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The Transcendental Phenomenological Argument against Eternalism

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Abstract: In this paper, we argue against eternalism on the basis of certain phenomenological considerations regarding our experiential life in a relatively novel way. Contrary to well-known phenomenological arguments that attempt to refute tenseless theories of time, our argument that we call the Transcendental Phenomenological Argument against Eternalism is against both tenseless and tensed versions of eternalism. The argument is based on the fact that one experiences a phenomenological *succession* of experiences, and it shows that perdurantist forms of eternalism have to either deny this fact or should embrace *ad hoc* and metaphysically implausible assumptions about the nature of the mind. As we argue, neither of these options seems to be too promising.

Keywords: eternalism, perdurantism, tensed theory of time, tenseless theory of time, phenomenology of time

1 Introduction

The common-sense understanding of time is that it is a dynamic phenomenon. There is a direction to it from past to future, and the movement of time consists in the fact that it is always only the present moment that is real. In other words, the movement of time is the coming into and passing out of existence of the present moment. This, of course, means that the past and the future do not exist. Nowadays it is more common for scientists and philosophers to hold the rival view, that of the block universe or eternalism. It states exactly what the common-sense view denies, namely that the past and the future exist just as much as the ‘present’ moment.

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The main reason for its popularity is that it seems to fit the mathematical representations of physics better. Nevertheless, in this paper we will argue against eternalism on the basis of certain phenomenological considerations regarding our experiential life in a relatively novel way (an argument similar to ours can be found in Kant 1781/1998, 422–425).

Phenomenological arguments in the philosophy of time attempt to refute *tenseless* theories of time rather than all forms of eternalism. They are based either on the thesis that (tenseless) eternalism (or, in McTaggart's popular terminology, B-theory) is inconsistent with our *rational attitudes* toward our experiences (see, among many, Craig 1999; Prior 1959; Kiernan-Lewis 1991; Pearson 2018) or on the thesis that *the phenomenal contents* of our veridical experiences show the tensed nature of time (see Craig 2000, 138–165; Geach 1972, 304–311 that is somewhat similar to the argument of the present paper; Schuster 1986; and Schlesinger 1991). In contrast, our argument *directly* attacks both tensed and tenseless eternalism, and is based simply on the rather solid fact that one experiences a phenomenological¹ *succession* of conscious events (regardless of whether the contents of our experiences are temporally static or dynamic). While defenders of eternalism can deny that the contents of our experience represent the world as temporally dynamic, they cannot deny, without making the theory much more implausible, that there is the experience of the *succession* of experiences. It is just a primal fact that the experience present to me now will be followed by another experience which in turn will be followed by another and so on. That is, I experience a constant succession of different experiences and experiential phases. Now, this is all our argumentation requires, since what this primal fact shows is that the standard version of eternalism cannot be true, since it is incompatible with the experience of the succession of experiences.

¹ Through the whole paper, we stress that one experiences a *phenomenological* succession of conscious events. This is because, in contemporary philosophy and psychology, many talk about unconscious experiences. Some use the phrase in a way that they ascribe experiences even to inanimate robots. We have to admit, one may say even about an inanimate robot that it has some non-phenomenological representations about some of its representations about the world (for instance, the robot may have a memory about some data that it collected earlier). In similar vein, one may plausibly say also that the robot has some non-phenomenological representation or experience about the fact that the robot and its collected data (non-phenomenologically) represented the world in a way at t_1 , the robot represented the world in a different way at moment t_2 , and the two different representations were one after another in succession. In this non-phenomenological sense, it can be said that the robot has an experience about the succession of experiences. However, if the robot does not have a subjective feeling about what it is like to undergo any experience, or in other words, it has no subjective perspective, then it cannot have any what-it-is-likeness with regard to the succession of experiences. To put it differently, in this case the robot does not have any *phenomenological experience* of the succession of the experiences.

Because the argument that aims to show this incompatibility is a transcendental one based on a phenomenological fact, we call it the Transcendental Phenomenological Argument (TPA). The argument is transcendental only in the sense that it attempts to show that the most standard form of eternalism cannot be true because its falsity is the *condition* for the existence of a phenomenological fact. Furthermore, it is a phenomenological argument only in the sense that the falsity of the most standard form of eternalism can be seen due to its incompatibility with the existence of a *phenomenological* fact. In other words, the argument is a transcendental and phenomenological one only in a weak sense, and it is based neither on the Kantian transcendental tradition nor on the Husserlian phenomenological approach.

