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## McTAGGART'S PARADOX AND THE NATURE
## OF TIME

By FERREL CHRISTENSEN

McTaggart's famous argument for the unreality of time[1] is so completely outrageous that it should long ago have been interred in decent obscurity. And indeed it would have been, were it not for the fact that so many philosophers are not sure that it has ever really been given a proper burial, and so from time to time someone digs it up all over again in order to pronounce it *really* dead. These periodic autopsies reveal that there is a continuing uneasiness among philosophers on the matter, a feeling that something more remains to be said. I believe that these lingering doubts stem from one particular underlying problem, one which to my knowledge has not been made sufficiently articulate in treating the " paradox ". So, if I may be forgiven for having one more fling with the shovel, it is to this task that I shall address myself.

### I

McTaggart begins his exposition by observing that we have two ways of distinguishing positions in time. In the first place, " Each position is Earlier than some and Later than some of the other positions ", and " In the second place, each position is either Past, Present or Future ".[2] *Prima facie*, the expressions ' earlier than ' and ' later than ' signify temporal *relations*, and would be represented in formal logic by dyadic predicates, while being past, present and future appear to be simple *properties*, representable by monadic

[1]J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1927). I am indebted to Professors K. W. Rankin and R. M. Gale for many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
[2]*Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

predicates. Reflecting McTaggart's terminology, I shall call them "B-relations" and "A-characteristics" respectively.

I shall not concern myself yet with what McTaggart says next concerning the logical dependence of B-relations upon the A-characteristics, since it is the contradiction which he claims to find in the latter that is the crux of his argument. It is on the basis of that claimed contradiction that he concludes that time and change cannot be real. Clearly, no concept or expression can correctly apprehend or describe reality if it is not logically self-consistent.

The first step of McTaggart's argument is disarmingly simple. The characteristics of pastness, presentness and futurity are clearly mutually exclusive, he says, yet " every event has them all ". The contradiction in this is not immediately evident, he realizes, and he anticipates the natural reply:

> It may seem that this can be easily explained. Indeed, it has been impossible to state the difficulty without almost giving the explanation, since our language has verb-forms for the past, present, and future, but no form that is common to all three. It is never true, the answer will run, that $M$ *is* present, past, and future. It *is* present, *will be* past, and *has been* future. Or it *is* past, and *has been* future and present, or again *is* future, and *will be* present and past. The characteristics are only incompatible when they are simultaneous, and there is no contradiction to this in the fact that each term has all of them successively.
>
> But what is meant by ' has been ' and ' will be ' ? And what is meant by ' is ', when, as here, it is used with a temporal meaning and not simply for predication ? When we say that $X$ has been $Y$, we are asserting $X$ to be $Y$ at a moment of past time. When we say that $X$ will be $Y$, we are asserting $X$ to be $Y$ at a moment of future time. When we say that $X$ is $Y$ (in the temporal sense of ' is '), we are asserting $X$ to be $Y$ at a moment of present time.
>
> Thus our first statement about $M$—that it is present, will be past, and has been future—means that $M$ is present at a moment of present time, past at some moment of future time, and future at some moment of past time.[3]

Thus, says McTaggart, the problem really has not been escaped by insisting that each A-predicate in the original sentence about $M$ is accompanied by a tensed copula. For the tense itself merely expresses an A-characteristic, a fact which may be made explicit by converting, say, ' $M$ *was* future ' to ' $M$ *is* future *at a past moment* ', in which the predicating verb ' is ' is now considered tenseless. But this reveals that the contradiction has merely been transferred from the original event or moment $M$ to some *other* moment. He continues:

> If we try to avoid this by saying of these moments what had been previously said of $M$ itself—that some moment, for example, is future, and will be present and past—then ' is ' and ' will be ' have the same meaning as before. Our statement, then, means that the moment in question is future at a present moment, and will be present

[3]*Op. cit.*, p. 21.

and past at different moments of future time. This, of course, is the same difficulty over again. And so on infinitely.[4]

Thus, McTaggart concludes that the attempt to deny contradiction at a *second* temporal level, by appealing again to the fact that the A-predicates are always tensed, must also fail. For on closer examination, we see again that the tense actually contains reference to those very A-properties which it is supposed to save from contradiction. When this fact is again made explicit, the contradiction merely reappears on a new level. The attempt to remove the new contradiction requires recourse to yet another temporal level, and ultimately the price of escape from paradox is a viciously infinite regress.

