

# Re: path-dependence: a philosophical issue concerning time

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- *From:* Justintruth <[truth.justin@xxxxxxxxx](mailto:truth.justin@xxxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Tue, 2 Dec 2008 09:52:53 -0800 (PST)
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On Dec 1, 2:02 pm, Haines Brown <[bro...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:bro...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

Justintruth <[truth.jus...@xxxxxxxxx](mailto:truth.jus...@xxxxxxxxx)> writes:

I think Occam's razor helps here. The issue of the "reality" of the past is reduced to a question of the "simplicity" of the required assumptions.

I don't want to quibble, for I'm quite sympathetic to Okham's Razor, but I fear you may be going a bit far with it. It is one of several subjective criteria by which we select among competing hypotheses, each of which is considered equally sufficient to the data. There are other criteria, such as whether a hypothesis is coherent or heuristic. I hope you don't imply that Okham's Razor in itself suffices to choose among hypotheses to the exclusion of other criteria. Also, Okham's Razor refers to the number of assumptions or auxilliary hypotheses, not their "simplicity".

I was just trying to point out that positing an objective history is no different than positing a time space manifold or other object as part of our "best guess" or "current theory" that "explains" experiment. Taking the time-space manifold of relativity as an example. It does not exist "in time" it is an objective model "of time". I am only pointing out that its "validity" is based in the same tests as were used in previous theories which posit entities "in time". In fact I am told that relativity can be described from the point of view of absolute time but that the equations are more complex and the resultant theory requires more assumptions. The notion of the existence of the past is not necessary but can be used in an objective model and when used is subject to the "standard" methods of verification namely that it be in agreement with observation and then it must meet the test of Okham's Razor.

I was not aware that there were other criteria like "choherence" or being "heuristic". I confess I did believe that it was just

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correspondence with observation and then Okam's razor. I will try to check out these other criteria. I never heard of them before you mentioned them. I believe theories need "coherence" to even be a candidate theory but I don't know that a theory being more heuristic would give it an advantage over another theory? "Simplicity" perhaps?

Understanding it correctly implies a mature recognition of the fact that all objective existence is posited and contingent on observation and therefore not fundamental or absolute and not existential but essential and constantly in the possibility of being disproved.

Is all existence contingent on observation? Doubt that there is a world independent of our consciousness is certainly a position that some philosophers have held, but not scientists in general, and the history of the philosophy of science in recent decades shows philosophers of science coming around more to the typical scientific view.

Please note that a condition of my question was that there is a world independent of our consciousness. I realize this assumption can be debated, but doing so does not help much to arrive at an answer to my question.

No existence is contingent on observation. Consistency with observation is merely the criteria for discriminating between competing objective theories. The contingency comes from the fact that all objective existence is completely unexplainable. It "could be otherwise" and therefore is "contingent" and depends on observation for confirmation or refutation. That is why scientific theory must be confirmed via experiment. Physical law cannot be derived mathematically.

With respect to the idea of "worlds behind the scenes" to use Sartre's phrase, I believe that it is true that most scientists would agree that in a sense there is a world independent of our consciousness but that in another sense there is not. The world is available in consciousness as that is the mechanism by which we experience it and in that sense it is not independent. However, I do agree that they posit objects existing (waves, particles, manifolds etc – it's set theory basically, the theory of objects) as well as non objective realities constituting constraints etc and that these entities "exist" independent of a given experiment. However, I think that for the scientific method to work they have to admit a possibility for experimental confirmation and this makes them not "completely independent" of our consciousness. For example I do not consider Tachyons as scientific because they are truly independent of our consciousness. Protons however are scientific precisely because they

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can on principle be observed.

It must also include a mature realization of the vast stability of the essent and the degree to which it has allowed scientific theorizing which at its heart is predictive and therefore temporal as well as its limitations.

I'm sorry, but I don't follow you here. I don't know what it means to say something is not existential but essential. I've no idea what this stability of the essent refers to.

At any time it is possible to turn ones attention away from what something is and consider instead the fact that it is. When one does that he turns from the essential to the existential.

The stability of the essent can be explained like this: I have a car out in the parking lot. I believe that if I get up and go outside I will see it. Now that is not a necessary fact. It cannot be derived that I have a car in the parking lot or that I will see it. However, there is a kind of stability in reality that is pervasive so much that for me to doubt that my car will be there is unreasonable. If this stability were to break down, if experience were to be altered such that I go out and there is no longer a car and then I turn and there is no building out of which I came and then etc etc then the basis for objective modeling would be eliminated. In this way the basis of objectivity is a real aspect of the world and is based on a kind of stability in its appearance.

In some ways this stability has in fact broken down. With respect to quantum mechanics certain naive notions of objectivity have broken down. However there is still a great stability since the wave functions still produce the probabilities of appearing reliably. Those laws are still contingent (dependent on the stability of the essent) and capable of being disproved in future experience so we do not know absolutely but only contingently that they will hold.

I do agree that the idea that there is some "reality" "causing" physical law is not scientific. The idea that there are real scientific laws I do not doubt. But that they are self causing or that something "in" reality "causes" reality seems to me to be ridiculous and entirely unscientific.

A non-predictive scientific theory is unscientific as it does not allow confirmation through future experiment.

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I don't want to be rude, but no one has thought this for a very long time,

Actually, that is not true as I have thought it recently and I am someone. However, either way its no argument because whether someone has thought something recently is not a good criteria for validity.

and it may actually be more an artifact of positivist ideology

than a description of scientific methods or what scientists actually do. I don't want to get hung up on this issue, but merely note that I tried to state my question in terms of current thinking, not because it is necessarily right, but because it makes sense to begin dialog in terms of it.

I have no problem starting with current thinking but it seems to me that all advances have come when one departs from current thinking where it is wrong. I think of the notion of the vacuum, the heliocentric theory, the theory of relativity etc. I do not believe that "common sense" leads to an understanding of the truth nor that what is "currently thought" is correct. I do not think that current philosophy is "correct".

Check this out:

[http://www.ma.utexas.edu/mp\\_arc/c/08/08-62.pdf](http://www.ma.utexas.edu/mp_arc/c/08/08-62.pdf)

as well as her latter posts.

Thanks for this very interesting citation. Off hand, the authors seem in agreement that time in quantum cosmology is a extranic property rather than an independent dimension.

Your welcome. Glad you liked it! She's great to read!

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Haines Brown, KB1GRM