First, we outline a version of the argument that can be easily grasped, but is somewhat imprecise. Secondly, we make the argument more precise and motivate its premises. Thirdly, we investigate the most obvious possible counter-argument which claims that eternalism can be reconciled with the experience of the succession of experiences by positing a gliding consciousness that goes through all the experiences of a person's temporal parts. We argue that this defense is highly implausible because it posits an *ad hoc* and overcomplicated metaphysics of persons and implies that one and the same subjective experience can simultaneously be experienced by more than one distinct subjects. Fourthly, we examine whether the eternalist can deny the existence of the experience of the succession of experiences. Even though this strategy fits some tendencies in the philosophy of mind, we argue that it is implausible in itself and has costly theoretical consequences. Nonetheless, apart from rejecting eternalism, it is arguably the best that the eternalist can do.

2 The Transcendental Phenomenological Argument Against Eternalism

2.1 A Simple Version of the TPA

First of all, we would like to give a brief and intuitive version of our argument. Eternalism is the view according to which past, present, and future events have the same ontological status, meaning that they all exist in the same sense. One of the main reasons for accepting eternalism is that it provides a fitting framework for an appealing theory of change called perdurantism. If past, present, and future events exist in the same sense, then change can be reduced to the fact that an object has a property F at moment t_1 , and it loses F at moment t_2 . For example, in the eternalist

framework, bending a wire, means that the wire has the property of straightness at t_1 , but loses this property at t_2 . However, since numerically identical objects cannot have different properties, the temporal parts of any object are different from each other. Things persist, rather than endure, in time. The straight wire at t_1 is a numerically different entity from the wire that is bent at t_2 , although they are the temporal parts of the same wire. To put it differently, the wire is constituted by the temporal parts at t_1 and t_2 in the same way as a wall is constituted by its bricks, while the straight temporal part and the non-straight (curved) one are different from each other in the same way as the bricks of the wall are different from each other (the classic statements of perdurantism can be found in Heller 1990; Lewis 1986, 1988, 2002; Quine 1960, 1963, 1981).

Nevertheless, the problem is this: what seems to work with wires does not work with minds. One's mind undergoes constant changes while one is sitting on a bench, enjoying the breeze blowing with varying intensity. Even if one's temporal experience actually consists of sequences of temporally static instances rather than inherently dynamic content (such as fundamental phenomenological durations with a past-future direction), it is still the case that now one part or phase is experientially given, and then at the next moment another one. According to eternalism, the mind which enjoys intensive breeze at t_1 is numerically different from the mind which enjoys less intensive breeze at t_2 . Even if these two minds can be regarded as two temporal parts of the same mind, there is not a single mind that experiences both the intensive and the less intensive breeze. There is one mind that enjoys the intensive breeze and another one that enjoys the weak breeze, and the two of them together can be regarded as the mind of the same person, but there is no mind that moves from enjoying the intensive breeze to the experience of enjoying a weak breeze, because eternalism reduces change to the sequence of numerically different states. However, if there is no mind that enjoys both the intensive and the weak breeze, then there cannot exist the experience of the transition from experiencing an intensive breeze to experiencing a weaker breeze. Now, it is evident that such experiences of the transition from one experience to another exist. Therefore, eternalism has to be false.

This simple version of the argument can be summarized in the following way:

- (1) If eternalism is true, then there is no mind that has more than one experience.
- (2) If there is no mind that has more than one experience, there is no experience of the succession of experiences.
- (3) There is the experience of the succession of experiences.
- (C) Eternalism is false.

We believe that this intuitive form of the argument brings out the main point rather well, but it is too imprecise. In what follows, we make the argument more precise and deal with possible objections to it.

2.2 Eternalism, Perdurantism and the Main Problem with the Perdurantist-Eternalist Philosophy of Mind

The most important way in which the above argument should be made more precise is that it should be directed only toward a subset of eternalism. This is because in its present form, it is toothless against endurantist eternalism, according to which objects do not have temporal parts because they are fully present at the present moment of time (Bottani (2020), Haslinger (1989), Inwagen (1990), Johnston (1987), Lowe (1988)). An endurantist eternalist believes that objects go forward in time and occupy only the present moment of time, but past and future moments still exist even if they are empty because objects either left them or did not arrive to fill the space in them. Clearly, an endurantist eternalist does not claim in any manner that numerically different minds experience the intensive breeze at t_1 and t_2 . Rather, in agreement with other endurantists, they claim that the one and the same mind moves from t_1 to t_2 and experiences the breeze varying intensity at both moments. That is, the TPA can, even in principle, refute only perdurantist eternalism.