Now the correct reply to McTaggart's line of reasoning may be stated in two parts. This reply was in fact given, reasonably clearly, by C. D. Broad in his *An Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*,[5] though most of McTaggart's other commentators have not been so clear-eyed as he. Step 1 consists in observing that there simply is no contradiction, McTaggart's assertions notwithstanding, at any point in his analysis. It is just a fact of grammar that the A-predicates ' past ', ' present ' and ' future ' are always attended by a tensed copula: an event which is present, we say, *was* future and *will be* past. McTaggart is surely right in saying that sentences of the form ' X is past ', ' X is present ' and ' X is future ', in which the ' is ' is tenseless, would issue in contradiction—but he is not free simply to remove the tense, by fiat. He must show that the language harbours contradiction as it is, not merely construct a new language which incorporates some similar terms and charge *it* with contradiction.

Point number two: since there is no contradiction to begin with, there is no occasion for the defender of time to be led into a regress trying to avoid it. It is McTaggart himself who begins the regress, trying to get rid of the tense in the copula ' was ' (in ' was future ') by replacing it with the prepositional phrase ' at a past time '. But it is then discovered that the latter expression involves yet a further tensed copula: ' at a past time ' means ' at a time which *is now* past '. Again it is McTaggart who must push the regress another step further in the attempt to de-tense the A-predicate in the added prepositional phrase, by adding *yet another* prepositional phrase of similar form. " And so on infinitely." Every succeeding stage of the regress is generated, not by the defender of time trying to escape a contradiction, but by McTaggart trying to produce one.

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[4]*Op. cit.*, pp. 21-2. Even though McTaggart speaks of transferring the original contradiction from an *event M* to a *moment*, this is not essential to his argument. Like many others, I hold that " times " are basically just abstractions from events. However this may be, the two kinds of entities have all the same temporal characteristics: we may speak of a past event as easily as of a past time, of one event or time as being earlier than another event or time, etc. So we can avoid this minor complication in the regress by taking our *original* individual M to be a moment rather than an event.

[5]Cambridge, 1938 ; relevant portions reprinted in *The Philosophy of Time*, ed. R. M. Gale (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), pp. 117-67.

Now it seems to me that the foregoing simple reply to McTaggart is completely correct, if not yet fully detailed. Nevertheless, people keep reviving the subject, as the literature over the years attests, as if they remain uneasy about the whole thing. I believe that I know the underlying reason, and it is the same basic conceptual failing that underlies a complex of similar puzzles about time that have troubled philosophers for centuries. In the remainder of this paper, I hope to use the McTaggart paradox as a tool for getting at this conceptual problem.

To begin, some philosophers still suspect that maybe McTaggart was right after all—or at least, they cannot see where his argument goes wrong. After all, *doesn't* ' $X$ was $Y$ ' assert $X$ to be $Y$ at a past moment ? Doesn't it *just mean* ' $X$ is $Y$ at a past time ' ? At the outset, it is true, this claim seems harmless enough. Picture a father explaining the wonders of nature to his child. Pointing to a green leaf, he says: " This leaf will, at some future time, be red ". In this sentence, a prepositional phrase of the form in question, namely ' at a future time ', does indeed appear. But so does the tensed verb ' will be ' ; the former merely appears in apposition to the latter. The added phrase does not alter the *meaning* of the tensed sentence ' This leaf will be red ', even though it contains additional temporal terms. In ordinary language, an expression like ' at a past time ' is in fact never used to *replace* the tense in a verb, which is what McTaggart was depending on, but only (occasionally) together *with* it for the sake of emphasis.

Nevertheless, a serious question has been raised. Just because the prepositional phrase *is* redundant, it seems to convey the same information as the tense in the verb, in which case we ought to be able to de-tense the verb when we use it. Can we not do so, even though ordinary English does not ? Plausible as this may seem, it is the very attempt to replace the tensed copula by an untensed one modified by such a phrase that provides the mechanism for an infinite regress. Moreover, it will launch us on such a regress even though we are not trying thereby to produce a contradiction. In order to see this, let us begin again with any tensed sentence of the form ' $X$ was $Y$ '. We replace the tensed ' was ' by converting the sentence to ' $X$ be $Y$ at some past time ', where I use the word ' be ' for a tenseless copula. We might be content to stop here, considering the job finished and the point made. But then we notice that the prepositional phrase which we have employed has an inner structure of its own: it quantifies over individuals called " times " (moments) and predicates pastness of one of them. We can make this predication explicit by altering ' at a past time ' to read ' at a time *which is* past '. And we are forced to decide whether the *new* copula *inside* the added phrase is itself tensed or not.

