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Do Asymmetries of Temporal Ontology Ground There Being Reasons to Have (Certain) Temporal Attitudes?

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Abstract

It has been argued that one or other asymmetry in temporal ontology grounds there being reasons to have certain temporal attitudes which we not only have, but also judge to be reasonable, and that this gives us reason to posit that asymmetry. Call this general form of argument, the Argument from Reasonable Attitudes (ARA). There are several versions of this argument depending on (a) the posited asymmetry and (b) the attitude(s) mentioned and (c) whether the reasons adduced are subjective or objective. I argue that none of the resulting versions of the ARA are sound, and so reflecting on the nature of these temporal attitudes does not furnish us a reason to posit an asymmetry in temporal ontology.

Keywords: temporal asymmetry; temporal attitude; reasons; temporal passage

1. Introduction

According to the Argument from Reasonable Attitudes, it is reasonable to have certain temporal attitudes where, very roughly for now, temporal attitudes are attitudes that are sensitive to the temporal location of their object. So, for instance temporal relief[1] is a temporal attitude in this sense, because we only feel temporal relief towards events that we represent as being in the past, rather than the present or the future. Moreover, temporal relief is a good example of an attitude that we typically take to (sometimes) be reasonable, and indeed, we take it to be reasonable when and only when it is directed towards negatively valued events that are represented as being in the past. But if certain temporal attitudes are reasonable, then *something* must ground[2] this being so. Since it is characteristic of many of these attitudes that they are temporally asymmetric—that is, they are sensitive to whether events are represented as being in the past or in the future—it is an attractive thought that what grounds their reasonableness is at least in part a temporal asymmetry of ontology: an ontological asymmetry between past and future states of affairs. Then, the thought goes, we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry which grounds our having reason to have the temporal attitudes that we do, and which we judge to be reasonable.

Now of course, this appeal to an asymmetry of ontology is only one way one might attempt to ground its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes. One might instead appeal to other asymmetries in, or of, time. For instance, one might appeal not to an ontological asymmetry, but instead to an asymmetry between past and future, of the kind posited by those who think that time is dynamical (i.e., that it robustly passes) such that events can be absolutely divided into those that are past, present, and future, and such that which events are present (past and future) changes. Then, one might hold that what

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grounds its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes is there being some absolute distinction between past and future such that we should direct different attitudes towards events located in the past compared to those in the future. Or one might appeal to the idea that time has a direction, in that events can be partitioned into those that are earlier, and those later, than other events, such that we have reason to direct different attitudes to those that are earlier than our location compared to those that are later. My aim in this paper is not to critique such views. Rather, it is to examine an alternative proposal, which locates the grounds of its being reasonable to have such attitudes in an ontological asymmetry, and then attempts to leverage that claim to argue that we consequently have a reason to posit an ontological asymmetry. It is this latter claim that is of particular interest to those interested in temporal ontology.

In what follows, I will take there to be an ontological asymmetry if there is an *ontological difference* between future events or states of affairs and past ones. That is, if either (a) future states of affairs/events exist, but past ones do not or (b) past states of affairs/events exist, but future ones do not. There are several examples of such views in the literature. The growing block view posits an ontological asymmetry on which reality grows as new states of affairs—and hence times, thought of as maximal aggregates of simultaneous states of affairs—come into existence. Once a time comes into existence it remains in existence thereafter, so the present time and all past times exist, but future ones do not. Hence, the growing block theory is a *dynamical* theory of time, since it posits that time *robustly passes*: there is a fact of the matter as to which time is present—namely the one at the growing end of reality, later than which there are no more times—and which time is present, changes—for new times are added to reality and times that were present, become past [1–9].

Another view that posits an ontological asymmetry is the shrinking block view. On that view, there is a block of states of affairs—and hence times, conceived of as maximal aggregates of simultaneous states of affairs—and that block shrinks as times pass from existence. That view comes in several incarnations [10,11]. The version of the view I have in mind is one on which future times exist and past ones do not. Like the growing block view, this view is dynamical. Reality shrinks as time robustly passes. There is a fact of the matter as to which time is objectively present—namely the one that sits at the *shrinking* edge of reality standing between the existent future and the non-existent past—and which time that is, changes, as times change from being at the edge of the block, to becoming past by ceasing to exist, with a different time coming to sit at the edge of the shrinking block and hence becoming present.

By contrast, many other models of time are ontologically symmetrical. Presentism is symmetrical since on that view *neither* past not future times exist. Eternalism and the moving spotlight views are symmetrical, since on those views *both* past and future times exist.

According to the Argument from Reasonable Attitudes, we have a reason to posit one or other of these ontological asymmetries because there being such an asymmetry would ground our having reason to have certain temporal attitudes. For instance, returning to temporal relief for a moment, we might argue that it is reasonable to experience temporal relief about events we negatively value and represent as past, but not reasonable to experience temporal relief about events we negatively value and represent as future. And we might argue that this is because past events do not exist and future ones do. It is reasonable to be relieved that some negative event does not exist, and not reasonable to be relieved that some negative event does exist. So, it is reasonable to be relieved when we represent a negative event as past, but not when we represent it as future. Hence, the asymmetry

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posited by the shrinking block theorist grounds our having reason to experience temporal relief [12].

Here is the broad schema of the argument.

The Argument from Reasonable Attitudes (ARA)

1. It is reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA.
2. If it is reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA, then something grounds its being reasonable to do so.
3. There being ontological asymmetry OA would ground its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA,
4. If there being ontological asymmetry OA would ground its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA, then we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry.
5. Therefore, we have a reason to posit ontological asymmetry OA.

There are several important things to note about this argument before we proceed.

First, as we will see, there will be several versions of this argument depending on (a) which temporal attitudes we substitute in for TA, and (b) which ontological asymmetry we substitute in for OA, and (c) what we mean when we talk of *reasonableness*. Since different versions of the argument substitute in different ontological asymmetries for OA, some of them will generate the conclusion that we have a reason to posit one ontological asymmetry, and some will generate the conclusion that we have a reason to posit a different, incompatible, ontological asymmetry. It is important to notice that these different conclusions are not, in themselves, incompatible with one another. That is because (5) talks about our having *a reason to* posit a particular ontological asymmetry. (5) does not talk about our having *an all things considered reason* to do so. And there can, of course, be a reason to posit one ontological asymmetry, and a different reason to posit the opposite asymmetry. Which asymmetry (if either) we have an all things considered reason to posit, will then depend on the overall weight of reasons. This latter claim about all things considered reasons is not one I take up; rather, I focus only on whether some version of the ARA can deliver us *a* reason to posit a particular ontological asymmetry, and indeed, whether multiple versions might give us competing reasons to posit different such asymmetries.

Second, I will be asking, throughout this paper, whether there being a particular ontological asymmetry would ground it being reasonable to have a particular temporal attitude. By this, I mean to ask whether, *if that asymmetry obtained* it would ground it being reasonable to have that attitude. This leaves open that it might be that *one, both, or neither*, of the ontological asymmetries would explain its being reasonable to have some *particular* temporal attitude. So, nothing I say presupposes that the reasonableness of any particular temporal attitude could only be grounded in one of the ontological asymmetries, and not the other. Of course, only one ontological asymmetry can in fact obtain. So, at most, a single, unique, ontological asymmetry *in fact* grounds its being reasonable to have some particular temporal attitude. But the question I will be asking is about *whether an ontological asymmetry would, if actual*, ground an attitude's being reasonable, and it may certainly be that more than one ontological asymmetry would do so.

Third, one might wonder how all this connects to our commonsense view of time. So far, I've noted that there will be different versions of the argument depending on what we substitute in for TA, and what for OA. But there will also be different versions depending on how we conceive of *reasonableness*. We might have in mind the idea that there being some ontological asymmetry grounds our having *objective* reason to have certain attitudes, or we might have in mind the idea that it grounds our having *subjective* reason to do so. I discuss these options at much greater length shortly. For now, I just want to note two things. First, objective reasons are grounded entirely in the way the world in fact is, and not in the ways we believe the world to be. Hence, whether some ontological asymmetry is

any part of our commonsense conception of time is entirely orthogonal to the question of whether the obtaining of that asymmetry would ground our having objective reason to have some particular temporal attitude. So, questions about our commonsense view of time are irrelevant to questions about whether some ontological asymmetry would ground our having objective reasons to have some attitude, and hence give us a reason to posit that asymmetry. By contrast, if the reasons in question are subjective, then a particular ontological asymmetry can *only* furnish us with a subjective reason to have certain attitudes *if we in fact believe that our world contains that asymmetry*. In this sense, there is a connection between our commonsense view of time and the presence of such subjective reasons. I will have more to say about this later in the paper. For now, I just want to note that I make no assumptions about what our commonsense view of time is like, nor that there is either a unique such view, or alternatively that there are multiple such views. I return to this issue in Section 4.