Another defect of the simple version of the argument is that it does not sufficiently stress the central role of phenomenology. As the example of enjoying the varying intensity of breeze suggests, the experience of the transition from one experience to another one would be impossible if every single mind experienced only one experience. It may be the case that a person can experience the flow of time and the flow of experiences in the sense that her experiences – as time goes forward – have a different meaning and impact on her due to the representational contents of her mental states about the past *even if* eternalism is true and a person's mind at t_1 is numerically different from the later mind of that person at t_2 . Plainly, however, one cannot experience the *succession* of experiences if one has only one experience. It seems to be an analytic truth because an experience of the succession of experiences is the experience of the transition from one experience to another one. Now, it may be possible that there could be minds which enjoy only one, unchanging experience. If, for example, panpsychism is true, the basic physical constituents (elementary particles, strings, quantum fields etc.) – due to their lack of sufficient internal complexity – could be possible candidates for possessing such a mind. Nevertheless, our consciousness is not like that at all. Most evidently, in our case the succession of experiential phases is accompanied with a *change* in the phenomenal

character of the *experiences*. In other words, for us there is something that it is like to undergo the *transition* from one experiential phase to another.²

The last defect of the simple and rather brief version of the argument is that it does not explain too well why eternalism, or, at least, perdurantist eternalism is incompatible with the experience of the succession of experiences. The key is the metaphysical relation between temporal parts of the entity and the entity as a whole. Perdurantists claim that an entity is nothing more than the sum of its temporal parts. If one tells you everything about each temporal part of the entity, one tells you everything about that entity. In other words, nothing metaphysically new emerges due to the fact that certain parts of the metaphysical landscape are in a spatial, temporal and causal relation to each other that makes them the temporal parts of the same object. This reducibility of the entity to its temporal parts raises the question whether it is not misleading to regard the relation as a whole/part one between the entity that encompasses more than one temporal slice and the temporal slices that are encompassed by the entity. It is one of the reasons why a prominent eternalist, Ted Sider argues for the thesis that perdurantists should not speak about temporal parts, but rather about temporal counterparts (Sider 2001).

However, whatever is the case about the appropriateness of the standard semantics of perdurantism, its reductionist metaphysics makes the metaphysics of the succession of experiences rather problematic. If any changing entity is nothing more than the simple sum of its temporal parts, then there are no other minds than those that can be found in the temporal slices. One can find the mind which experiences the intensive breeze in the temporal slice at t_1 and a numerically different one that experiences the weak breeze in the temporal slice at t_2 , but one cannot find a mind that experiences both the intensive and the weak breeze at t_1 and t_2 . You can talk about the mind at t_1 and t_2 as if they were the same entity in the same way as you can talk about different parts of the same table as if they were the same entity. But this kind of speaking does not add a mind to the metaphysical landscape that experiences the intensive breeze at t_1 , the phenomenological transition from this experience to the later one of the weaker breeze at t_2 , and the experience of the weaker breeze at t_2 . since the temporal parts do not metaphysically give rise a super-mind that experiences both of them, so there can be no experience of the phenomenological transition from the earlier experience to the later one.

² It is worth noting that even in the case of a supposedly undifferentiated experiential life, it is still the case that experiential phases constantly follow each other and hence even in that case, there is an experience of the succession of experiential phases despite the fact that it does not manifest itself as a change in phenomenal character.

We would like to drive this point home also in another way because it is crucial for making the case for the thesis of the present paper. In a perdurantist eternalist metaphysics, conscious phenomenal events³ which involve some changes have to be reduced to the succession of basic phenomenal events that do not involve any change, even if they occupy more than one moment of time. Each of these basic phenomenal events may, in principle, be experienced by no more than one (numerically identical) mind, since the change of a basic phenomenal event implies a change of the mind. And, according to perdurantist eternalism, this event of a changing mind can be reduced to two numerically different minds which have the appropriate spatio-temporal and causal relation to each other. So, in the perdurantist eternalist landscape of metaphysics, one cannot find two basic phenomenological events that have different phenomenological features and are experienced by the same mind that is numerically identical to itself. Since the phenomenal mind⁴ of a person is nothing more than the succession of phenomenal minds that experience only one basic phenomenal event and have the appropriate spatio-temporal and causal relation to each other, there is no such pair of different basic phenomenal events which have different phenomenal features from each other and are experienced by the same super-mind that occupies many moments of time. Because there is no mind that experiences more than one basic phenomenal events, there is no mind that could experience the phenomenal transition from one experience to another one with different phenomenal features.