If we decide, contrary to the rules of grammar, that it is tenseless, we run headlong into a genuine contradiction. For if we are unable to say of the moment in question that it *is* past but *was* future, we are left saying that it *be* both past and future, which is as much a contradiction as saying

of something that it is both round and square. If on the other hand we decide that the copula in the prepositional phrase is tensed, we have failed in our attempt to get rid of tensed verbs. The very thing we were trying to eliminate by importing the phrase ' at a past time ' into the original sentence ' $X$ was $Y$ ' has come back to haunt us in the *inner structure* of that phrase. And in so doing it launches us on an infinite regress. For our claim was that tenses can be replaced by prepositional phrases of a certain type ; we must now remove the present tense of the verb ' is ' in the added phrase by modifying *that* verb with yet another prepositional phrase, namely ' at the present time '. But once again, the present time is the time which is present, and another round has begun. For if the tense in the verb ' is ' truly just means ' at the present time ', it means it at any succeeding stage no less than at the first. Consequently, it is required that our simple original sentence, ' $X$ was $Y$ ', be reduced to ' $X$ be $Y$ at a time which be past at the time which be present at the time which be present at the time which be present at . . .', which is sheer nonsense. The seemingly innocent assumption that we can eliminate the tenses in favour of prepositional phrases which use the A-predicates leaves us on the horns of a vicious dilemma.


## II

To see more clearly why this result ensues, and to pursue further the conceptual error that misled McTaggart, let us now take a closer look at the nature of tensed verbs. Consider the following three sentences: ' Tom is tall ', ' Tom was tall ', ' Tom will be tall '. Clearly they have a lot in common: a singular term (' Tom '), a predicate (' tall '), and a copula (' to be ') which links the name and predicate. But there is also a fourth element in each, by virtue of which each is different from the others, namely the tense. What is *its* syntactical nature, since it is clearly different from both singular terms and predicates ? The answer is that it is one kind of adverb—an adverb, because it modifies the verb. The formal difference between it and other adverbs is that it is incorporated physically into the verb, or, as we say, the verb is inflected.

At least, this is true in many natural languages ; in certain languages the tense is attached to a different word in the sentence, or an altogether separate temporal adverb is employed. Surely, there is no reason why the tense *must* be attached to the verb ; why, that is, we cannot take it out of the verb and make a separate word of it. The verb in that case (or better, the sentence as a whole) would still be tensed, in the sense of being tensed *by* the now-separate adverb. Indeed, we already have such temporal words even in English, and they are adverbs: ' formerly ', ' now ', and ' eventually ',[6] among others, corresponding to past, present and future tense. Though we use them in apposition to rather than as replacements for tensed verbs,

[6]I am indebted to Professor Ray Jennings for calling this latter word to my attention.

there is no reason in principle why the tense in verbs could not be simply replaced by special tense-words.

Now, even though the creation of such terms would be a purely syntactical move, having no effect on the meaning of a sentence, it might nevertheless turn out to be very instructive philosophically, by helping us to see more clearly the structure of temporal language—and hence, perhaps, to clarify the nature of time itself. This is in fact what has happened, I claim, in the development of tense logic, beginning with the work of the late A. N. Prior. In my opinion, tense logic is one of the most significant philosophical innovations of recent years. Though I cannot here discuss all the conceptual insights to which it has led, they begin with the conscious recognition of the adverbial nature of the tenses and their explicit representation *as* adverbs.

Actually, ' adverb ' is much too general a term for the tenses ; they are a very different sort of thing from other adverbs (adverbs of manner, for example). We can characterize the tenses more adequately by pointing out their role as sentential operators, as tense logic in fact does. They are analogous in their formal function to the familiar negation and necessity operators. (Certain other varieties of adverb may aptly be called *predicate* operators, or parts of predicates.) But again, it should not be supposed that different kinds of singular sentential operators need have anything in common semantically. Sameness of logical form does not by itself imply similarity of content. But the converse does hold: difference of syntactical form requires difference of content, for terms that are logically primitive (not themselves reducible to *other* forms). It is this point that I shall develop here in regard to the tenses, and the main thing I wish to stress is that they are radically different from *predicates* of any variety. That they are very different from other adverbs is also true but not significant to present concerns.