With that said, my aim is to evaluate different versions of the ARA that interpret it in terms of objective (Section 2) versus subjective (Section 3) reasons, and which focus on different temporal attitudes that can be substituted in for TA, and different ontological asymmetries that can be substituted in for OA.

Here is the plan of attack. In Section 2.1, distinguish three temporal attitudes that can be substituted in for TA. Then, in Sections 2.2–2.4, I develop three different versions of the ARA depending on which of these we substitute in for TA, and which ontological asymmetry we substitute in for OA. Then, in Section 3, I consider different interpretations of the claim that such attitudes are reasonable. On one interpretation, we mean that we have subjective reason to have those attitudes; on another, we mean that we have objective reason to have them. Each of these readings yields further versions of the ARA. I argue that on either interpretation, there is no sound version of the argument.

2. The Argument from Reasonable Attitudes

2.1. Revisiting the ARA

Let us remind ourselves of the ARA

The Argument from Reasonable Attitudes

1. It is reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA.
2. If it is reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA, then something grounds its being reasonable to do so.
3. There being ontological asymmetry OA would ground its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA,
4. If there being ontological asymmetry OA would ground its being reasonable to have temporal attitudes TA, then we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry.
5. Therefore, we have a reason to posit ontological asymmetry OA.

(1) talks of its being reasonable to have certain temporal attitudes. So, we need to know what reasonableness is, and we need to know what sorts of temporal attitudes we might substitute in for TA. Let us start with the latter.

The attitudes I have in mind are openness attitudes, temporal relief attitudes, and future-biased preferences, because these can be substituted into the ARA to generate what, on first inspection, is a plausible argument. I'll have more to say about each attitude in Sections 2.2–2.4. Roughly for now though, openness attitudes are a cluster of attitudes that we direct towards events we represent as future, and not towards those we represent as past. For instance, we deliberate about and take ourselves to be able to causally intervene on future but not past events. We direct a package of related attitudes—the openness ones—towards events represented as future, and not those represented as past. Temporal relief, by contrast, is the attitude of being relieved that something is over and done with,

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and it is an attitude we only direct towards events we negatively value and which we represent as past. Finally, future-bias is a preference over where in time, past or future, we prefer events to be located. It is temporally asymmetric in the sense that we tend to prefer that negative events be located in the past rather than equidistant in the future, and that positive events be located in the future not equidistant in the past. What is characteristic of these attitudes is that they are differently directed towards events depending on whether those events are represented as past or future.

Depending on which of these attitudes we substitute in for (1), it says that that attitude is reasonable. It seems natural to interpret this as the claim that we have reasons to have that attitude. As noted in the introduction, that immediately raises the question of what sorts of reasons are at issue: subjective or objective. I return to this issue in Section 3. I hope that we can, in the meantime, still get a sense of why one might be inclined to think that positing an ontological asymmetry gives us reason, *in some sense or other*, to have the attitudes we do. For it will be difficult to get a handle on the import of subjective versus objective reasons, without first having some sense of how the various versions of the ARA go.

Even setting aside whether to read the ARA in terms of objective or subjective reasons, there is more to be said about how to understand reasonableness. (1) talks of 'having' some temporal attitude TA. In what follows when I say that we *have some temporal attitude*, such as temporal relief, I will mean that we display a particular pattern of directing relief: in particular, in this case, we direct relief towards negatively valued events we represent as past, but not future. So, as I shall conceive of things, that we display temporal relief consists in our having that particular pattern of attitudes. Were we to, for instance, direct relief only towards positive events we represent as future, then we would certainly have a temporal attitude; but as I am using terminology it would not be temporal relief directed differently than we do, it would be *some other attitude*. I use terminology this way since I take it that it is the particular pattern of attitudes that we display, which we take to be reasonable, and so it is that pattern that I name as the temporal attitude in question that can be substituted in for TA.

With this in mind, notice that to say that it is reasonable to have some attitude might be to say that there are reasons that make it permissible to do so, or that there are reasons that make it obligatory to do so. In what follows I will assume only the following: if it is reasonable to have a certain temporal attitude, then it is at least permissible to have that attitude. So, for instance, if we substitute in temporal relief for TA in (1), then (1) can only be true if it is permissible to direct relief towards negatively valued events represented as past. This, of course, is consistent with its being *required* that we have this pattern of attitudes. Further, I will assume that if it is at least permissible to have some temporal attitude TA, then there is at least some *justifying reason* to have TA, where a justifying reason to φ is a reason that pushes towards the permissibility of φ, or, if you prefer, that consideration makes it permissible to φ in the absence of sufficiently weighty countervailing considerations for ~φ. By contrast, a requiring reason for φ is a reason that makes ~φ impermissible in the absence of sufficiently weighty countervailing considerations for ~φ.[3] All this is to say that I assume that the truth of (1) requires only the relatively weak claim that there is at least a justifying reason for TA. I take this to be an assumption that is friendly to my interlocutor.

In this paper I focus primarily on arguing that (3) is false, and so any version of the argument is unsound. That leaves open that there might be other reasons to resist the argument. Some will resist (1). One will reject (1) if one thinks that there are no substantive constraints on which non-doxastic attitudes we have reason to have. In particular, Humeans think there are no desire-independent reasons to have, or avoid having, particular conative

states, and so the question of the reasonableness of these attitudes simply does not arise. Alternatively, one might think that there are substantive reasons to have conative states and attitudes, but that in fact we don't have reasons to have any of the particular temporal attitudes in question: those attitudes are not reasonable. In either case one will reject (1).

In what follows I am going to simply give to the defender of the ARA that there are substantive reasons to have attitudes. That is, I will, for present purposes, assume a non-Humean view of reasons. Since I am in the business of rejecting the ARA, I take this concession to be friendly to my interlocutor. However, nothing I say relies on this assumption. I will also suppose that, conditional on there being substantive reasons to have non-doxastic attitudes, the temporal attitudes in question are reasonable. That is, I will grant each version of (1) on at some least *some* reading of 'reasonable'. To be clear: I am not arguing for (1), I am simply granting it for the purposes of this paper, because my interest lies in (3). If (1) is false too, then so much the worse for the argument.

Now, sometimes it might look like what I say relies on the truth of (1). It does not. Everything I say should be read as defending a conditional claim: *if* some temporal attitude is reasonable, *then it cannot be that what grounds it being reasonable is one or other ontological asymmetry*. So, my arguments often take the form of *supposing* some attitude to be reasonable and then showing how *if it is*, then what grounds its being so is not a particular ontological asymmetry. Or alternatively, the argument proceeds by supposing our world to contain some particular ontological asymmetry, and then showing how the presence of that asymmetry would not ground some attitude being reasonable. In both cases the aim is to show that the conditional is true. Importantly one can of course accept the truth of the conditional and still think that the antecedent is false. Then, one will deny (1) as well as (3).

Finally, one might think that one ought to take no stand on the truth of (1) without knowing something about the temporal structure of our world. One might argue, for instance, that whether our temporal attitudes are reasonable must be a function of the way the world is, temporally speaking, and so we ought not to be confident in the truth, or indeed falsity, of (1) before we know both what would ground those attitudes being reasonable, and whether those grounds obtain. So, the ARA is putting the cart before the horse in trying to reason *from* the reasonableness of those attitudes, *to* a conclusion about the structure of time (or temporal ontology).

Now, to re-iterate, I am not committed to the truth of (1), and so I do not wish to defend the ARA from such an objection. Having said that, while there is something obviously right about the claim that our attitudes can only be reasonable if there is something in our world that grounds them being so, and that, very likely, that something is at least partly about time, I think a defender of the ARA might legitimately resist this worry. It does not strike me as wild to suggest that our credence in its being reasonable to have certain of the attitudes we do, is stronger than either (a) our credence in the world being any particular way temporally speaking or (b) our credence in what would be required to render that attitude reasonable. If I were to defend the ARA, I might simply say this: of all the things that I am pretty sure of, that I am reasonable in feeling relief that the surgery is in the past, is high on my list. So, our world must be a way which makes that reasonable. What I do not know is either what this world is like, or what it is about this world that makes it reasonable, or both. But it is legitimate to begin my enquiry with the one thing about which I feel sure: that sometimes, temporal relief is reasonable. Now, again, nothing I say relies on this kind of view being right. But it is, at least, not so mad that one ought to reject the ARA out of hand.

