

Introduction to the Metaphysics of Time

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There are three main issues in the metaphysics of time.

- (1) Is one time ‘special’ or are all times are ‘on a par’.
- (2) Do times other than the present *exist*? If so, which ones?
- (3) Do ordinary objects, like tables and people, have *temporal parts*?

1 IS ONE TIME SPECIAL?

The question is whether there is one particular time that is *metaphysically privileged*. It is not about whether there is one time that is ‘special for me’ – obviously there is one time that is special for me: it’s the time I happen to be located at. Rather, the question is about whether there is a time that is special from a ‘God’s eye’ point of view.

The question about whether one time is special is sometimes called the question of *the reality of tense*, where to say that tense is real is to say that one time is special. And it is also called the question of A-theory vs B-theory, where to say that the A-theory is true is to say that one time is special.

2 THE ONTOLOGY OF TIMES

The second question is about the existence of various times. Perhaps you think that only present things exist, for example, I exist, but dinosaurs do not exist and a human colony on Mars does not exist. This view is called *Presentism*. Or perhaps you think that past, present and future things all exist. This view is called *eternalism*. Or perhaps you think that only past and present things exist but not future things. This is called *growing block*. There are many other possible views.

A good way to see what philosophers mean by the distinction between presentism and eternalism is by considering the analogy between time and space. If you think that the past exists then you think that dinosaurs exist in basically the same way as people in Japan exist – they exist, but just at a different location from us.

3 TEMPORAL PARTS

The third question is one about ordinary objects, like tables or human beings. Most ordinary objects have spatial parts, but do they have temporal parts? For example, is part of me in the year 2000?

These three questions make up the core of the metaphysics of time.