We are now in a position to state more clearly the elements of truth and falsity in McTaggart's attempted elimination of the tenses. The element of truth lies in the fact that the prepositional phrases by which he intended to do it are themselves *adverbial* in nature. The phrase ' at a moment of past time ', taken as a whole, operates in a sentence as an adverb, just as do the word ' formerly ' and the past tense. But McTaggart's belief that the adverb with the complex inner structure is logically more basic than the structureless tenses (hereafter to be called " A-adverbs ") is just false. This is clear enough from the logical difficulties to which that claim has been seen to lead.

Notice next that what his suggested translation amounts to at base is the attempt to reduce the A-*adverbs* to the A-*predicates*, via those particular A-predicates that appear within the prepositional phrases. As Broad diagnoses the situation:

> The real motive of this analysis, and the real cause of the subsequent infinite regress, seems to me to be a certain assumption which McTaggart tacitly makes. He assumes that what is meant by a sentence with a *temporal copula* must be completely (and more accurately) expressible by a sentence or combination of sentences in which there

is no temporal copula, but only *temporal predicates* and non-temporal copulas.[7]

McTaggart's ultimate error was the belief that the monadic predicates are logically more fundamental than the adverbs. That this belief *is* false, I trust, is also by now sufficiently clear. If we attempt to define the tenses in terms of the A-predicates, whether we do it in McTaggart's way (using pre-positional phrases) or in some other way, we shall find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma: only infinite regress can save us from the vicious circularity of defining tenses by means of tensed A-predicates, but using tenseless A-predicates will lead to contradiction. (Actually, I am as much inclined to say that untensed A-predicates are simply nonsensical as that they generate contradiction. I don't know what it could mean to say that a moment simply *be* past, in contrast to saying, for example, that it *is* future but *will be* past.) The reduction of the tenses to the A-predicates is a simple logical impossibility.

Now, what of the converse situation ? Are the A-adverbs logically more basic than the predicates ? I claim that they are. Indeed, contextual defin-itions of the latter in terms of the former are readily supplied. Consider for example a sentence of the form ' Event *e* occurred '. It contains the existence-verb ' occur ', which is in the past tense, but no temporal predicates. Then we have only to notice that ' *e* occurred ' is equivalent in meaning to both ' *e* is past ' and ' *e* was present ', which contain the A-predicates ' is past ' and ' is present '. Incidentally, it is also worth pointing out that the singular terms ' the past ', ' the present ', and ' the future ' (hereafter called " A-names ") are derivable in just the same way. The A-names and A-predicates can be completely eliminated in favour of the tenses, but the converse is not true.

Once again, take note of the fact that ' *e* is past ' and ' *e* was present ' are both tensed. An A-predicate cannot wholly supplant the adverb(s) in a sentence even after it has been defined from them. This fact alone—that A-predicates and A-names can only appear accompanied by A-adverbs—should make it clear which of the three logically related forms is the funda-mental one. Indeed, the singular terms and predicates are comparatively rare in the language, whereas every sentence must carry tense. (With the probable exception, that is, of those in which the subject is an abstract entity, and is therefore altogether non-temporal.)

This reducibility of temporal predicates to temporal adverbs enables us to look at McTaggart's argument from a slightly different angle. The sentence with which he began in trying to display a contradiction was of the general type ' *e* was future and *e* will be past '. Using only the tenses, this becomes ' *e* was going to occur and *e* will have occurred '. This is a case of using tense-operators which are iterated, resulting in the multiply-inflected verbs of the future perfect and other compound tenses. (In the symbols of tense

[7]Gale, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

logic, we could write this sentence as ' PF(*e* occurs) and FP(*e* occurs) '.)
Now, in effect all McTaggart did to produce his contradiction was to strike
out the tenses accompanying each A-predicate, getting ' *e* be past and *e* be
future '. Doing the analogous thing to the sentence that contains doubly-
inflected verbs instead of tensed A-predicates—that is, removing the *first*
tense-adverb in each clause—yields the sentence ' *e* is going to occur and *e*
has occurred '. This, again, is a contradiction—though it involves no un-
grammatical tenseless verbs. But also, again, it poses no threat to the reality
of time: the mere fact that contradictions using temporal terms *can* be
produced will not help McTaggart's argument.

