

24.118: Paradox and Infinity, Spring 2024

Response Set 4: The Metaphysics of Time

Please include your name and list all of your collaborators on the last page of your response set, preferably a separate page so that no one sees it till the end. *Failing to list collaborators constitutes a violation of academic integrity.*

How your answers will be graded:

- There is no quiz this week so all answers are to be submitted by PDF.
- Each response should be a maximum of 250 words.
- Responses will be evaluated by the clarity, concision, and the degree to which they reflect careful reading and comprehension of the text. Begin by working out your thoughts separately as you might with a problem set, writing up your response only once you have a good sense of what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- You are encouraged to read critically rather than accepting every word of a text as true. At the same time, it is important to be charitable to what the author intends. When something in the text is less than clear, it is important to do your best to get clarity about what the author intends to express, assuming the best interpretation consistent with the text before delivering any criticisms. For instance, saying that something in the text is not clear is not a good criticism even if it is true.
- You may consult published literature and the web, but you must credit all sources where failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and can have serious consequences. For advice about how and when to credit sources see <https://integrity.mit.edu/>. Note that merely citing a source does *not* count as a good justification.
- Reading old texts is hard! So don't worry if you struggle to understand every point. Instead, do your best to learn what the author is trying to express, using this as a chance to sharpen your close reading skills.

All submissions must be in PDF format. Type-written submissions may be strongly preferred by your TA; handwritten submissions are acceptable only if:

1. Your handwriting is easily legible (as judged by your TA);
2. You produce a clean version of the document (as opposed to the sheet of paper you used to work out the problems); and
3. Your manuscript has been scanned to high enough standards (as judged by your TA). Consider using, e.g. *Scannable* or *Adobe Scan*.

1. McTaggart presents two separate conceptions of the positions in time which go by the names ‘A-series’ and ‘B-series’. Describe each conception, using an example to help explain how each series orders positions in time.
2. McTaggart takes both the A-series and B-series to be essential to the nature of time, claiming that the A-series might be regarded as more fundamental than the B-series. Explain why McTaggart thinks that the B-series alone does not provide an adequate account of the nature of time. Do you agree that the A-series is essential?
3. McTaggart (1908, pp. 27-8) contrasts the case of the poker being hot at one time and cold at another to the meridian of Greenwich. Present these examples, explaining what McTaggart takes them to show. Do you find these examples to be convincing? Say why or why not.
4. McTaggart (1908, p. 32) asserts that: (1) past, present, and future are incompatible determinations; and yet also claims that (2) every event has them all. He goes on to consider a revision of (2) which denies that any event is past, present, and future, claiming instead that these, “characteristics are only incompatible when they are simultaneous.” What problem does McTaggart take the revised version of (2) to have? Do you find McTaggart’s argument convincing? Say why or why not.

References

McTaggart, J. Ellis. 1908. “The Unreality of Time.” *Mind* XVII:457–474. ISSN 0026-4423, 1460-2113. doi: 10.1093/mind/XVII.4.457.