Notice that it does not matter whether the basic phenomenal events are static instances or their contents involve some inherent dynamism such as a duration going from the past to the future. Even if they do, the phenomenological transition from one *basic* phenomenal event to *another* is impossible in a perdurantist-eternalist metaphysics because no mind experiences both the earlier and the later basic phenomenal event. Nevertheless, consciousness is a reliable and suggestive witness of that the mind does not only believe, think or represent that there is a succession of phenomenal events, but it continuously experiences the phenomenal transition of one phenomenal experience into another one. This is why one, who

3 Conscious phenomenal events are those conscious events that have what-it-is-likeness. In other words, there is something it is like for the subject to undergo these conscious experiences. Note, there are some who believe that all conscious events are phenomenal ones, but there are others who deny this. For example, those philosophers who reject cognitive phenomenology. If one does not hold that, for example, thoughts have what-it-is-likeness, she cannot accept that all conscious events have phenomenological characteristics.

4 We use term 'phenomenal mind' only in a weak sense. Phenomenal mind is a mind that undergoes an experience that have what-it-is-likeness.

describes the mind phenomenologically, must talk about the *stream of consciousness* rather than the mere series of basic phenomenal events.

Bearing in mind the above considerations, one can flesh out the full form of the TPA as follows.

- (1) If perdurantist eternalism is true, then there is no mind that experiences more than one basic phenomenal event.
 - (2) If there is no mind that experiences more than one basic phenomenal event, then there is no experience of the succession of basic phenomenal events.
 - (3) There is experience of the phenomenological succession of basic phenomenal events.
- (C) Perdurantist eternalism is false.

Now, it is time to examine possible objections to the TPA. Since we regard the second premise as analytically true, we turn to the arguments against the first and the third premises.

3 Objection 1: Denying Premise 1

It is a bit tricky how the perdurantist eternalist can deny the first premise. She accepts that there is change in the world because her theory is a theory of change. Moreover, if she attacks premise (1) rather than premise (3), she does not deny either that there is the experience of the succession of experiences. So, she regards it as true, for instance, that *S* experiences an intensive breeze at t_1 before *S* experiences a less intensive breeze at t_2 . However, in a perdurantist-eternalist framework, the truth of the previous claim implies that there is a mind *m* that experiences the intensive breeze from *S*'s perspective at t_1 , and there is a mind *n* that experiences a less intensive breeze from *S*'s perspective at t_2 . This is because a perdurantist-eternalist holds that the states of existing temporal slices of the spatio-temporal continuum make true the propositions about the past, present, and future true. The problem is precisely that *m* and *n* go nowhere, and none of them experiences both experiences which take place at different moments. And without experiencing both the intensive and the less intensive breeze, experiencing the transition from the intensive breeze to the less intensive one is impossible.

To deny (1), the proponent of perdurantist eternalism has to introduce a mind that, contrary to *m* and *n*, experiences both basic phenomenal events. In other words, it has to add a mind to the perdurantist eternalist metaphysical landscape that retains numerical identity while it moves from the experience of *m* at t_1 to the experience of *n* at t_2 . Given this mind, the eternalist will say that the experience of the succession of experiences “consists in the movement through a series

of temporally embedded perspectives” (see Baron and Miller 2019 who discuss this proposal). The succession of the experiential phases transpires in a consciousness which experiences them *one after the other*. We may use here a metaphor of a gliding consciousness which traverses the frozen landscape of time.

Recall, the perdurantist eternalist cannot eliminate m and n because they make the proposition true about S experiencing the breeze with varying intensities at t_1 and t_2 . If only the gliding consciousness would be apart the metaphysical landscape and only this consciousness experienced the intensive breeze and the weaker one, then, at t_3 or at an even later moment, there would be no perdurantist-friendly truth-maker of the claim that S experiences varying intensities of breeze at t_1 and t_2 . This is because the gliding consciousness *leaves* t_1 and t_2 to collect the later experiences that are phenomenologically connected to the experience of the varying intensity of breeze. At t_3 and later, the gliding consciousness cannot make any sentence true about t_1 and t_2 because it is not there anymore. So, the gliding consciousness cannot be substituted for m and n , but it has to be added to the temporal slices that are already populated by phenomenal consciousnesses.

