

THE TENSED THEORY OF TIME

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VOLUME 293

THE TENSED THEORY OF TIME

A Critical Examination

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To

ALVIN PLANTINGA

who by his work and his life
has pointed the way

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PREFACE

The present book and its companion volume *The Tenseless Theory of Time: a Critical Examination* are an attempt to adjudicate what one recent discussant has called “the most fundamental question in the philosophy of time,” namely, “whether a static or a dynamic conception of the world is correct.”¹

I had originally intended to treat this question in the space of a single volume; but the study swelled into two. I found that an adequate appraisal of these two competing theories of time requires a wide-ranging discussion of issues in metaphysics, philosophy of language, phenomenology, philosophy of science, philosophy of space and time, and even philosophy of religion, and that this simply could not be done in one volume. If these volumes succeed in making a contribution to the debate, it will be precisely because of the synoptic nature of the discussion therein. Too often the question of the nature of time has been prematurely answered by some philosopher or physicist simply because he is largely ignorant of relevant discussions outside his chosen field of expertise. In these two complementary but independent volumes I have attempted to appraise what I take to be the most important arguments drawn from a variety of fields for and against each theory of time.

The two rival theories of time which are the subject of our examination have been known under a variety of names: the A- versus the B-Theory, the tensed versus the tenseless theory, the dynamic versus the static theory. None of these labels is wholly adequate. The terminology of A- and B-Theory has the advantage of being the traditional designations inspired by J. M. E. McTaggart; but these names are descriptively opaque. D. H. Mellor changed the vocabulary of the debate by speaking instead of tensed and tenseless theories, but he has now reverted to speaking of the A- and B-Theories because his labels aroused confusion in the minds of many concerning tense as an ontological category and tense as a linguistic phenomenon. Michael Tooley prefers to speak of dynamic versus static theories, but this terminology, too, can be misleading, since the vast majority of A-theorists do not think of time as literally moving. In these volumes, I use such labels interchangeably but have for the most part stuck with the traditional A and B terminology.

I have spoken of “the” tensed or tenseless theory of time, but this expression is purely stylistic. As we shall see, there is actually a family of A-Theories of time, and B-theorists, too, differ among themselves on certain key issues. I shall argue that many of these versions of the A- or B-Theory are, in fact, inconsistent and that a unique A- or B-theoretical paradigm exists; but I should not want to be thought to prejudice the issue in advance by my choice of words.

I am intellectually indebted in this study to too many persons to recall by name; but I should like to acknowledge my special gratitude to Quentin Smith, from whom

¹ Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 13.

I have learned a great deal about language and time, and to the late Simon J. Prokhovnik, the eminent Australian physicist, who helped me to see the wisdom of Lorentz. I should also like to thank The University of Chicago Press and Wesleyan University Press for permission to reproduce figures.

I am indebted to my wife Jan for her faithful labor in production of the typescript and to my research assistants Ryan Takenaga, Mike Austin, and Narcis Brasov. I should also like to thank Edward White and the Day Foundation for their generous grant which helped to fund the production of the camera-ready copy and to Mark Jensen and Jennifer Jensen for meticulously bringing this book into its final form.

Atlanta, Georgia

William Lane Craig