuinely disagreeing when the first affirms and the second denies that there is something it is like when Ben has a headache. For it is only from Ben's point of view that the goings-on in Ben's brain instantiate the subjective quale of pain. Notice, however, that this might not be tantamount to saying that, from Bill's perspective, Ben is a zombie: after all, for (or 'at') Bill, those goings-on, though not painful, are at least *other-personally* painful. Needless to say, this leaves the realist about subjectivity free, if he wants to, to give a 'conciliatory' semantic analysis of what Ben and

Bill are saying.<sup>61</sup> But at least there will be, in the semantic vicinity of the claim that “There is nothing it is like when Ben has a headache”, a metaphysically saturated proposition that does full justice to Bill’s point of view on reality.

A world with subjectivity need not be an outrageously subjective world. Bill and Ben do not disagree on everything. Notably, they do not disagree on physical facts. On any plausible version of realism about subjectivity, physical facts will be expressed with objectively true propositions, propositions that are true ‘at’ all subjects. Physical facts are what reality-relative-to-Ben, reality-relative-to-Bill and any other subjective reality will always have in common. In this sense, the physical world is, for a realist about subjectivity, a bit like the city described in a famous passage from Leibniz’s *Monadology*:

Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to the different points of view of each monad. (*Monadology*, § 57)

There are many interesting questions and challenges surrounding the project of taking subjectivity seriously and I wish to conclude by mentioning at least a few of them:

(1) To begin with, one might ask whether the subjectivity of consciousness is the only plausible reason for embracing RS or whether the world contains other irreducibly subjective facts. To cite an example, maybe the distribution of moral and aesthetic properties is a subjective fact about the world. Or maybe not: maybe, propositions about morality and aesthetics are as objective as the propositions expressing physical facts.

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<sup>61</sup> On the problem of making sense of what other people believe and say, see Hare (2009, 52-55) and Fine (2005, 295-297).

- (2) Suppose that, for some reason or another, we believe that our world contains subjectivity. Is this true of all possible worlds? Or are there worlds of ‘absent subjectivity’, i.e. worlds where all propositions are objective? If we answer this question in the positive, what is going to be the truth-value of the subjective proposition expressed by “There is no pain” at a world of ‘absent subjectivity’? Does that proposition simply not exist in that world? Needless to say, the same questions may be raised in the context of realism about temporariness and one may answer them in the same way in both contexts or else take a differential stand on the issue.
- (3) This invites a further set of questions. Suppose RS and RT are both true: our world is both subjective and temporary. How do RS and RT interact? Is our world primarily temporary or is it primarily subjective? Notice that these questions become particularly pressing if the project involves reconciling ‘neutral’ versions of realism about temporariness with ‘impartial’ versions of realism about subjectivity. For then the question is: is reality primarily relative-to-a-time or is it primarily relative-to-a-subject? (Or, in a fragmentalist framework, what rules of coherence are to be given priority: the temporal or the subjective ones?)
- (4) Some questions concern more directly the philosophy of mind. I am thinking, for example, of how the falsity of the subjective Barcan formulas would impact on our understanding of the ontology of the mental. But I am also thinking of how the problem of mental causation might make us lean towards certain subjective theories of consciousness (like the Double-Aspect View) rather than others.
- (5) The most exciting questions, however, seem to me to be those connected with the metaphysics of mind. How should we think of subjects, if we are ‘impartial’ realists about subjectivity? Are subjects true alternative realities or are they mere bundles or fragments of subjective facts? These questions have an immediate bearing on the

problem of the so called ‘unity of consciousness’. Bayne and Chalmers (2003) have defended the thesis that “necessarily, any set of phenomenal states of a subject at a time is phenomenally unified” (33). They have suggested that this thesis might be at some level a conceptual truth, “whose roots are revealed only by a deep analysis of our concepts” (55), notably the concept of consciousness and the concept of a subject. As we’ve seen, a fragmentalist and an external relativist conceive subjects in radically different ways: it would be interesting to see if (and how) these different conceptions reflect themselves in different explanations of what Bayne and Chalmers call the ‘phenomenal unity’ of consciousness.

The answers to these questions might be interesting and illuminating. Or they might just reveal that realism about subjectivity is a deeply incoherent view. In either case, it is in the interest of the non-reductivists to explore this view further. For what I hope to have shown here is that any credible non-reductive metaphysics of consciousness has to take subjectivity seriously, more seriously than any expanded or revised objective ontology can allow.

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