Of course, all this is rather problematic. First, this answer to the TPA leads to an *ad hoc* and overcomplicated metaphysics of consciousness according to which the experiential life of persons is composed of two types of consciousness. They have both the sequence of static consciousnesses that are frozen in different time-slices and the gliding consciousness that goes forward through time. It implies, at the minimum, an undermotivated dualism in which the gliding consciousness does not do anything useful (since it does not participate in the causal order of the world) besides solving the problems raised by the TPA. Moreover, although this approach may not be in conflict with our lived experience, it surely goes against the commonly-held thesis of the privacy of experience.

Let us show how that problem arises. The idea of a *gliding consciousness* is that while traversing the temporal landscape, a person’s gliding consciousness occupies the phenomenal perspectives of that person’s temporal parts. In other words, if the experience of succession is due to a consciousness gliding through the temporal phases, then this consciousness necessarily experiences the experiences of the temporal parts. Therefore, wherever the gliding consciousness happens to be, there are two consciousnesses for the same experience: the gliding consciousness and the consciousness of the temporal part. Now, how are we supposed to understand the idea that S ’s gliding consciousness occupies the phenomenal perspective of S ’s temporal part? It has to mean something like that the gliding and the frozen consciousness have the very same experience. For example, both the gliding and the frozen consciousness experience the intensive breeze at t_1 . Now, there seems to be something very wrong with this idea. In this picture, experiences must be understood as phenomena that are intersubjectively accessible *in the same way*. If my

consciousness shares the experiences of my temporal parts (as it traverses the temporal landscape), it accesses them in the same way as they do. But this cannot be right. Experiences are taken to be private in the sense that one's experiences cannot be (experientially) given to anyone else in the same way (that is, in the same first-person perspective) as they are given to her. However, if experiences are private, it cannot be true that distinct subjects may share the very same experience. Now we don't think that this could coherently be denied, because one then would have to say that experience (understood here as experiential content) and consciousness are ontologically distinct phenomena. This way, an experience could be detached from its consciousness so that another consciousness could access it in the same way. But again, this is incoherent. If experiential content is ontologically distinct from consciousness, it would follow that it could in principle exist without any consciousness being aware of it. There would be no reason why it could not.

One may object that ontological distinctness does not necessarily entail logical separability. Take for example the view according to which space and a physical object occupying space are two distinct substances. Although they are ontologically distinct, no physical object could exist without space, since their very mode of existence is spatial. A physical object – by the mere fact that it has the property of extension – it requires space to exist. For this reason, here we can see the necessity of the dependence. But this is exactly what we cannot see in the case of phenomenal content and consciousness under the proposed view. For the analogy to hold, one would have to say that the mode of existence of phenomenal contents is essentially experiential, just as the mode of existence of physical objects is essentially spatial. But one could not justify this claim. If one detaches phenomenality from consciousness and places it on the side of content (as one must if one insists that *phenomenal* contents as such are ontologically distinct from consciousness), then one just lost the ground for saying that contents necessarily require consciousness. Why would they do, if their phenomenality does not depend on it? Notice that in the case of physical objects, the notion of space is built into their very concept. Extendedness (extension) can only exist in space. Now, if one treats phenomenal contents as ontologically distinct from consciousness, the notion of content one ends up with is such that it does not inherently refer to consciousness. If one says that *phenomenal* contents are ontologically distinct (from consciousness), it means that phenomenality is ontologically distinct. What one would lack then is any positive conception about why it should be the case that contents are always necessarily accompanied by consciousness. And this is a crucial difference, as compared to the case of physical objects and space (where we do have such a positive conception). Therefore, if one would wish to insist that there is still a metaphysical entailment, it could be replied that such a claim is completely *ad hoc*. We have simply no

reason to deny, under the proposed view, the logical possibility of contents occurring without any consciousness.

