Handout 18

Time and change: Broad

C-series reconsidered. Broad's discussion incorporates some of McTaggart's ideas, before eventually turning to the criticism of his argument. Broad here begins with C-series. Points on the line have no 'sense': $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ and $\langle C, B, A \rangle$ are, in some sense, equivalent. Here we revisit the subjects covered in Handout 16. In this instance, any left-right or earlier-later distinctions are irrelevant to the two series. In isolation, if we try to characterise $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ we might say:

> The series has exactly three elements A, B, C; the point B is between A and C. (18-1)

Here we have specified *an* order, since we have ruled out several series. Yet we cannot distinguish between $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ and $\langle C, B, A \rangle$. This, in Broad's terminology, amounts to lack of 'sense'.

Let us try another example: $\langle A, B, C, D \rangle$ and $\langle D, C, B, A \rangle$:

> The series has exactly four elements A, B, C, D; the point B is between A and C; the point C is between B and D; the point B is between A and C. (18-2)

Once again, an order is set, but the two series are indistinguishable. Also, unlike the relation 'greater than', our way of setting up a relation does not specify anything about the intrinsic qualities of the elements. The elements are identified strictly on the basis of their positions in the series, their relations to other members of the series.

On this view, it is misleading to characterise a particular C-series in terms of some relation R which is irreflexive, asymmetrical, and transitive (as often done and as we did in Handout 16). Having laid down R for one series, we can always point out a difference between the two series above (in the last example, $R(A, B)$ and $\sim R(B, A)$ in the first series, but not in the second).

Yet I think that this way of thinking about C-series is problematic. If all I say about a particular C-series is the condition(s) (18-1), then how do I even distinguish between two distinct C-series $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ and $\langle C, B, A \rangle$? After all, they are distinct in *some* way—that is why I am interested in them in the first place. I am not trying to establish the equivalence of $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ and $\langle A, B, C \rangle$! But nothing in our condition points into their distinctness. It seems that I am talking about the same series all along. For example, I cannot say that $\langle A, B, C \rangle$ put on a line is right-to-left, while $\langle C, B, A \rangle$ is left-to-right. Any reference to spatial direction is prohibited (it would introduce a definite relation R that I wished to avoid).

Here and Now. Broad asks whether Now can be analogous to Here. Both have indexical character: they are specifiable by reference to a particular circumstance, namely, *my* position and *my* time. But Here, Broad argues, relies on a prior understanding of Now. When I say:

> It is hot here, (18-3)

I mean that it is hot in a region of space near me *now*. So Here refers to the speaker and to a certain date in that speaker's history. Hence spatial analogies cannot help us understand time.

Changes in events and in things. Following roughly McTaggart's trajectory, we arrive at two paradoxes associated with A-series (i.e. the triad past-present-future). First, every event is past, present, and future, but these predications are mutually inconsistent. Second, events change in time, but is such talk so much as intelligible?

We may suppose that both difficulties are resolved by analogy with change in things. When a lamp changes from red to green, instead of saying:

> $[G(L) \& R(L)] \Rightarrow [G(L) \& \sim G(L)]$ (18-4)

and face a contradiction, we say:

> $R(L, t)$ and $G(L, t')$. (18-5)

The contradiction is resolved by introducing relation in the place of unary properties. But is it possible to talk of changing events just as we talk of changing things?

Broad argues that the analogy is defective. He gives two reasons. First, there is circularity. The analysis of event-change that is done like the analysis of thing-change, by means of dissecting events into mini-events, depends itself on the fact that these sections are changing their temporal properties (A-properties). Secondly, the very idea of dissecting the event is spurious, since it does not give a proper account of the change of the 'whole event'. He concludes by saying that, whereas thing-change is a change in time, event-change just *is* change of time. To account for event-change we will have an extra dimension of time, another time.

JUDGEMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE. Broad addresses the distinction between judgements about the future and about the past and the present. Unfortunately, the lengthy discussion is marred by antiquated philosophy of language and logic that crumbles under even a superficial criticism. Specifically, it is marred by a poorly drawn distinction. The distinction is between what the judgement is about and what it refers to. The reference of the judgement has to do with its truth value. The judgement J is true when it is in 'concordance' with the fact F, and it is false when in 'discordance' with F. But what *is* concordance and its opposite, discordance? Suppose we have:

J = 'Snow is green'

F = [Snow is white].

We are now supposed to say that the judgement J is in discordance with the putative fact F. Apart from the question how to make sense of this esoteric relation, there is this trouble: the judgement J is in concordance with the fact F, only *falsely* so. In order to understand the opposition between concordance and discordance (ignoring their obscure nature), I should already be able to have a grip on the concept of truth. Defining truth in terms concordance and discordance, or, what is the same, in terms of correspondence, is a dead end.

Set this problem aside. Broad claims that some false judgements (perhaps even necessarily false) are nevertheless about something. What do they refer to? You might think they refer to nothing, that they lack reference. Broad disagrees: they refer to a negative fact (i.e. non-existent state of affairs, in modern rendering). But they cannot be *about* that negative fact. Their subject-matter is a positive fact, it is real.

Now, all such talk is extremely suspect. If the reference of a false judgement is a negative fact, if we allow negative facts ('important negative facts', says Broad), then why is it 'absurd' to think that the judgement cannot be about such facts? Secondly, when you confidently announce that J is about something, do you say anything other than that the judgement is meaningful? It is meaningful, you further suppose, because it refers to a *possible* state of affairs, though not to an actual fact. Metaphysics is still troublesome here, because now we have to explain what 'possibility' and 'actuality' are. Yet some small progress has been made: we understand that the question of 'aboutness' is the question of meaning. Our question is now refined as the question how false judgements can be meaningful, and moreover, how necessarily false judgements can be meaningful too.

These ideas belong in the philosophy of language, and they are beyond Broad's horizon. His examples involve a judgement about a mythical Puck (in the wide sense of 'mythical'). In Broad's view, it is about certain characteristics that in the mind of the medieval English were possessed by Puck. This does not seem right. The judgements they made were not about characteristics. They were about Puck's characteristics: 'What are you talking about?'—'I am talking about Puck.' Puck was the subject-matter, not the characteristics. Broad's comments do not do justice to this fact.

At all events, judgements of the future are subjected to the same treatment. They have no reference, not even reference to a negative fact. So they are neither true, nor false. In this they are contrasted with judgements of the past and the present.

Yet judgements of the future are about something. Broad suggests that they are about the sum total of existence that will increase (!) through becoming. It is pointless to comment on such hazy pronouncements further.

ARE TEMPORAL PREDICATES INCOMPATIBLE? At last Broad turns to McTaggart's argument. Supposing that every event is past, present, and future, these property ascriptions are mutually inconsistent. (To recall, that was McTaggart's proof of the internal contradiction in A-series and, ultimately, of the unreality of time: see Handout 17.)

His discussion depends on the claims made earlier about futurity. Namely, 'future' is not a genuine characteristic of an event. It is paraphrased away as a characteristic to do with the 'sum total of existence'.

The unresolved question is the ostensible contradiction in terms of 'past' and 'present'. Should there be a contradiction in the fact that the event [The death of Queen Anne] has been present and is now past?

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