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Moving on. I will also grant (2). If there are reasons to have certain temporal attitudes, then it seems very plausible that *something* grounds this being so. It is surely not a brute fact that there are such reasons.

In order to evaluate (3), we need to say more about the nature of the temporal attitudes in question, and to spell out the resulting versions of the ARA. It is this to which I turn in the following sections. I begin by considering the version of the ARA in which we substitute in openness attitudes for TA.

2.2. Openness Attitudes and the ARA

I will take openness attitudes to be a broad set of attitudes that, jointly, constitute its being the case that we take the future to be open, unsettled, and the product of what we will do, and the past to be closed, settled, and no longer the product of what we will do. To be clear, when I say that we take the future to be that way, I do not intend that to be a claim about our beliefs (though of course, we might also believe the future to be that way) but rather, a claim about our non-doxastic attitudes towards the future. This has the welcome outcome that no stance need be taken about either (a) what is in fact the right way to model future openness nor (b) what people in fact believe about the future being open (though for empirical work on the latter see [13–16].

While it is controversial what actual future openness consists in [17], I think we can do somewhat better at spelling out openness *attitudes*. To that end, I will suppose that taking an openness attitude includes taking a *deliberative stance* towards future events but not past ones, such that as part of this stance we take ourselves to be able to causally intervene on future events but not past ones. I also take it to include our taking a particular *epistemic attitude* towards the past that we do not take towards the future: namely, taking it to be that there are facts about the past, some of which can be known via consulting records, and that none of these facts are dependent on what we do in the present. Conversely, we act as though there are (often or always) no (contingent) facts about the future in the following sense: we do not expect to find (nor do we) records of future facts, and so insofar as we take a view about what will happen in the future, this is either to make a *prediction* about what will happen, or to form an *intention* that certain things will happen.

I take this to be a relatively uncontroversial and deflationary view about our attitudes. It seems extremely plausible that we have such attitudes. I also think that a defender of the ARA can argue that it is plausible that we take such attitudes to be reasonable, and that they are. As I noted earlier, I will concede the truth of this claim in what follows, though I am not certainly not arguing that it is true. Rather, I am asking the question, if those attitudes *are* reasonable, what sort of ontological asymmetry, if any, could ground that being so? Or, if you prefer, for each ontological asymmetry, could that asymmetry ground its being reasonable for us to have openness attitudes?

Some have already taken a stance on this question. According to some growing block theorists these attitudes are reasonable because past states of affairs exist, and future ones do not [4–6,8]. These authors reason as follows. If past states of affairs exist, then there are facts about what happened. Those facts are enshrined in the 'back' block—that portion of the block that is earlier-than the present moment. Moreover, since the growth of the block is itself a causal process, it follows that causes temporally precede their effects, because how things are, in the present, is causally responsible for how they are at future times, and how things were, at past times, is causally responsible for how they are, at the present time. This explains why the past is causally inaccessible and the future causally accessible. Past states of affairs do not causally depend on the present, but future ones do. Moreover, if causation involves leaving a mark, or record, of what was the case, then we can explain why there

are presently records of past events but not future ones by appealing to the asymmetry of causation.

So, we have reason to deliberate about the future and not the past, because (a) we know about the past and not the future, and it only makes sense to deliberate about that which we do not already know to be the case and (b) we can causally affect the future, but not the past, and it makes no sense to deliberate about what to do if one cannot causally act in the world so as to (attempt to) bring the outcome one decides upon through deliberation. So, the ontological asymmetry grounds a causal asymmetry and a knowledge asymmetry, which in turn ground both (a) our having different attitudes towards the future than the past and (b) its being reasonable to have different attitudes towards the future than the past.

Let us call the ontological asymmetry posited by the growing block theorist the *Past/No-future* Asymmetry. Then, we can spell out one version of the ARA as follows:

The ARA for a Past/No-Future Asymmetry

I. It is reasonable to have openness attitudes.
II. If it is reasonable to have openness attitudes, then something grounds its being reasonable to do so.
III. There being a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to have openness attitudes.
IV. If there being a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to have openness attitudes, then we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry.
V. Therefore, we have a reason to posit a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry.

Many take something like this argument to militate in favour of the growing block view [3–6,8,18] or at least, have discussed the possibility that it does [13–16]. But there are several things to notice about this argument.

As I noted earlier, even if sound this argument, like all versions of the ARA I consider, delivers a relatively modest conclusion. It tells us we have *a* reason to posit a particular ontological asymmetry. This is consistent with us not having an *all things considered* reason to do so. So, even if true, (V) does not entail that we ought, all things considered, to believe that our world contains a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry. That is why, as I noted in the introduction, it is not ruled out, as a matter of logic, that different versions of the ARA are *all* sound: for different versions might give us *a* reason to posit a *different* ontological asymmetry.

Second, the argument does not rely on showing that positing this ontological asymmetry is the *only possible* ground for our having reason to have openness attitudes. The argument is consistent with there being other features of time (or something else) which, if they obtained, would ground our having such a reason. Indeed, my own view is that it is some other feature of time which grounds these attitudes being reasonable, and that is because I am inclined to think that openness attitudes are reasonable and I do not think that their reasonableness *could* be grounded in an ontological asymmetry (and moreover, I do not think that any such asymmetry obtains, so even it *could* ground them, I do not think it *does*). But this paper is certainly not the place to articulate an alternative view of the grounds. My point here is just that this argument does not rely on the claim that the ontological asymmetry in question is the only possible grounds. The claim is simply that if that asymmetry obtained, it would ground the reasonableness of those attitudes. There is a stronger version of the ARA according to which the posited asymmetry is the only possible such ground. That argument might be appealed to in support of a stronger conclusion; namely that we have decisive reason to posit that ontological asymmetry. After all, a defender of this stronger version of the ARA could argue that since openness attitudes are reasonable, if the only way there could be reasonable is if there is a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry, then we should posit such an asymmetry. I won't focus on this

stronger argument since there is enough work to be done evaluating the weaker one, and since it would be difficult for the defender of this stronger version of the ARA to argue for the claim that an ontological asymmetry is the only possible ground of the reasonableness of these attitudes.

2.3. Future-Bias and the ARA

The next temporal attitude we could substitute into the ARA is future-bias. Future-bias is a preference. It is the preference, all else being equal, to have positive events (i.e., those we positively value) located in the future not equidistant in the past, and negative events (i.e., those we negatively value) located in the past not equidistant in the future. Future-biased preferences are preferences that are sensitive to temporal location (past versus future) *per se*, rather than merely being sensitive to something that is contingently connected to temporal location. For instance, one might prefer that a surgery is past rather than future because one clearly survived the past surgery without any ill effects, but for all one knows, something awful might happen in the future surgery. Then, one is sensitive to the *risk* of the surgery, which is contingently connected to where the surgery is located. Or one's preferences might be sensitive to the utility of the state of affairs over which one is forming the preference. For instance, suppose one is forming a preference over a pleasant walk yesterday, and a pleasant walk tomorrow. But suppose one is told that tomorrow's pleasant walk is twice as pleasant as was yesterday's if indeed you took the walk yesterday. Then, you would have a reason to prefer the more pleasant walk tomorrow, over the less pleasant one yesterday. Someone whose preferences are sensitive to these factors has preference that are, as one might hope, sensitive to the expected utility of the outcomes. Such people are *merely apparently* future-biased [19–21]. Future-biased preferences are those that are retained holding fixed factors other than temporal location.

One way to think of future-bias, then, is that it involves discounting the value of an event *when and because it is past*, compared to *when and because it is equidistant in the future*. Empirical evidence reveals that a majority of people display this pattern of preferences across an array of states of affairs over which one can form a preference [19–26]. Indeed, a majority of people have this preference even when the negative event is *more* disutilitous when it is *past* compared to *future*, and when the positive event is *less* utilitous when it is *future* compared to *past* [27,28]. For instance, Parfit says, of himself, that he would prefer to have had a 10 h painful operation yesterday, than to be going to have a 1 h painful operation tomorrow [29]. Empirical work shows that many people are like Parfit in this regard [27].