Now, contrary to this, the claim that the phenomenality of contents depends on consciousness seems to be rather solid. Take your current experience. It is probably rich with perceptual contents, sensations and thoughts. What one is being asked here is to believe that all these could exist *in the very same way* in the absence of *any* consciousness. But this leads to self-contradiction. If they could exist in the very same way, then there really would be no difference between the two situations. As Barry Dainton rightly observes, “what difference could there be, given that in both cases intrinsically indistinguishable phenomenal properties are realized in all their technicolor glory?” (Dainton 2000, 39). If the contents retain their phenomenal nature, then the thesis that there is no consciousness to them becomes incomprehensible. Again, try to imagine your current experiential contents with the same phenomenal nature occurring in the absence of consciousness. Since, by hypothesis, they retain their phenomenal nature, there is something that it is like to have them. However, there is no one to whom there could be something that it is like to have them. And this is self-contradictory, since what’s-it-like-ness is necessarily what-it’s-like-ness for someone.⁵ A feeling is a feeling only by being felt, that is, experienced. Let us take a feeling of warmth. It has a particular phenomenal character that makes it warm. It is just incoherent to say that the same phenomenal character could exist in the absence of consciousness. To describe something as phenomenally such and such entails that something has been experienced.

Insofar as the idea of a gliding consciousness implies an ontological distinction between content and consciousness, it has to be rejected. But why is it not possible to hold *both* that the same phenomenal content can be presented to distinct consciousnesses *and* that content and consciousness are not ontologically distinct? The reason why it is not possible is that a self-contradiction follows from this combination. If we say that one consciousness has access to the contents of another, it follows that the two consciousnesses have merged into the *very same consciousness*. If consciousness and content are ontologically one or unified, the relation between them is either identity or constitution. Both of these options will lead to the consequence

⁵ This is controversial. One may think of colors for example. The qualitative properties of colors are not conceptually tied to an experiencing subject. Other qualities encountered in experience, however, are. The concepts of feelings and sensations, as paradigmatic examples, do imply their necessary experientiality. Now we take it that phenomenal contents share a common nature. If some of them can be shown to be experience-dependent, then I stipulate that all of them are. But even if one wants to deny this, it is still the case that the idea of the gliding consciousness entails that *all* contents should be logically separable from experientiality. But that is false since at least *some* of them are experiential in nature by conceptual necessity.

that the access of two consciousnesses to the same content translates into the two consciousnesses becoming numerically identical. If the relation is identity, then the situation is straightforward. Content *c* as the content of consciousness *a* is identical with that consciousness. If it is also the content of consciousness *b*, it is identical with consciousness *b*, too. Thus, by the principle of transitivity, consciousnesses *a* and *b* are identical. The same goes for constitution. If content *c* is the content of consciousness *a*, it is constituted by that consciousness. If it is also a content of consciousness *b*, it is constituted by *b*. Therefore, consciousnesses *a* and *b* are identical. But this, of course, is non-sensical. Two things that are distinct cannot become one/identical. Thus, the notion of experientially shareable phenomenal contents does not seem to work, which means that we have to reject the idea of a gliding consciousness (which requires this notion).

In sum, denying premise (1) not only results in an undermotivated and *ad hoc* dualist metaphysics in which there is a causally inert ontologically irreducible consciousness on top of conscious events, but it also goes against the privacy of phenomenological experiences. This kind of answer to the TPA is so problematic that it seems to us that anything else could do a better job.

4 Denying Premise (3)

Insofar as premise (2) is analytically true and denying premise (1), as we argued, does not offer too bright prospects in a perdurantist eternalist framework, denying premise (3) is the only viable option for perdurantist eternalists (apart from giving up the whole framework altogether). Denying premise (3), however, comes with a high cost because it is tantamount to claiming that there is no experience of the phenomenological succession of experiences.⁶

⁶ It is important to stress that this strategy is not identical with the approaches according to which the experience of the passage of time is either illusory or non-existent. It is clear that arguing for the illusoriness of the passage of time is not to argue for the thesis that there is no phenomenal succession of experiences. Rather, it is arguing for the thesis that there is no passage of time in the external world. However, claiming that there is no phenomenal experience of the passage of time is not the same as denying the existence of the experience of the succession of experiences because it can, in principle, be the case that one does not experience the passage of time itself, but infers it from the experience of the succession of experiences. It is one thing to say that one experiences that an experience is followed by another experience, and another thing to say that one experiences that there is such a thing as time and it has a direction. The former type of experience has less conditions than the latter one, even if all humans who experience the latter on all occasions of experiencing the former one.

