the Stoics and some others, who 'thought Aristotle to say that future contingents are neither true nor false'.

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## THE SELF FROM TIME TO TIME

## By D. H. Mellor

 $\mathbf{F}^{\mathbf{ROM}}$  the fact that a token of the sentence type

(1) It's two o'clock now

can be used to give valuable information, Zemach (ANALYSIS 39.3, June 1979) concludes that selves have only momentary existence. While I share Bernard Williams' (1973, ch. 6) distaste for immortality, I confess my present self still hopes for more than the mayfly's span of life, and Zemach does not persuade me I can't have it. Believing moreover that others, perhaps even some future Zemach-selves, may wish to share my hope, I hasten now to reassure them. A less bizarre conclusion can and should be drawn from the familiar facts and arguments to which Zemach redirects our attention.

The truth conditions of any token of (1) are not in dispute. A token of it is true if it is produced at two o'clock; otherwise it is false. The time of utterance completely fixes its truth value. There is no scope for anything else to affect the truth value of tokens of (1). Specifically, the pastness, presentness or futurity of the time, two o'clock, to which they refer cannot affect their truth value, even though (1) appears to say that two o'clock has the property of presentness. And the same goes for tensed statements of any complexity, as the stock "semantics" for tense logic (e.g. McArthur 1976) makes clear, albeit unintentionally. This semantics shows, if nothing else, how the temporal truth conditions of a tensed statement are fixed entirely by how much earlier or later its utterance is than various other events and times explicitly or tacitly referred to in it. The supposed properties of pastness, presentness or futurity, whether of these events or times (or, as tense logicians prefer, of the facts of their occurrence) have no scope at all to enter into the truth conditions of any tensed utterance. And since their doing so would provide the only reason for supposing any time, event or fact really to possess these properties, we see that there is no such reason.

Since, moreover, McTaggart (1908) anticipated Zemach in showing the contradictions inherent in this supposition, we have had the best of reasons to deny it. Nothing can be distinguished in reality as being past, present or future—except in the tenseless relational sense in which events later than a time may be said to be "future" to it, earlier events "past" at it, and simultaneous events "present" at it. Nor therefore can any other real nonrelational distinction be consistently supposed to rest on these illusory ones. In particular, as Zemach observes, 'it is nonsense to say that "the past" or "the future" are not fully real.' It is also nonsense to distinguish the past from the future in other ways still current among philosophers: as being objectively fixed (as opposed to open), actual (as opposed to possible), unique (as opposed to multiple), or certain (as opposed to chancy). All this is nonsense, and it's time it stopped.

Tense, in short, is not an aspect of reality, but the way the truth conditions of tokens of certain sentence types depend on when they are produced; just as spatial token-reflexive expressions ('here', 'sixteen miles North East') make the truth conditions of tokens of other sentence types depend on where they are produced. Now to these sentence types there correspond definite states of belief (that it is now two o'clock, that Ely is sixteen miles away North East) whose truth conditions likewise depend on when or where they are held. The truth conditions of tenseless beliefs (e.g. that the 1979 Cup Final starts at two o'clock) and their spatial equivalents (e.g. that Ely is sixteen miles North East of Cambridge) do not, by contrast, depend in this way on when or where they are held. A tensed belief state is therefore never identical with a tenseless one, and consequently neither are the meanings of the sentences expressing them. There is, as Prior and others have rightly maintained, no tenseless translation of tensed discourse, even though there is no tense in the reality that determines whether it is true. There is no special temporal mystery about this; it merely illustrates the fact that sentences with token-reflexives cannot be properly translated by sentences without them, whether the token-reflexives be temporal, spatial or personal.

All this, *pace* Zemach, has nothing to do with selves, except insofar as sentient selves are needed to supply the conventions which make linguistic types out of specific types of sound and of inscription. Tokens of (1) need not be uttered by a self; most of them are in fact given out by clocks and not noted by anybody. They could quite well continue to be given out after all our selves are dead. The things books and road signs say would surely retain their truth value in those circumstances, and if they would, so would the deliverances of Big Ben. Now no one, I trust, thinks Big Ben is a self, let alone a succession of momentary selves; it is rather too far down the Chain of Being. So it couldn't truly say Zemach's

(5) I am located at two o'clock.

But it can, and repeatedly does, truly say (1); which therefore does not, as Zemach asserts, have (5) for its content.

The fact is that Zemach has misplaced the connection between tense and the self. It really lies in the fact that agents need beliefs whose truth conditions change with time in the way those of tensed beliefs do. Since it is the object of all belief to be true, we have to change our tensed beliefs from time to time in order to try and keep them true, and for this purpose we need what is in effect an internal clock. Thus if my tensed belief about two o'clock is to remain true, it must change at two o'clock to (1) from the belief state I was previously in, namely that two o'clock is still future. And this is the very change that is needed to cause me to do at two o'clock whatever it is I desire to do then. As Perry (1979) has shown, nothing else will do this. Certainly no amount of unchanging tenseless belief, however relevant and true and however combined with specific desire, will prompt me on its own to timely action.

Tensed beliefs are thus indispensable for causing timely action, and therein lies the value of true tokens of (1). I may want to do something at two o'clock, and to do it I need to believe (1) at that time. But this belief does not automatically arrive then; our internal clocks are far from infallible. The belief may need to be induced, and that is the function of a token of (1). If, when I hear it, it is true, I hear it at two o'clock. So if my hearing it causes me at once to believe what I hear, I thereby acquire the true belief I need to prompt me to do what I want at the right time. The value of a true token of (1) depends therefore on what, if anything, its hearers want to do at two o'clock and whether, but for hearing it, they would have come to believe (1) in time to do it. But that it can be of the greatest value, as Zemach rightly says, is obvious.

This explanation of how tokens of (1) may be valuable does not have to appeal to selves being merely momentary, and that I take to be a virtue of it. Perhaps selves are momentary (though I don't believe that even for a moment), but our use of temporal token-reflexives is not a good reason for thinking so. Where Zemach went wrong was in his rejection of his

(4) The time at which this very token of 'now' is uttered = two o'clock.

He may be right to say that (4) 'is quite unhelpful as an analysis of (1)'; but it does in fact have the same truth conditions as (1). Indeed not only (4), *any* assertion (4<sup>\*</sup>) got from (4) by replacing 'now' with any expression whatever, has the same truth conditions, as the Editor has pointed out to me. The reason is that the work of making the assertion token-reflexive with respect to time (rather than speaker or place), which in (1) is done by 'now', is done in (4<sup>\*</sup>) by 'the time at which this token of': and once that is done, the *type* of the token referred to is immaterial. Whatever it is, tokens of  $(4^*)$ , like those of (1), are true if uttered at two o'clock and false at all other times.

So it is in a sense true, as Zemach says, that 'now is my time, my only time. I have no other.' But the reason is not that the self is only momentary. It is simply that if, while I am doing (or thinking or experiencing) anything, I simultaneously ask myself when, in tensed terms, I am doing it, the answer has to be 'Now'. This answer-token 'now' is made true just by being simultaneous with whatever the question was about, just as a token of (1) is made true by being simultaneous with two o'clock. That is all the much overrated experience of being confined, in one's perception, thought and action, to the present time amounts to.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This note was written during my tenure of a Radcliffe Fellowship, for which I am indebted to the Radcliffe Trust.