To return once again to those prepositional phrases which contain the
A-predicates: these complex adverbs may indeed be called equivalent in
meaning to the simple adverbs, as we originally thought, but this is because
the former are reducible to the latter. In a way, the use of the predicate
' is past ' within the complex *adverb* ' at a past time ' brings us full circle,
by recovering the adverbial nature of the tense from which that predicate
is originally derived. But the *basic* adverbs are logically primitive ; they
contain no predicates, nor for that matter do they refer to and quantify
over moments as individuals.

This latter fact is highly significant in itself, though a thorough explora-
tion of it would be too lengthy to undertake here. It will have to suffice to
point out that there are no such entities as " moments " in our empirical
experience, and to indicate how certain references to these convenient
abstractions can be reductively eliminated. In small measure, I have already
begun to do this. Notice in addition that just as ' $X$ was $Y$ at some past
moment ' and ' $X$ will be $Y$ at some future moment ' reduce to the simple
' $X$ was $Y$ ' and ' $X$ will be $Y$ ', we might read ' $X$ either is, or was, or will
be $Y$ ' as ' $X$ is $Y$ at some moment or other '.[8] From the latter expression,
the phrase ' at all times ' is readily defined: let ' $M(Fx)$ ' $=$ ' x is F at some
time ' ; then ' x is F at all times ' becomes ' $\sim M(\sim Fx)$ '. It is possible in
similar fashion to reduce a host of other adverbial phrases that quantify
over moments (' at the same time ', ' at two different times ', etc.) to ex-
pressions that do not.

### III

In his treatment of McTaggart's paradox, C. D. Broad realized that
tenses are something very different from predicates, and in particular that
they are sufficiently different from the temporal predicates ' is past ', ' is
present ' and ' is future ' that they cannot in any fashion be analysed into
them. But there, and on a note of uncertainty, he stopped. What Broad

[8]Contrary to what some have supposed, this latter statement is *not* tenseless. It is
no more tenseless than ' $X$ is either hot or cold or lukewarm ' is predicateless ; it is
merely indefinite as to which tense applies. A truly tenseless sentence does not allow
*any* tense to apply, and consequently it has no temporal adverbs of any kind modifying
it. ' $X$ be $Y$ ' is a very different sort of sentence, if it is intelligible at all, from ' $X$ is $Y$
at some time or other ' and ' $X$ is $Y$ at all times '.

perceived dimly, Prior saw clearly ; and he boldly produced the logical machinery required to make a study of temporal adverbs rigorous and exact. His claim—I would call it a discovery—is that classical symbolic logic, in which all the non-logical terms are predicates (either monadic or polyadic), is inadequate. There is at least one kind of non-logical information that simply cannot be expressed by means of predicates.

A less metalinguistic way of putting what I have been saying will be useful at this point. To assert that the A-names and A-predicates are reducible to the A-adverbs is to say that there are no such *individuals* or particulars as the past, the present and the future, and no such *properties* as pastness, presentness and futurity. The foregoing analysis reveals that, unlike the predicates ' is round ', ' is an explosion ', etc., the predicates ' is past ' and ' is present ' do not signify real attributes or qualities of anything. It would be a strange attribute indeed that an event or object could acquire only and always by ceasing to exist or to occur ! Once again, a past event is merely one which did exist but does not exist. That existence, and hence also non-existence, are not qualities which an individual might equally well have or lack among other properties, is commonly acknowledged. And we can now see that this is one part of the reason why pastness and presentness are not real properties. (We might wish to put it by saying that the tense-operator and existential quantifier are *together* converted into the predicate.)

So a past or present event is not a special *kind* of event at all. The tenses from which such predicates are derived perform a very different sort of task from telling what the nature or properties of an individual are: they tell *when it has* its properties. That is to say, they tell whether it once did, or does now, or will yet possess such-and-such characteristics (or bear such-and-such relations), and also simply whether it did, does or will exist. Indeed, it is precisely because the kind of information they carry is so different from that which is conveyed by predicates that the tenses have such a different logical form: to tell when the individual named in a sentence has the property (or relation) predicated of it, the tense-operator acts in a special way upon both terms together. The concept of time is altogether different from other concepts, and relates to all those others in a very special way.