It is controversial whether it is reasonable to have genuinely future-biased preferences, with some philosophers arguing that it is [30–34] and others that it is not [35–39]. As before, my aim is to not to argue for the reasonableness of such a preference. Rather, I want to ask the question: would one or other ontological asymmetry ground it being reasonable to have such a preference? Or if you prefer, if such preferences are indeed reasonable, could their reasonableness be grounded in the presence of an ontological asymmetry?

The idea that this might be so follows pretty naturally from an existing view about what grounds the reasonableness of future-biased preferences. Several authors have argued that such preferences are reasonable, and that what grounds them being so is that we have reason to prefer that negative events be in the absolute past where they are over and done with, and positive ones in the absolute future where they are still to be experienced [32–34]. These authors then, defend the reasonableness of future-bias by appealing to the idea that time has the property of robustly passing. Here, I take robust passage to occur when and only when there is some objective fact of the matter as to which events/time is present, and such that which events/time that is, changes. Hence dynamical views of time are,

given this characterisation, views on which time robustly passes. The idea, very broadly, is that there being objective change in which things are present grounds our having reason to be future-biased because we have reason to prefer that negative events are objectively past rather than objectively future, and that positive ones are objectively future rather than objectively past. Whether robust passage, if it obtained, would ground the reasonableness of future-bias is controversial [40–44] and not something I aim to adjudicate here. A different approach, suggested recently by Yu [12] focusses on combining robust passage with ontological asymmetry to do this grounding work.

Let us call the ontological asymmetry posited by the shrinking block theorist, according to which future states of affairs exist, and past ones do not, the *No-Past/Future Asymmetry*. Yu [12] argues that the No-Past/Future asymmetry grounds our having reason to be future-biased. Her idea is this. We have a reason to prefer, of some negative event, that it does not exist, rather than that it does, and to prefer, of some positive event, that it exists rather than that it does not. Given the posited asymmetry, past events do not exist, and future ones do. So, that asymmetry grounds our having a reason to prefer that negative events are past, and hence do not exist, rather than future, and hence do exist, and to prefer that positive reasons are future, and hence exist, rather than past, and hence do not exist.

This yields the following version of the ARA:

The ARA for a No-Past/Future Asymmetry

A. It is reasonable to have future-biased preferences.
B. If it is reasonable to have future-biased preferences., then something grounds its being reasonable to do so.
C. There being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to have future-biased preferences.
D. If there being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to have future-biased preferences., then we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry.
E. Therefore, we have a reason to posit a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry.

At this point a reminder: remember that both of the aforementioned versions of the ARA could be sound (though I shall argue that neither is). Then, we would have competing reasons to posit two incompatible ontological asymmetries. The first version of the argument would give us a reason to posit a Past/No-Future Asymmetry, and the second would give us a reason to posit a No-Past/Future asymmetry. Then, we would need to weigh up the various reasons, in order to determine which, if either, asymmetry we have most reason to posit.

As before, for present purposes I am going to grant (A) to my interlocutor. In fact, I am not at all sure that future-biased preferences are reasonable. But I am interested in the question of whether, if they are, an ontological asymmetry could ground them being so, as Yu suggests, As before, I am also granting (B). We have just seen why Yu thinks we should accept (C). Of course, there are responses one might offer to Yu at this point. One might point out that never having existed, and having existed but existing no more, are different. Presentists think that dinosaurs do not exist, but did once exist, whereas they think that magic simply does not exist at all. And that might seem importantly different. So, one might press the idea that the fact that some past event *did* exist, *even though it no longer does*, undermines the claim that the posited asymmetry grounds our having a reason to be future-biased, because one does not have a reason to prefer that a negative event *did exist, but no longer does*, even though one does have a reason to prefer that it simply *never existed at all*. That is because in the latter case one is still preferring that the world contained overall more, rather than less, pain. For you are preferring that it is the case that there *was* much more pain, over its being the case that there *will be* much less pain. While I think

there is something to this thought, I am not going to rely on it in what follows. Instead, I will pursue a different avenue to arguing that this version of the ARA fails.

2.4. Temporal Relief and the ARA

That brings us to our last and final version of the ARA. This argument, too, concludes that we have a reason to posit a No-Past/Future asymmetry. But the attitude it appeals to in place of TA is temporal relief. Here is the argument.

The ARA for a No-Past/Future Asymmetry

a. It is reasonable to feel temporal relief.
b. If it is reasonable to feel temporal relief then something grounds its being reasonable to do so.
c. There being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to feel temporal relief.
d. If there being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry would ground its being reasonable to feel temporal relief, then we have a reason to posit that ontological asymmetry.
e. Therefore, we have a reason to posit a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry.

Temporal relief is the sort of relief Prior [34] refers to when he says that he is relieved that the painful dental surgery is 'over'. As it happens, I think that (a) is pretty plausible; but my aim is not to argue for that claim. Rather, my interest lies in whether, *if* temporal relief is reasonable, positing an ontological asymmetry could ground its reasonableness. So, I will grant to my interlocutor (a), and indeed (b). Yu [12] argues that we should accept (c). Recall that she argues that we have a reason to prefer that negative events do not exist rather than exist, and that positive events exist rather than do not, and so we have a reason to prefer that negative events are located in the past not the future, and positive ones in the future not the past. This, she says, gives us a reason to be relieved when some event that was future, and then present, becomes past. That is because by becoming past any event changes from existing to non-existing. So, consider some negative event such as a painful surgery. Matters are decidedly *better for one* once the surgery lies in the past, because the negative event of the surgery passes from existence. Hence, one has reason to be relieved once the painful dental procedure lies in the past. One is, in effect, being relieved that matters have improved.

So far, I have articulated the three versions of the ARA we get depending on which attitudes we substitute for TA, and which asymmetry we substitute for OA. As I noted earlier, however, this leaves a good deal unsaid with respect to the notion of reasonableness. It is to this I now turn.

3. Subjective Versus Objective Reasons

I have said that having an attitude is reasonable only if it is at least permissible, and that if it is at least permissible to have some attitude, then there is at least some justifying reason to have that attitude. That leaves open whether the justifying reason is a subjective or an objective reason. Our *objective* reasons are the reasons we have given the way the world in fact is. Our *subjective* reasons are the reasons we have if the world were as we believe it to be. So, suppose Dougie, the sheepadoodle, is hungry, and he believes that the stuff in front of him is roo meat, and he likes roo meat and roo meat satiates his hunger and is good for him. Let us suppose that Dougie has an objective reason to eat roo meat when he is hungry. As it happens, however, Dougie's belief that what is in front of him is roo meat, is false. What is in front of him is a plastic representation of roo meat. Dougie has no objective reason to eat plastic. So, Dougie has a subjective reason to eat what is in front of him. He believes there is roo meat, and he's hungry. He has that subjective reason because

were his relevant belief true, he would have objective reason to eat what is in front of him. But given the way the world is, he lacks objective reason to eat what is in front of him.

When philosophers ask whether we have reason to have certain temporal attitudes, then, they might be asking whether we have subjective reason, or they might be asking whether we have objective reason. When it comes to the temporal attitudes at issue here, philosophers are typically asking about objective reasons. They are not usually wondering whether *if the world were as people believe it to be*, they would have objective reason to be future-biased, or to experience temporal relief, or have openness attitudes. Rather, they are asking whether, *given the way the world in fact is*, people have objective reason to have those attitudes. Indeed, philosophers concerned with whether there are, say, reasons to be future-biased, rarely mention what people *believe* about, say, the properties of time, strongly suggesting that they are interested in objective not subjective reasons. So, I will begin by outlining a version of the ARA on which being reasonable is understood in terms of having objective reasons, before outlining a version on which being reasonable is understood in terms of having subjective reasons. That puts us in a position, in Section 4, to evaluate each of these versions.

So, suppose we interpret reasonableness in terms of there being an objective reason to have some temporal attitude. Then, we get the following schematic argument.

The Argument from Objectively Reasonable Attitudes (AORA)

1.* There is an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
2.* If there is an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, something grounds there being such a reason.
3.* There being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
4.* If there being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA
5.* Therefore, we have a reason to posit OA.

