

Questions on Prior and Broad
PHIL 1480 Metaphysics
Cian Dorr

A. Broad, 'The General Problem of Time and Change'

You can skip the beginning of this, which doesn't make much sense out of context. Start reading with the paragraph that begins on p. 57.

1. 'It is evident then that *Here* is not going to help us to understand *Now*, since it contains an essential reference to *Now*' (p. 59). Why does Broad say that? Are his reasons good? Is there a real problem here for the B-theorist?
2. 'But, in the first place, the lighting of the characteristic of presentness now on one event and now on another is itself an event, and ought therefore to be itself a part of the series of events, and not something that happens to the latter from outside' (60). How does this objection to the Moving Spotlight view work, and is it any good? Suppose the proponent of the Moving Spotlight were to reply as follows: 'Yes indeed, the lighting of presentness on an event is itself an event: but it is not a *different* event. For example, the lighting of presentness on the death of Queen Anne is the same event as the death of Queen Anne.'
3. On p. 66 Broad contrasts two ways in which an object might change its relational properties. How would he classify the change that occurs in Tom Smith when, upon the death of his younger brother, he comes (once again) to be the youngest son of John Smith? Has Broad any *argument* for treating (what we normally call) 'ceasing to exist' differently from 'coming to exist'?
4. Broad's argument for the growing block view seems to fit the following scheme: (P1) Events can change in respect of type-X features only while they are occurring. (P2) Events can change in respect of presentness and pastness (and in respect of the various degrees of pastness) even while they are not occurring. (C1) So presentness and the various degrees of pastness are not type-X features. (C2) So presentness is *being succeeded by nothing* and pastness is *being succeeded by something*. Is this right? What is "type-X"? How plausible is (P1), on the relevant reading of "type-X"? And how plausible is the step from (C1) to (C2)?
5. According to Broad, judgments about the future are 'neither true nor false at the time they are made'. But, he goes on to say, 'they will become true or false when there is a fact for them to refer to'. How are these two remarks consistent? What is Broad doing when he makes this particular judgment of about the future, to the effect that each judgment about the future will eventually become true or false, if he is not claiming that *it* at least is true?

B. Prior, 'Changes in Events and Changes in Things'

1. Prior seems to be suggesting that *really* (ultimately speaking), there are no such entities as *events*: 'what looks like talk about events is really at bottom talk about things' (16). Is this a plausible view? Does Prior actually have an

argument for it? What is the relation between this view and presentism? Are there considerations that could motivate a presentist to want to eliminate not only past and future events, but present ones too? (Cf. the stuff about 'when is a long process long' on p.10-11.)

2. Broad seems to be suggesting a diametrically opposed view, according to which really, ultimately speaking, events are the *only* concrete entities there are: talk about things (people, signal-lamps, etc.) is really at bottom just a way of talking about events (p. 63). Is this a plausible view? How does it bear on the dispute between presentists, eternalists and growing block theorists?
3. 'We might paraphrase "Queen Anne has died" as "Once there was a person named 'Anne', who reigned over England, etc., but there is not now any such person' (p. 17). Here's an objection to this proposal (those of you who have read Kripke will find it familiar): since Queen Anne could have had a different name or never become a queen, it could be true that Queen Anne has died without it's being true that there was ever a person named Anne who reigned over England. Is this effective? What might Prior say in response?
4. Does this paper contain any argument for presentism? If so, where is it, and how does it work?