The problem with this latter claim is rather straightforward. It is an obvious (we dare to say: apodictic) fact that there is the experience of the phenomenal succession of experiences. Consciousness seems to be the unassailable witness of this. Nevertheless, the perdurantist eternalist may want to insist that this obvious fact is in tension with other facts that are even more obvious (say, the existence of the experience of the succession of experiences is in contradiction with the fact that special relativity is true and implies the truth of eternalist perdurantism). Whether such a strategy merits discussion or not depends partly on what the best version of denying premise (3) is and what the costs of such an answer are. Thus, an investigation of the best possible way of denying premise (3) is in order.

Since, as far as we can tell, virtually everyone (except the strategically educated perdurantist eternalist) professes that they have such an experience of the phenomenal succession of experiences, the perdurantist eternalist cannot deny that (almost) everyone believes that they undergo such experiences. The perdurantist eternalist, however, may claim that there is nothing else besides this belief. That is to say, virtually everyone mistakenly believes that they have such phenomenological experiences.

At this point, the perdurantist eternalist has to provide an *error theory* to mitigate the seemingly fatal implausibility of this thesis. It is not an easy task. Perdurantist eternalists tend to explain the illusion of the endurantist nature of physical objects by referring to the phenomenal characteristics of subjective experiences. The problem with this attempt is precisely that if the perdurantist eternalist faces the TPA, she cannot base her explanation of the belief in the experience of the succession of experiences on the illusory nature of the experiences of succession, because she has to deny the existence of such experiences. So, it seems that the traditional strategy to save perdurantist eternalism is not available in this dialectical situation.

There may, however, be one phenomenological error theory that can explain the formation of beliefs in such experiences. The perdurantist eternalist could say that the basic phenomenological experiences are phenomenologically dynamic, and this dynamism causes the mistaken belief that there is experience of the succession of experiences.

We think that this line of reply is not too promising. The main problem is that it does not fit well with the general framework of perdurantist eternalism. Perdurantist eternalism reduces every dynamic feature of reality to sets of static states. Presumably, the dynamism of the basic phenomenological events would involve some kind of inherent change that cannot be reduced to any set of static states. Thus, it would be unfitting to introduce such phenomenologically and inherently dynamic events into perdurantist eternalism.

However, there is a way in which the above strategy could be modified so that it fits perdurantism eternalism. Instead of saying that the basic phenomenal events are inherently dynamic, the perdurantism eternalist could claim that even though the basic phenomenological experiences are static states, they have some features that compel the mind to vividly remember preceding experiential states and anticipate subsequent ones. This unavoidable and vivid remembering and anticipation of past and future phenomenal events – the perdurantist eternalist could (and, in our view, even should) insist – forms the basis of the (false) belief in the experience of the succession of experiences and an enduring self.

As far as we can see, this is the best answer that the perdurantist eternalist can offer against the TPA and its third premise. But it still remains incredible. Can we take a really seriously a proposal to the effect that all particular consciousnesses experience only one static instance? This phenomenological error theory is as radical as if one would claim that no one experiences color-qualities despite pervasive belief to the contrary. In other words, it would be a rather extreme attempt to solve the issue. (No wonder that we know of nobody who endorses it.)

We would like to put this point in another way. Perdurantist eternalism was, is, and will be a revisionist metaphysics in the sense that it denies the common-sensical belief in the special ontological status of the present moment.⁷ This kind of revisionist metaphysics is and has to be based on some ground that can be considered more solid than common-sense considerations. The most prominent candidates for this role are *a priori* philosophical and/or empirical scientific considerations. So far so good, most competent philosophers tend to accept on the basis of modern physics, for instance, that space is not Euclidian as common-sense suggests, but has a much more exciting geometric. However, the common-sense beliefs that are overridden in this way are, in most cases, *based on* phenomenological facts, but they *are not about* phenomenological facts. It is a phenomenological fact that agent experiences the world in a fashion that is rather close to the Euclidian geometry, and this fact is the main tenet of the explanation why common-sense mistakenly suggests that mind-independent space is Euclidian. The problem is that, insofar as TPA has the argumentative force that we ascribe to it, TPA forces the proponent of perdurantist eternalism to claim that one of our common-sensical beliefs *about phenomenological facts* is *completely* wrong. Not in a way like how common-sense is *somewhat* wrong about the percentage of the sharp part of vision. Instead, the perdurantist eternalist should insist, in the light of TPA, people are radically and totally wrong about whether they experience transition from one experience to another. Despite the fact that all of us have continuous and intense phenomenological ‘epiphany’

⁷ We would like to thank for an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the importance of this fact.

about the rather primitive phenomenological fact of the transition of one experience to another; all of us have to be wrong in some way if perdurantist eternalism is true. At this point, perdurantist eternalism goes against common-sense and subjective experience to an extreme degree.