We can then spell out the version of the ARA that appeals to subjective reasons, as follows:

The Argument from Subjectively Reasonable Attitudes (ASRA)

1.** There is a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
2.** If there is a subjective reason to have attitude A, something grounds there being such a reason.
3.** There being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being a subjective reason to have attitude TA.
4.** If there being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being a subjective reason to have attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA
5.** Therefore, we have a reason to posit OA.

Here, I take it that to say that there being an ontological asymmetry would ground there being a subjective reason to have some temporal attitude is to say the following:

> Subjective Reason Ground (SRF): A posited ontological asymmetry OA, grounds X's having a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA, (a) when and because X has (justified) belief that OA obtains and (b) were that belief true, X would have an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.

Why accept SRG? Well, pretty clearly there being some ontological asymmetry does not, all by itself (fully) ground anyone having a subjective reason to have any attitude. After all, the world could be thus and so with respect to an ontological asymmetry, but that would not give anyone a subjective reason to have any attitude if no one believed that the

world was thus and so. So, it must be part of the grounds for someone having a subjective reason, that the individual has the relevant belief.

In what follows I will not suppose that (a) requires an explicit belief. That is, I will not assume that it requires that the individual explicitly (i.e., consciously) tokens the thought that our world contains a particular ontological asymmetry. I take this to be friendly to my interlocutor since it seems unlikely that most people explicitly think about whether either past or future states of affairs exist. So, if that were required for some instance of SRG to be true, it would follow that no version of the ASRA is sound.

I will allow that an individual counts as having a belief about temporal ontology if they have either an explicit belief or a tacit/implicit belief or folk theory with a certain content. For instance, it could be that people have a folk temporal theory (i.e., a folk theory of, *inter alia*, temporal ontology) in much the way that they have folk theories of mind, biology, and physics. These theories are not formal, explicit, or precise, but they typically include ontological commitments which provide a framework for explaining and predicting aspects of the world [45,46]. Importantly, intuitive theories are typically implicit. They guide behaviour, but need not involve people explicitly tokening a particular proposition to the effect that the theory is true. I will have more to say about this shortly.

Further, it is an open question whether the relevant belief must be justified. That is why I have put mention of justification in brackets in SRG. Those who think justification is required can read SRG as requiring this, those who do not, can leave it out. But nothing I say in what follows relies on justification being necessary for SRG. I will assume only that SRG requires, at a minimum, a tacit belief that the world is thus and so with respect to the posited ontological asymmetry. It also requires that were that belief true, the individual would have an objective reason to have the relevant attitude.

With all this in place, we are now in a position to evaluate different versions of the ARA.

4. Evaluating ASRA and AORA

In what follows I start by evaluating AORA. That is because, first, I think that this is the argument most philosophers have in mind. Second, someone's having a subjective reason requires that were their beliefs true, they would have an objective reason. So, if they wouldn't even have an objective reason, then they certainly can't have a subjective one. In Section 4.2, I turn to evaluate ASRA.

4.1. Evaluating AORA

Let us remind ourselves of AORA

The Argument from Objectively Reasonable Attitudes (AORA)

1.* There is an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
2.* If there is an objective reason to have temporal attitude A, something grounds there being such a reason.
3.* There being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
4.* If there being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA
5.* Therefore, we have a reason to posit OA.

In what follows I argue that (3*) is false. I present two arguments: the Argument from Descriptive Pattern Mismatch and the Argument from Normative Pattern Mismatch.

4.1.1. The Arguments from Pattern Mismatch

The Argument from Descriptive Pattern Mismatch

6.* There being an ontological asymmetry, OA, grounds there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, only if it grounds our having objective reason to have the descriptive pattern of TA-attitudes we have.
7.* There being OA does not ground there being objective reason to have the descriptive pattern of TA-attitudes we have.
8.* Therefore, there being OA does not ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.

I say that (6*) is plausible regardless of whether you think that the TA in question is reasonable. That is because all (6*) says is that the presence of an ontological asymmetry only counts as grounding the reasonableness of that TA, if it grounds the reasonableness of the actual pattern of attitudes we have, and that being true is consistent with TA in fact not being reasonable at all. Indeed, given the way I have defined what it is to have some temporal attitude TA, (6*) is practically analytic. For, recall, I've said that what it is to have TA is to have some particular pattern of attitudes. For suppose that there being an ontological asymmetry OA *would* ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA. If having TA is having some particular pattern of attitudes, then that can only be true if there being OA would ground our having objective reason to have the particular pattern of attitudes that we do, else it would ground our having reason to have *some other* temporal attitude altogether, than TA. So, we should all accept (6*).

Now, I can imagine someone thinking that this cannot be *quite* right. For suppose that our normative judgements about which temporal attitudes are reasonable come apart a little from our actual pattern of attitudes. Perhaps, that is, we do not always have the attitudes that we take to be reasonable. In that case we might think we have reason to reject (6*), because we would not expect the objective reasons that there are, to ground our having reason to have the exact pattern of attitudes we do. Instead, we'd expect them to ground our having objective reason to have the pattern of attitudes we take to be reasonable. Again, notice that we can accept this even if we think the relevant attitudes are not reasonable. That would be to accept a conditional claim: if certain attitudes *were* reasonable, we'd expect the objective reasons to align with our judgements about which pattern of attitudes is reasonable, rather than to align with the actual pattern of attitudes that we display. We will accept that conditional claim as long as we tend to think that our normative judgements are a better guide to the normative reasons than are our actual displays of attitudes, and it seems plausible that most of us will think this.

Even if (6*) is not quite right for just those reasons, it is still plausible that something close to (6*) is true. After all, consider those people who judge that some attitude is reasonable. They would be unlikely to judge this to be so if their actual attitudes radically failed to align with their normative judgments about those very attitudes. For that just would be to judge that mostly, their actual attitudes are not in fact reasonable! I take it that what it is to judge that our actual attitudes are reasonable (if one does so) is to think that, by and large, we have reason to display the actual attitudes we do. So, it seems safe to say that if we tend to think, as defenders of the ARA do, that our temporal attitudes are reasonable, it must be because for the most part, our normative judgments align with our actual attitudes. So, something *closely approximating* (6*) can be expected to be true. And again, one can accept that without thinking that our actual attitudes are reasonable: for that will simply be to think that if those attitudes *were* reasonable, it would have to be because we have objective reason to have something *very close to* the pattern of our actual attitudes. Then, we might amend (6*) to say something like (9*): There being an ontological asymmetry, OA, grounds there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, only if it grounds our having objective reason to have the pattern of TA-attitudes that we normatively judge to be reasonable where, as per our discussion so far, this latter must be

very close to the pattern of our actual attitudes, else we would not judge that our actual attitudes are reasonable.

We can then offer the following argument as a refinement on the Argument from Descriptive Pattern Mismatch.

The Argument from Normative Pattern Mismatch

9.* There being an ontological asymmetry, OA, grounds there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, only if it grounds our having objective reason to have the pattern of TA-attitudes that we normatively judge to be reasonable.

10.* There being OA does not ground there being objective reason to have the pattern of TA-attitudes that we normatively judge to be reasonable.

11.* Therefore, there being OA does not ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.

As I've just said, (9*) is very plausible as a constraint on what it would *be* for there to be objective reasons for us to have TA, regardless of whether we think there are any. So, I think we should accept it regardless of whether we think that TA is in fact reasonable. What of the second premises of each of the above arguments? (7*) and (10*) make similar claims. (7*) says that there being OA does not ground there being objective reason to have the descriptive pattern of TA-attitudes we have. (10*) says that there being OA does not ground there being objective reason to have the pattern of TA-attitudes that we normatively judge to be reasonable. We can argue for both by appealing to the same considerations because, as I alluded to above in my discussion of (6*), insofar as we think our actual attitudes *are* reasonable, we would expect our normative judgments to closely align with our actual pattern of attitudes. And indeed, we have some empirical evidence that this is so when it comes to people's future-biased preferences and their normative judgments about those preferences [47,48]. So, in what follows I will suppose that there is a close alignment of our actual pattern of attitudes and our normative judgements regarding the reasonable pattern. Given this we can amalgamate (7*) and (10*) into a single claim:

> No Ground: There being OA does not ground our having objective reason to have the pattern of TA-attitudes we do, nor does it ground our having objective reason to judge, as reasonable, the pattern of TA-attitudes that we do.

There are then three versions of No Ground depending on how we substitute in attitudes for TA and ontological asymmetries for OA. These are as follows.

