

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TIME

The Philosophy of Time

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

EDITED BY RICHARD M. GALE





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Dedicated to the memory of my father—
MOE GALE

PREFACE

Works on time invariably have titles like "The Problem of Time" or "The Mystery of Time." No wonder! For time, more than any other subject of philosophical concern, has been a perennial source of puzzlement and perplexity. It is ironic that something with which we are so intimately acquainted should give rise to paradoxes as soon as we attempt to scrutinize it analytically. The brilliant analyses of time by Zeno, Augustine, and McTaggart, which are included in this volume, show how easily time seems to dissolve—to prove itself unreal—under the weight of analysis. Time, of course, is real: ask any woman who has just seen the first wrinkle on her face in the mirror. The fault must lie, therefore, with the analyses of time; and it is the task of philosophers to cure themselves of their homegrown paradoxes and perplexities.

The first step in the achievement of this therapy is to realize that the problem of time is not a single problem, namely that of defining time. Section I of this volume deals with the inevitable failure of such an attempt. Rather, the problem of time is a group of intimately related questions having to do with the nature of the concepts of truth, events, things, knowledge, causality, identification, action, and change. The remaining sections of this volume are devoted to questions concerning the temporal involvements of these concepts, and it turns out that an adequate treatment of any one of these conceptual questions requires an answer to the others as well. It is this organic, across-the-board feature of the problem of time which, in my opinion, makes it the most important and exciting issue in all of philosophy. My introductions

to the different sections attempt to show the interconnections between these different conceptual issues.

The thread for interweaving these far-ranging conceptual questions is supplied in Section II. Herein the connection between the temporal relations of precedence and simultaneity, on the one hand, and the tensed distinctions of past, present, and future, on the other, is explored by noting the manner in which these two different kind of temporal determinations are involved in the meaning of the concepts I have mentioned. Section III gives a more detailed account of how tensed distinctions enter into the concepts of truth, knowledge, causality, and identification by dealing with the questions: "Can statements about the future be true now, and, if so, does this entail fatalism?"; "Can our present actions have past effects, and, if not, why not?"; and "Can an individual who does not yet exist be identified now?" Further questions concerning the nature of past, present, and future are taken up in Section IV, where competing answers are given to the question of whether these tensed distinctions are dependent on a *subject* qua perceiver or language-user, and whether they are therefore *subjective*. In the final section the concept of change is examined in the light of Zeno's paradoxes of motion; here the main issue is whether change is discrete or continuous.

My own research on the philosophy of time, which enabled me to put this anthology together, was greatly aided by various fellowships and grants. These were the Samuel S. Fels Foundation Fellowship for 1960-61; the Vassar College Class of '59 Grant-in-Aid for Summer Research for 1963; the National Science Foundation grant No. 387 for 1964-65; and the University of Pittsburgh Post-Doctoral Andrew Mellon Fellowship for 1966-67. I gratefully appreciate the help of these benefactors.

The introductions to the different sections of this volume were written during the summer of 1966 while my wife and I were visiting her parents, Kiyoshi and Mari Mori, in Tokyo. No one was ever blessed with more wonderful in-laws.

CONTENTS

Preface		vii
I. "WHAT, THEN, IS TIME?"		1
Introduction		1
Time — <i>Aristotle</i>		9
Time and Eternity — <i>Plotinus</i>		24
Some Questions about Time — <i>St. Augustine</i>		38
Analytic-Synthetic — <i>Friedrich Waismann</i>		55
II. THE STATIC VERSUS THE DYNAMIC TEMPORAL		65
Introduction		65
Time — <i>J. M. E. McTaggart</i>		86
The Myth of Passage — <i>Donald C. Williams</i>		98
Ostensible Temporality — <i>C. D. Broad</i>		117
Time: A Treatment of Some Puzzles		
— <i>J. N. Findlay</i>		143
Spatialising Time — <i>J. J. C. Smart</i>		163
III. THE OPEN FUTURE		169
Introduction		169
On Interpretation — <i>Aristotle</i>		179
Truth and Necessity in Temporal Perspective		
— <i>Nicholas Rescher</i>		183
Fatalism — <i>Richard Taylor</i>		221
Must the Future Be What It Is Going to Be?		
— <i>R. D. Bradley</i>		232
Bringing About the Past — <i>Michael Dummett</i>		252
The Open Future — <i>Bernard Mayo</i>		275

IV. HUMAN TIME	293
Introduction	293
Our Direct Experience of Time — <i>J. D. Mabbott</i>	304
The Status of Temporal Becoming	
— <i>Adolf Grünbaum</i>	322
The Flow of Time — <i>William Barrett</i>	355
An American Indian Model of the Universe	
— <i>Benjamin L. Whorf</i>	378
V. ZENO'S PARADOXES OF MOTION	387
Introduction	387
Form and Becoming — <i>Henri Bergson</i>	397
Tasks and Super-tasks — <i>J. F. Thomson</i>	406
Modern Science and Zeno's Paradoxes of Motion	
— <i>Adolf Grünbaum</i>	422
Bibliography	502

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