I hope I have made this point reasonably convincingly. There are modern McTaggartians who still want to make some sort of property or other out of " nowness ". To Adolf Grünbaum, for example, an event that is " occurring now " is just a special *kind* of event, namely a mental occurrence of a certain complex type (or, derivatively, is simultaneous with an event of that kind). He refers to what he calls " the adverbial attribute now ", and consistently treats the A-adverb as if it were just a peculiar kind of monadic predicate, designating just a special sort of attribute or property.[9] I find it difficult to understand how being an event of *any* particular kind could

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[9] For example, see his " The Meaning of Time ", *Essays in Honor of Carl G. Hempel*, edd. N. Rescher *et al.* (Dordrecht, 1969), pp. 147-77.

be thought to have something to do with whether the event is occurring now, in contrast to being past or future, since it is clear that an event of that same kind may itself be a past or future event ! (In linguistic terms: a *genuine* predicate such as ' is a mental event of type Q ' can itself, together with its subject, be modified by each of the three A-adverbs. It is the right sort of expression to be *modified* by any one of the tenses, including the present tense, and the wrong sort of thing to *define* any one of the tenses.) Worse yet, this notion is faced with the spectre of yielding a flat contra-diction—the contradiction that McTaggart *would* have revealed if the " now-ness " of our concept of time *were* a real property.

There are other important ideas concerning the nature of time that might also be mentioned. On one view, for example, all that time consists in is *relations* among individuals. Then since temporal relations are expressed by polyadic predicates (notably ' is earlier than ', ' is later than ' and ' is simul-taneous with '), it is required that all A-terms alike (adverbs, monadic predicates and singular terms) be reducible to those B-predicates. (On the contrary, I insist, it is the B-predicates that reduce to the A-adverbs. At least, such is the order of logical priority for ordinary language ; the ordinary concept may of course be wrong.) It is unfortunate that the debate over this particular claim is too involved to be treated here ; obviously, the view constitutes a denial that we need non-predicative expressions for time. It should be mentioned, however, that the special account which adherents of this view would (and do) give of McTaggart differs greatly from the one I have developed. It avoids the paradox by reducing monadic predicates like ' is past ' to dyadic predicates like ' is earlier than ' (or ' is past relative to ', or ' is in the past of '): clearly, there is no contradiction in saying of one and the same event *e* that it is in the past of some events but also in the present and future of yet other events. That this is not the correct response to McTaggart follows if, as I claim, it involves an analysis of ordinary language which is incorrect. But again, this much wider issue cannot be adequately explored here.

One question now remains. Why did McTaggart take it so completely for granted that the tenses could be eliminated in favour of predicates ? And why have so few of his commentators even questioned this crucial assumption ? In the answer to this question lies the real moral of McTaggart's aborted paradox, and the value of studying his argument. The primary reason, I believe, is that he and they alike, along with most of the rest of us, share a deep-seated prejudice—one which must be consciously recognized if its influence on our thinking is to be broken.

In natural and artificial languages alike, the most common manner in which information is conveyed is via sentences which have the subject-predicate form. Indeed, this kind of structure is used so universally that it seems we have come to regard it as the ultimately basic way to carry information of *any* kind. In the particular case of time, there seems almost

to be something terribly *oblique* about the way the tenses convey their content, in contrast to the directness of predicative assertion. It is almost as if we say to ourselves, " How can anything be real if we can't talk about it ? Yet of course the way we talk *about* something is by putting it in the *subject* position of a sentence. And what we say about it (or predicate of it) must surely be expressed in the *predicate* position." This desire to squeeze everything into the subject-predicate mould is manifested in many ways. To mention one, even philosophers who are schooled in formal logic, and hence are aware of the difference between a sentential operator and a predicate, tend on first exposure to the formulae of tense logic to read the singular operators as if they were monadic predicates, taking entire sentences as their singular terms. (Whence they may draw the erroneous conclusion that tense logic commits one to an ontology that contains " propositions " as individuals.)

What makes this linguistic propensity so significant, as has already been observed, is that it is inevitably accompanied by its conceptual counterpart: a bias in favour of an ontology of individuals and their properties and relations. (This is notably true in the case of the singular term ' time ' itself. There is a persistent desire on the part of many to hypostatize this convenient abstraction.) Whether one of these biases is to be regarded as producing the other is perhaps not an important question ; what *is* important is that the entire conceptual and linguistic error be finally recognized for what it really is. I submit that this unconscious prejudice is the principal reason why time has always seemed so singularly enigmatic, to ordinary thinkers and philosophers alike: it simply refuses to fit comfortably into a linguistic and conceptual pattern that appears to work so well for everything else. We must cease being misled in this way, if we are ever to understand the nature of time.

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