> No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_1$: There being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry does not ground our having objective reason to display temporal relief, nor does it ground our having objective reason to display the pattern of temporal relief that we judge to be reasonable.
>
> No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_2$: There being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry does not ground our having objective reason to be future-biased, nor does it ground our having objective reason to have the pattern of future-biased attitudes that we judge to be reasonable.
>
> No *Past/No Future* Ground: There being a Past/No Future ontological asymmetry does not ground there being an objective reason to have openness attitudes, nor does it ground our having objective reason to have the pattern of openness attitudes that we judge to be reasonable.

If the above three claims are true, then (3*) of the AORA, in *any* of its versions, is false. Let us consider each in turn.

Why accept the third of these: No *Past/No Future* Ground? On the face of it, this claim looks to be false. Individuals located at the edge of the growing block staring out into a

non-existent future seem to have objective reason to have openness attitudes. But consider an individual located in the objective past. That individual is such that there exist lots of later times. Those later times are, relative to that past individual, future—that is, they are *relatively future*, even though they are *objectively past*. Notice, though, that things seem the same with respect to future openness to that past individual as they do to individuals sitting at the growing edge of the block. The past individual is situated, with respect to events that are *relatively future*, but *objectively past*, the very same way they were when they were sitting at the edge of the block. That individual has no greater access to those relatively future but objectively past events than they did when those events did not exist.

Moreover, located as they are in the past, that individual has the same attitudes they had when they were present. For all that has happened as additional times are added to the block, is that the time at which they are located has entered into new relations with new times that have come into existence. The intrinsic nature of that time has not changed. Or at least, that is typically how block-accretion has been thought to work [49], although there are alternative proposals [4–7]. I set aside these latter views because if the past is not as it was, when it was present, then it cannot easily be a partial ground of our having reasons to, say, suppose there to be truths about what happened which are encoded in the block, since in fact no such truths are encoded [50].

Notice, though, that once we make this assumption then it follows that from the perspective of a past time *there is no ontological asymmetry*, since from that perspective both past and future times exist. That means that if, say, Freddie at t has attitudes of openness towards events that occur later than t, then Freddie will have those attitudes regardless of whether t is the present time, after which there are no later times, or a past time after which there are later times. Freddie is not unique in this regard. Given that, our openness attitudes do not align with the posited asymmetry. For we have the same openness attitudes at a time, whether, from the perspective of that time, that asymmetry holds or not. Hence, it cannot be that the posited asymmetry grounds our having reason to have the openness attitudes we do. It does not. It grounds us having reason to have those attitudes when, and only when, we are located in the objectively present moment.

What of our normative judgements. Well, consider. If the ontological asymmetry in question grounds our having objective reasons, then we have objective reasons to have openness attitudes at a time, only when that time is objectively present. Does this align with what we in fact judge to be reasonable in this regard? No. Are we inclined to judge that Freddie's openness attitudes cease to be reasonable the moment that the time at which he has those attitudes ceases to be present? Surely not. What motivates this verdict is partly that it ought not make a normative difference that time has passed, to our evaluation of Freddie's attitudes. It ought not be the case that his attitudes somehow change from being reasonable when t is present, to unreasonable when it is not. It is also partly motivated by the fact that we are inclined to judge that the attitudes are reasonable even when t is past, because Freddie's epistemic position as regards the future is the same when t is past, as when t is present. After all, Freddie has the same epistemic access to future facts regardless of whether future times exist or not. He has the same casual access to future times, regardless of whether they exist or not. The mere fact of the existence of those future times as of t being past, compared to t being present, makes no difference to Freddie's epistemic access to future facts, nor to his ability to bring about future events. So, it makes no difference to anything that is relevant to whether it is reasonable for Fredie to have openness attitudes. So, I think we will tend to judge that Freddie's attitudes at t are reasonable even when t is past. But if that is right, then it follows that our normative judgements do not align with the posited ontological asymmetry. That is, the posited

asymmetry does not give us objective reason to have the attitudes that we judge to be reasonable. So, No *Past/No Future* Ground, is true.

Next, consider No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_2$ according to which there being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry does not ground our having objective reason to have future-biased preferences, nor ground our having objective reason to have the future-biased attitudes that we judge to be reasonable. To see why, notice that the posited asymmetry is supposed to ground our having objective reason to discount the value of past events compared to future ones because the former do not exist while the latter do. This, however, implies that we have objective reason to accord past events *no value at all*. If having existed, but existing no more, is an objective reason to discount the value of past events—which it had better be if the posited asymmetry is to be reason giving in the manner intended—then it surely grounds our having a reason to discount them *entirely*. For a start, it is *prima facie* very plausible that we should accord no value to non-existent states of affairs. Imagine the person who is a little saddened by some absolutely awful non-existent state of affairs. They tell you that although the state of affairs is negatively valued by them *a lot less* than it would be, were it existent, it still has some negative value. And, they say, the state of affairs is truly awful, hence their sadness. I take it we would likely refer them to a professional. Or consider the best event you can; an event approaching infinite utility. Now consider an event that has the smallest possible utility. Which do you, and should you, prefer? Clearly you should prefer the former to the latter! Now suppose that the former does not exist, and the latter does. If you should accord *even a tiny bit* of value to non-existent states of affairs, then you should likely still prefer the former to the latter: for even massively discounted an almost infinitely utilitous non-existent state of affairs is still likely worth more than an existent state of affairs of the smallest possible amount of positive utility. But that is madness. So, clearly, we should discount non-existent things entirely. In turn, if the ontological asymmetry in question grounds our having objective reason to be future-biased, then it grounds our having reason to entirely devalue past states of affairs compared to future ones.

This, however, is not the attitude that people take, nor the attitude they judge they should take. Very few people judge that it is reasonable to prefer infinite past torture over the smallest conceivable future discomfort. Indeed, some people start to shift away from future-biased preferences once the disutility of the past event exceeds that of the future event by a factor of 10 [27,51]. Moreover, we know that people display retrospective near-bias: they prefer that negatively valued events are located farther in the past rather than nearer, and positively valued events located nearer in the past rather than farther [52]. So, people do not devalue past events entirely. Moreover, people do not judge that they should devalue past events entirely [47,48]. Hence, if the posited asymmetry grounds our having some kind of temporal preference, it does not ground our having reason to have the preference we do, not does it ground our having a preference that we judge to be reasonable. Hence No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_2$ is true.

Yu [12] considers something close to this objection. She responds that people's normative judgments may be unreliable because they are sensitive to the contingent fact that past disutility almost universally produces *present* and *future* disutility by way of, say, unpleasant memories, bodily damage, recurring pain, psychological trauma, and so on, while the converse is true of past utility. The posited asymmetry gives us reason to *avoid present and future* disutilities, and to *promote present and future* utilities. Hence it gives us reason to avoid past disutility *insofar as it brings about present and future disutilities*. Thus, Yu says, our general disposition to accord some (dis)utility to past events might be a function of our tracking the fact that contingently, such (dis)utility generates present and future

(dis)utility, rather than due to us valuing it for its own sake, and likewise for our normative judgements in this regard.

Yu is at least partly right about this. Lee at al [52] found that people are less inclined to be concerned about past pains that have no effect on present and future disutility than those that do. Indeed, a few participants in their study reported that if past pain had no disutilitous effects in the present or future, *they would prefer any amount of past pain to some amount of future pain*. This, of course, is precisely the pattern of preferences that the posited asymmetry would ground being reasonable. However, it is worth noting that most participants did not show this pattern; instead, while holding fixed the absence of present or future disutility tended to result in more people preferring a greater past pain to a lesser future one, most people did not entirely discount the value of past pains. Given this, I think that people's normative judgements are sensitive to the difference between past (dis)utility that influences present and future (dis)utility, and past (dis)utility that does not, and that most people still accord value to the latter, and if that is right then No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_2$ is true.

Finally, consider No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_1$, according to which there being a No-Past/Future ontological asymmetry does not ground our having objective reason to display temporal relief, nor does it ground our having objective reason to have attitudes of temporal relief that we judge to be reasonable. To see why this is so, let us return to Freddie.

