

The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination. By William Lane Craig. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000. Pp. 297. \$123.

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This book, together with its companion volume, *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) constitutes a comprehensive study of the main debates in the philosophy of time, together with Craig's own contribution to these debates. Craig is an A-theorist, specifically a presentist, so in writing these two volumes he aims not just to provide the academic world with a systematic presentation of the debates in the philosophy of time, but also to argue against any non-presentist account of the metaphysical nature of time, and in favour of his brand of presentism. Part I of this book examines arguments in favour of an A-theory of time, B-theoretic responses to them, and Craig's assessment of these responses. Two main arguments receive this treatment: the argument from the ineliminability of tense, and the argument from our experience of tense. In Part II Craig considers arguments against an A-theory of time, and here the focus is firstly McTaggart's paradox, and secondly, a number of remaining objections both to presentism and to the notion of the flow of time.

Craig presents what he calls the A-theorist's "fundamental argument", the argument from the ineliminability of tense, as follows:

1. Tensed sentences ostensibly ascribe ontological tenses.
2. Unless tensed sentences are shown to be reducible without loss of meaning to tenseless sentences or ontological tense is shown to be superfluous to human thought and action, the ostensible ascription of ontological tenses by tensed sentences ought to be accepted as veridical.
3. Tensed sentences have not been shown to be reducible without loss of meaning to tenseless sentences.
4. Ontological tense has not been shown to be superfluous to human thought and action.
5. Therefore, the ostensible ascription of ontological tenses by tensed sentences ought to be accepted as veridical.

(p. 22. Numbering of premises changed)

This argument serves as the focus for section I of Part I of the book. In order to avoid its conclusion, Craig insists, the B-theorist must either show that tensed sentences can be translated into tenseless sentences (thus refuting premise 3) or that tensed facts are not required for human thought and action (thus refuting premise 4). Craig devotes a chapter each to examining and rebutting B-theoretic attempts to refute these premises. However, he gives very little space to consideration of premise 2. In

support of the claim that linguistic tense reflects ontological tense he states that “its ineliminability ... and its indispensability for human life and action make it *plausible* that tense is a feature of reality as well as of language” (p. 19 My italics). The assumption here seems to be that enough has been said to place the burden of proof onto the B-theorist. But whether or not the linguistic facts adequately represent the ontological facts is just the question at issue, and cannot be assumed from the outset.

Craig’s critique of B-theoretic attempts to undermine the significance of tense in language and experience make up chapters 2 to 5. Much of the material in these chapters is coverage of existing debates in the philosophy of time. Craig offers completeness in his treatment of the important issues in debates in the philosophy of time, and his work is exemplary in its scholarly presentation of the work of his predecessors and contemporaries. Completeness of coverage is something that has been sorely lacking in works in the philosophy of time. Most of the significant developments have taken place in the journals, and there has been no single volume in which all of the important arguments and issues are set out. So Craig’s book is a welcome addition to the literature in the philosophy of time in this regard. Together with its companion volume it would make a useful text in a graduate course in the philosophy of time, metaphysics and the philosophy of language. However, this completeness is achieved at the expense of much in the way of originality, at least in the first part of the book. For example, Craig offers a clear and complete account of attempts by the old B-theory to translate tensed sentences into tenseless date sentences and tenseless token-reflexive sentences, and he shows just how these

attempts failed. But none of this is new. Nor is any of it disputed by either A- or B-theorists. Certainly, the book leaves no room for doubt as to Craig's view on any of the matters he discusses, but whether his view constitutes a new contribution to the debate is another matter.

Many of the debates taken up by Craig centre on an issue that is gradually receiving more attention in the philosophy of time, and in metaphysics more generally. This is the question of the connection between semantics and ontology, and just how much study of the former can tell us about the latter. For example, in his presentation of the views of old B-theorists Frege, Smart, Reichenbach, Grünbaum and Russell, Craig comments that they all thought that if a purported temporal fact could not be expressed in the tenseless language of science, then it was, for that very reason, not a fact at all. The old B-theorists thought that if there was just one tenseless fact, then the tensed expression was either reducible to the tenseless expression, or redundant. Craig's contrary view is that, since tensed expressions are *neither* reducible to tenseless expressions *nor* redundant, they must therefore express facts distinct from those expressed by tenseless expressions. There is a third alternative, which Craig does not consider. If one acquires some sensitivity to the difference between facts and their expression, one can see that it is possible that there are some facts that can be expressed in both tensed and tenseless ways, such that the *ways of expression* are not reducible to each other, but that doesn't mean that they express different facts. So it is possible to hold that tensed language is neither reducible nor redundant, but that it still does not imply the existence of

tensed facts in the extra-linguistic world. To think otherwise is to conflate semantics with ontology.

The mistake of conflating semantics with ontology is one that Craig is on the lookout for, as he criticises his opponents of making it on a number of occasions. For example, his criticism of Fitzgerald (p. 227) is that he makes just this mistake.

However, in the final pages of the book Craig falls prey to it himself. He addresses the objection to presentism from the extent of the present. If the present is instantaneous, and only those objects that exist in the present exist at all, it follows that objects exist with no duration. But no concrete object can exist for zero duration; if it exists at all it will have some temporal duration. The alternative, that time is atomic, is equally problematic, and also rejected by Craig. He prefers a third view of the extent of the present, which he calls the non-metrical present. According to this view, the temporal extension designated by “present” depends on the context in which the term is used. If we are using it to describe the present minute, then its temporal extension is a minute. If we are using it to describe the present century, then its temporal extension is one hundred years. But where the term “present” is used to delineate ontological categories, this won’t do. Craig is a presentist so (ignoring timeless entities, if there are any) only what is present exists. But if the extent of the present is determined by context, then context will start to have ontological implications. When speaking of the present geological period Maastrichtian (*Dinornithidae*) exist, but when speaking of the present decade they don’t. The result

of conflating semantics and ontology in this instance is that existence itself becomes context-dependent, a conclusion I think Craig would rather avoid.

Craig's book is a much-needed addition to the literature in the philosophy of time, in that it provides coverage of many of the important issues in a single volume. It is written in a careful and meticulous style that repays close attention, and would, for these reasons, be an excellent text to use in a graduate course.

University of Otago

Heather Dyke