For the sake of the argument, however, let us say that the eternalist wants to insist on this proposal and would like to claim that there is no experience of phenomenal succession of experiences. In this case, her proposed solution is still under suspicion of being circular. Let us focus on the memory of a certain experience. The proposal takes it for granted that such aspects could be parts of our experience without the experience of the succession of experiences. But this claim is in need of serious defense, for one may quite reasonably hold that the very condition of memory is the experience of the succession of experiences. In other words, it is very plausible that the reason that an experience can be referred to as a *past* experience in my present experience is precisely that I experienced that experience giving way to other experiences (or being followed by other experiences) and thereby *sinking into the past*. That is, the pastness of a re-presented experience is due to the fact that I experienced that experience as it became a past experience by giving way to another. Its pastness is engendered by the fact that I experienced it as an element in the *experiential succession* of experiences. Thus, what the eternalist has to provide is some kind of demonstration that the sense of pastness is not logically contingent on the experience of the succession of experiences. Otherwise, the proposal is question-begging.

Nevertheless, the problematic consequences do not end here. If eternalism is true, then each temporal part of the mind which experiences a static, phenomenal event experiences it eternally in an ontological sense. These experiences are eternal not in the sense that the phenomenal experience occupies all slices of time, but in the sense that they never cease to exist because they make propositions like “*m* experiences *E* at *t*” true at any point of time. That is, the proposition that some *m* temporal part of *S*’s mind experiences intensive breeze at *t*₁ is true regardless of when someone utters this proposition. Moreover, the experience of each temporal part of the mind never ceases to exist, not only in a specific ontological sense, but also in the sense that it never ceases to exist in relation to the temporal part of the mind that experiences it. From the subjective perspective of *m*, it is always the case that it experiences intensive breeze. However, if a phenomenological event does not cease to exist in relation to the perspective of the subject (that also does not cease to exist in an ontological sense), it has to be phenomenologically eternal from the subject’s point of view.

To put it mildly, it is hard to swallow this phenomenological implication of perdurantist eternalism. It is one thing to say that it is implausible in itself to claim that

the temporal part phenomenologically experiencing a specific moment in the writing of this paper will be the subjectively eternal experience of this temporal part. It is, however, quite another thing to say that the subjective experience that occurred *at only one moment* has subjectively and phenomenologically the same characteristics as if the subject had otherwise the very same experience *without end in time*.⁸ There has to be something wrong with a theory that implies that an experience that is over instantly after its occurrence from a subjective point of view, may be identical with an experience that is without change through all moments of time.

5 Conclusion

The basis of this paper was our transcendental-phenomenological argument against eternalism. We argued that if eternalism were true and thus the experiential life of a person were distributed between her distinct temporal parts, there could not be such a thing as the experience of the succession of experiences. We looked at the ways an eternalist might wish to answer this charge. One option for her is to affirm the experience of the succession of experiences but maintain that it is compatible with the eternalist understanding of the universe. The only way to do this is to introduce the idea of a gliding consciousness which traverses the temporal parts of the person, thereby generating the experience of the succession of experiences. Of course, this means that the eternalist would have to allow temporal dynamism in the case of the gliding consciousness, yet she could maintain that the universe outside it is temporally static. Now, this yields a picture of the world that is just very hard to believe. But this is the lesser problem. The more serious one is that it is in conflict with the well-established idea of the privacy of experience. Thus, our conclusion was that the experience of the succession of experiences is incompatible with eternalism. What is left for the eternalist at this point is to bite the bullet and deny what seems to be a self-evident experiential fact: that there is the experience of the succession of experiences. Accordingly, we found this an implausible and rather *ad hoc* proposal. Hence our conclusion is that since the experience of the succession of experiences is incompatible with eternalism and the denial of it is self-evidently false, perdurantist eternalism is most probably false.

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⁸ For this reason, it could also be argued that the very idea that each temporal part enjoys a subjectively ever-lasting experience implies that there is an experience of the succession of experiential phases, and thus its experience has to be characterized by temporal dynamism.

we had on many occasions. We are grateful also for an anonymous reviewer's suggestions that helped us to improve the paper.

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