At t_6, Freddie is experiencing temporal relief about a painful surgery. The painful surgery is located at t_3, which is earlier than t_6. Suppose t_6 is the present moment, and so t_3 lies in the past. As such, t_3 no longer exists. So, we can say that the ontological asymmetry grounds Freddie having objective reason to be temporally relieved, because at t_6 the object of his relief, the painful surgery, does not exist. So far so good. But now consider how things stand when t_1 is the objectively present moment. When t_1 is present, both t_3 and t_6 exist, since both lie in the future. If Freddie is relieved at t_6, that the surgery is over, then unless the intrinsic nature of t_6 changes, it is already true, as of t_1, that *at* t_6 *he is relieved*. Yet when t_1 is present, it is true as of t_6, that t_3 exists. So, Freddie, located as he is in the future, has a pattern of attitudes that does not track the objective reasons afforded by the ontological asymmetry. Rather, that asymmetry grounds Freddie having reason to fail to feel relieved at t_6, when t_6 is in the future and t_3 exists, and to then come to feel relieved only after t_3 passes from existence: i.e., at all times after t_4. But this is not what we find.

Moreover, the objective reasons grounded by this asymmetry surely do not align with the attitudes that we take to be reasonable. We do not think that when t_6 and t_3 are both in the future, that Freddie lacks a reason to be temporally relieved vis a vis the painful surgery, and only gains that reason once t_3 ceases to exist. Indeed, it seems very plausible that we take Freddie's reason to have something to do with the relative locations of the surgery *to Freddie at* t_6 [41,42,53] namely that the surgery is earlier than t_6 and is so regardless of which time is objectively present, and regardless of which times exist. While I don't have empirical evidence about this, I suspect that most people's normative judgements about Freddie's temporal relief will fail to track the objective reasons that would be afforded by the posited asymmetry. So, I say, we should accept No *No-Past/Future* Ground$_1$.

In turn, since we should accept each of the aforementioned claims, we should reject (3*) of the AORA. Even if there *were* the relevant posited ontological asymmetry, it would *not* ground our having objective reason to have the temporal attitudes that we judge to be reasonable.

Next, in what follows I offer a different argument to the conclusion that (3*) is false.

4.1.2. The Argument from Explanatory Absence

Let us remind ourselves of the Argument from Objectively Reasonable Attitudes (AORA)

1.* There is an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
2.* If there is an objective reason to have temporal attitude A, something grounds there being such a reason.
3.* There being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
4.* If there being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being an objective reason to have temporal attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA
5.* Therefore, we have a reason to posit OA.

In what follows, I offer another kind of argument to the conclusion that (3*) is false. This is the argument from explanatory absence.

The Argument from Explanatory Absence

12.* What gives us objective reason to have some temporal attitude, TA, also explains our having that attitude (Explanatory Link).
13.* If what gives us objective reason to have some temporal attitude, TA, also explains our having that attitude, then there being an ontological asymmetry, OA, does not ground our having an objective reason to have TA[4].
14.* Therefore, there being an ontological asymmetry, OA, does not ground our having an objective reason to have TA.

The above argument is clearly valid. And if (14*) is true, then (3*) is false. So, if I can defend the Argument from Explanatory Absence, then I can show that the AORA is unsound. Let us begin with the first premise of the Argument from Explanatory Absence, which I call Explanatory Link.

> Explanatory Link (EL): what gives us objective reason to have some temporal attitude, TA, also explains our having that attitude[5].

I think we should accept EL, and hence (12*). That is because if what gives us objective reason to have some temporal attitude, and what explains our having that attitude and judging it to be reasonable, are *entirely distinct*, as would be implied by the falsity of EL, then in having those attitudes and judging them to be reasonable we are not tracking the objective reasons. If this is the case, there seem to be very few grounds to think that our actual attitudes fact align with the objective reasons. After all, our epistemic access to those reasons seems to largely, or perhaps even entirely, come from the fact that we have the attitudes we do, and judge them to be reasonable. We take there to be the objective reasons we do because we take our normative judgments about our actual attitudes to be tracking those reasons, and we take it that, at least in part, the explanation for our having those attitudes that we take to be reasonable is that we are conforming those attitudes to the reasons. If EL is false, then this cannot be right. So, insofar as we think we have good grounds to posit there being objective reasons to have certain temporal attitudes, we should think that there is some connection between the obtaining of those reasons and our having those attitudes and judging them to be reasonable. This is captured by EL.

Why accept the second premise of the Argument from Explanatory Absence? That premise is a conditional claim. It says that if EL is true, then there being an ontological asymmetry, OA, does not ground our having an objective reason to have TA. I've already argued that EL is true. So, if this conditional claim is true, the argument is sound. But why accept this conditional?

I take it that in order for a posited ontological asymmetry to explain why we have the attitudes we do, as is required if EL is true, we must have those attitudes *because* of that ontological asymmetry. So, it must at least be the case that the posited asymmetry

makes a difference to *whether we have* those attitudes. Further, I assume that a posited asymmetry makes a difference to whether we have some attitudes just in case were the asymmetry to not obtain, we would not have those attitudes. That is to say, our having those attitudes counterfactually depends on there being that ontological asymmetry. Call this the counterfactual dependence thesis.

> CDT: An ontological asymmetry makes a difference to whether individuals have attitudes TA, only if, were the asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not have those attitudes.

To see why CDT is plausible, I take it that you are, right now, reading the words on this page. That you are reading those words explains why you are having the perceptual and intellectual seemings you are. But now suppose I tell you that what explains your having those seemings has nothing to do with the fact that you are readings these words, and indeed, that you would be having the same experiences regardless of whether you were reading these words or not. So, the presence of these words being read by you makes no difference to your having those experiences. The analogue of CDT is false in this case. Further, I take it, if you learn this then you should conclude that it is not the case that the presence of these words being read is what explains your having the experiences you do, given that we know you'd be having them regardless. So, we should accept CDT.

In what follows I argue that the consequent of the CDT conditional is false, and hence so must be the antecedent. In turn, if the antecedent is false, then EL is false. That is to say that if EL is true, then it cannot be that what grounds our having objective reason to have TA is OA. Since EL is true, it follows that OA does not ground our having objective reasons to have TA.

The key claim to be defended is this: were the posited ontological asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not have TA attitudes. There are three versions of this key claim, depending on which attitude we substitute in for TA, and which ontological asymmetry is the relevant one. Here are those claims:

(A): Were the No-Past/Future asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not experience temporal relief.

(B): Were the No-Past/Future asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not have future-biased preferences.

(C): Were the Past/No Future asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not have openness attitudes.

As I will show shortly, all of these claims is false. CDT is true. Each of these is the consequent of the appropriately filled out version of CDT. So, since each of these is false, it follows that the antecedent of each of those CDT conditionals must also be false, else the conditional would be false when we have already argued that it is true.

The antecedent says that the ontological asymmetry in question makes a difference to whether individuals have the relevant temporal attitude. So, by showing that (A) through (C) are false we show that the ontological asymmetries in question make no difference to whether individuals have the relevant TA attitudes.

To see why (A) through (C) are true, consider three worlds: an eternalist B-theoretic world which, therefore, lacks any ontological asymmetry, a shrinking block world which contains the No-Past/Future asymmetry, and a growing block world that contains a Past/No Future asymmetry. Next, let us stipulate that the shrinking block world at the beginning of time is qualitatively identical to the eternalist block, and that the growing block world at the end of time is qualitatively identical to the eternalist block (and hence to the shrinking block at the beginning of time). So, in the shrinking and growing block worlds, as time passes what exists, *simpliciter*, is always a proper sub-set of what exists, *simpliciter*, in the eternalist world. Given this stipulation, it must be that things seem the

same in all three worlds. After all, each world is a time-for-time duplicate. The only difference is that in two of the three worlds not all of the times always exist.

Now suppose that the shrinking block world is actual and evaluate the two counterfactuals: (A) Were the No-Past/Future asymmetry to not obtain, individuals would not experience temporal relief; (B) Were the No-Past/Future asymmetry to not obtain, individuals would not have future-biased preferences. Is the closest world in which that ontological asymmetry fails to obtain, one in which individuals fail to have those attitudes? No. It is not obvious which world is the closest one to the actual world, in which that ontological asymmetry does not obtain. Pretty plausibly, though, it is either the growing block or eternalist world introduced above. After all, each of those is a time-for-time duplicate of the actual shrinking block world. It is hard to see how any world could be both (a) closer to the shrinking block world and (b) lack the posited asymmetry. Whichever of those two worlds is closest, though, it is false that if the ontological asymmetry had not obtained, then there would have been different attitudes. There would, regardless, have been the very same attitudes.

Now suppose that the growing block world is actual and evaluate the relevant counterfactual: (C) Were the Past/No Future asymmetry not to obtain, individuals would not have openness attitudes. An analogous argument shows that this counterfactual is also false. For either the shrinking block or the eternalist block are the closest worlds to the actual growing block world that lack that ontological asymmetry, and, in both worlds, individuals have the same attitudes as in the actual growing block world. Hence, absent that ontological asymmetry, individuals would have had the same attitudes. Hence, the posited asymmetry makes no difference to the attitudes displayed.

And none of this should be remotely surprising. In order for the presence of some ontological asymmetry to explain our having the attitudes we do, it needs to be that our attitudes are in some manner sensitive to the presence of the ontological asymmetry. But there is no way to detect whether past or future times exist, and so there is no way that our attitudes can be sensitive to the presence of certain times, and the absence of others. So, it should always have been clear that that the presence of an ontological asymmetry cannot explain our having the attitudes we do. Hence, the second premise of the Argument from Explanatory Absence is true. In turn, the conclusion is true: there being an ontological asymmetry, OA, does not ground our having an objective reason to have TA. The truth of this claim entails the falsity of (3*) of the AORA, and hence entails that that argument is unsound.

That brings me to the end of my discussion of AORA. That leaves ASRA, which appeals to subjective rather than objective reasons. It is to versions of this argument that I now turn.

4.2. Evaluating ASRA

Recall that the Argument from Subjective Reasons goes as follows:

1.** There is a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
2.** If there is a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA, something grounds there being such a reason.
3.** There being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA.
4.** If there being an ontological asymmetry OA would ground there being a subjective reason to have temporal attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA
5.** Therefore, we have a reason to posit OA.

I say we should reject this argument because both (3**) and (4)** are false. Consider (3**). (3**) is true only if SRG is true.

> SRG: A posited ontological asymmetry OA, grounds X's having a subjective reason to have attitude A, (a) when and because X has a (justified) belief that OA obtains and (b) were that belief true, X would have an objective reason to have attitude TA.

I argue that SRG is false, so (3**) is false. SRG is false because, first, if what I have already argued is true, then (b) is false because the posited ontological asymmetries do not ground our having objective reasons to have the relevant temporal attitudes. So, we already have reason to reject SRG. But even if you reject what I have already said about objective reasons, you should reject SRG since you should reject (a).

(a) requires, at a minimum, that people have the relevant belief regarding the ontological asymmetry in question (setting aside any need for it to be justified). Even allowing, as I am, that the belief might be tacit, this is not very plausible. For a start, two of the ASRA arguments posit a No-Past/Future asymmetry. While I do not, here, want to take a stand on what the commonsense view is, of time, it seems very unlikely that many non-philosophers believe that past times do not exist, but future ones do. (a) might strike us as more plausible when we have in mind the Past/No-Future asymmetry. After all, growing block theorists often claim that their model of time is an intuitive one that we might expect the 'man on the street' to accept precisely because it combines a fixed past with a non-existent and hence potentially open, future [5,6,8]. However, empirical work does not vindicate the idea that most people tacitly have a model of our world as a growing block [54].

Indeed, it is worth briefly pausing here. There is a good deal of empirical work about people's commonsense view of time, which suggests that there is some variation in the population in this regard. I don't want to take any stand on what peoples' commonsense view is like, or to what extent there is such variation, beyond noting that I think it unlikely that many, if any, people think that past states of affairs do not exist, and future ones do. It is, however, worth noting that in order for all the various versions of the ASRA to be sound, it would need to be that there are multiple commonsense views of time in at least this much: it would need to be that some people believe that there is one ontological asymmetry, and some believe there is the other. Having said that, one could defend one version of the ASRA and reject the others, thereby positing that there is a single commonsense view of time shared by everyone (or close enough) which posits just one ontological asymmetry. Thus, defenders of a version of the ASRA need not be committed to any view about the nature of our commonsense view of time.

However, I do think that these considerations mean that we should reject (3**) entirely when the posited OA is a No-Past/Future asymmetry, since (a) of SRG will be false then: no one has the relevant belief. By contrast, we might want to say that for some agents, (a) of SRG may well be true, given that empirical works suggests that some people do have a commonsense view of time which posits a Past/No-Future asymmetry. Even so, I think that (3**) is still false despite this, since I think that even were that asymmetry to obtain—i.e., were that belief to be true—it would not ground anyone having objective reason to have any of the temporal attitudes we do. I have already argued for that claim.

As it happens, I also think that (4**) is false. (4**) says that if there being an ontological asymmetry, OA, would ground there being a subjective reason to have attitude TA, then we have a reason to posit OA. So, it says that if SRG is true, then we have a reason to posit OA. So, suppose that SRG is true. Let us use an example to make things clearer. Suppose that Dougie believes (justifiably if you like) that there is a Past/No Future asymmetry. Suppose further that were there that asymmetry, then Dougie would have objective reason to have openness attitudes. Then, Dougie has subjective reason to have openness attitudes: the relevant instance of SRG is true. So, according to (4**) in virtue of this there is a reason to posit a Past/No-Future asymmetry. But surely there is not.

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To see why this is, think back to Dougie and the apparent roo mince in front of him. Dougie has subjective reason to eat the stuff in front of him given his beliefs and desires. Still, it hardly follows from the fact that Dougie has that subjective reason, that there is a reason to infer that the stuff in front of him *is roo*. After all, his having that subjective reason is entirely consistent with there being no roo in front of him. What grounds his having the subjective reason he does is that he has a certain belief and desire combination (a belief that there is roo, and a desire to eat roo) alongside the truth of a particular conditional claim, namely that were it roo in front of him, he'd have objective reason to eat it. That conditional claim can be true because as a matter of fact there is roo in front of him and that gives him objective reason to eat it, (the subjunctive mood of the 'were' here takes us to the closest world with roo, which is in fact the actual world) or because there is no roo in front of him, but in the closest world(s) in which there is, he has objective reason to eat the roo. Given this, it is entirely unclear why we should infer the presence of roo in front of Dougie, on the basis of his having a subjective reason to eat what is before him. What is true of Dougie is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of our having subjective reason to have certain attitudes: namely, even if we have those subjective reasons, we do not have an epistemic reason to posit the relevant ontological asymmetry. So, (4**) is false.

Now, perhaps you think this argument is too swift. For suppose we think that justification is part of SRG. Then, we might reason as follows: an individual can only have subjective reason to have certain attitudes if they have a *justified* belief that the world contains some particular ontological asymmetry. So, if they do have the relevant subjective reasons, then we have an epistemic reason to posit the relevant ontological symmetry, since it follows that the belief that there is such an asymmetry is justified. Put like that, however, the problem should be obvious. Our aim was to infer that we had a reason to posit a certain ontological asymmetry because we have certain reasonable attitudes, and the existence of that ontological asymmetry grounds those attitudes being reasonable. Now, however, the basis on which we infer that we have a reason to posit the asymmetry is nothing to do with our having certain reasonable attitudes, but rather, merely that we have a justified belief that there is such an asymmetry. And of course, we do have such a reason if we have such a belief. But we don't, as it were, get *more* reason out than we put in. If we already have a justified belief, then appealing to the existence of that belief can't give us a *further* reason to posit the asymmetry.

So, I say, we should reject the ASRA.

5. Conclusions

Even if we grant that there are substantive normative reasons, subjective or objective, to have certain attitudes, and that there are in fact such reasons to have some of the very attitudes that we do have, there is no way to leverage that being so, to yield the conclusion that we have a reason to posit one or other ontological asymmetry. Perhaps there are such reasons, but these are not they.

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Notes

[1] The distinctive relief one experiences when something is over and done with, as opposed to counterfactual relief, which is the relief that something is less bad than it could have been.

[2] I often use the term 'grounds' in what follows. However, I do not have in mind any metaphysically weighty notion here such as a relation of dependence that connects distinct entities. If you are sceptical of grounding, feel free to replace grounding talk with talk of what explains, or makes it the case that, the attitudes are rational.

[3] I think, however, that everything I say holds true even if one takes justifying and requiring reasons to be independent of one another, so that a reason need not have the same amount of justifying weight towards φ's permissibility, as it does requiring weight for ~φ's impermissibility.

[4] Notice that since (8) (EL) is a claim about partial explanation, we should also read (9) that way.

[5] EL requires at the very least, that what grounds our having objective reason to have certain attitudes is at least a *partial* explanation for our having those attitudes.

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