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Temporal Relations and Temporal Becoming: A Defense of a Russellian Theory of Time. by L. Nathan Oaklander

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L. Nathan Oaklander, *Temporal Relations and Temporal Becoming: A Defense of a Russellian Theory of Time* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), xii + 238 pp., \$22.75 (cloth), \$11.75 (paper).

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Professor Oaklander's book is devoted to highly spirited defense of the Russellian position concerning the most central issue in the philosophy of time, the issue of temporal becoming.

The first four chapters contain an extensive and uncompromising criticism of the opposition's views. Some of these are cogent, some less so. In my opinion this part of the book should prove very useful to someone who wishes to acquaint himself with the different positions held and the variety of arguments employed by philosophers in the context of this genuinely difficult topic.

From the fifth chapter onward the author embarks upon the much harder task of constructing a positive thesis on Russell's behalf. He states that he does not wish to deny "that it is an impression deeply felt by all of us that time flows relative to the present" (p. 138). Furthermore he states—something that most followers of Russell have denied:

Moreover, I think that we must also admit that the differences in attitude imply that "time moves". But the whole question centers around the correct interpretation of the vague claim that "time moves". (p. 138)

Subsequently Oaklander announces "So we arrive at the central issue: How can a Russellian theory account for time's asymmetry". This I found somewhat puzzling. Russell and his adversaries are not in disagreement about any aspect of physical theory; thus he has the same means at his disposal as anyone else for distinguishing between the two temporal directions. If for example a cigar is intact at time t_1 and mostly ashes at t_2 , and if a tree is a sapling at t_3 and a giant oak at t_4 , then t_1 is before t_2 and t_3 is before t_4 , and so on. Russell acknowledges this no less than McTaggart, thus it is hard to see why there should be any problem for him, let alone a problem that constitutes a "central issue", when it comes to accounting for time's asymmetry.

And the reader is not likely to find it easier to follow the author when he declares:

An event A that occurs at a certain time before event B, cannot be identical with an event that occurs at a certain time later than B . . . (p. 144)

Nor when he offers the rather unexpected explanation why the self-same event cannot happen both before and after a certain moment:

. . . it is a synthetic *a priori* truth that a particular that has ceased to exist cannot be identical with one that later begins to exist. (p. 144-5)

It is difficult to figure out why it was necessary to invoke anything as disputed as the notion of 'synthetic a priori', when in fact we are confronted with an outright contradiction. To say that *i* begins to exist at *t'*, which is later than *t*, is to say that there are times after *t'* that are occupied by *i*, and that directly contradicts what has been just said, namely, that *i* ceases to exist after *t*.

Most importantly however no clear explanation is offered not only for the belief that time's asymmetry entails the appearance of a moving NOW, but even for the claim that the various theses that have been postulated imply time's asymmetry.

Let me point out that Oaklander does make an attempt to provide an answer at least to the first question, and to explain in what sense time is moving or has transient aspect according to the Russellian view. He asks us to consider an event E occurring at time *t*. It is possible for me to think about E, earlier at *t*₀ as well as at a subsequent moment *t*₁ and then at *t*₂ and so on. At *t*₁ the time span between the event of my contemplating E and of E's occurrence is shorter than at *t*₀, which again is shorter at *t*₂ etc. The continual decrease in these intervals Oaklander informs us is what basically underlies our strong conviction that time moves.

Although Oaklander calls this "a clear and intelligible sense in which time has the transiency required by our deeply felt impression" I wonder if many will find it any help in making the source of our deeply entrenched view of time's transiency clearer at all. Consider my friend Fred who has a toothache. He is clearly aware that his toes are at a considerable distance from the aching spot in his body and also senses his knees to be somewhat closer to that spot. Upon contemplating his hips, he is conscious of these being even nearer to the location of his pain. In spite of all this there is of course not the slightest suggestion in Fred's mind that his toothache or anything associated with it partakes in any sort of a movement.

Why does one need such laborious tactics anyhow? J. J. C. Smart who is also a Russellian approaches the matter in a much more straightforward manner. He unequivocally denies that time moves in any sense whatever. But if future events are no more "approaching" us than past events, why do we for instance, feel threatened by disagreeable events in case they lie in the future, but not if they are situated in the past? This characteristic is shared by humans, says Smart, since it has obvious survival value: we can affect the future but not the past; dreading future calamities prompts us to take effective measures.

Thus the Russellian position is not so frightfully hard to defend provided one does not mind having a few awkward wrinkles in one's metaphysics.

Undoubtedly, Russell's thesis is very impressive because of its ingenuity and because of the considerable economy it seeks to achieve by cutting down on the kind of temporal properties it permits. At the same time, it is a difficult thesis to defend since it clashes with what many of us feel are the most basic givens of reality. Yet Oaklander wishes to do more than just defend Russell, he insists on conclusively showing that he and

only he is right. But when it comes to fundamental metaphysical disagreements in general, what one may hope at most is to devise new arguments to illuminate or strengthen a given position but not the decisive elimination or establishing one or the other contending hypotheses. Thus to the extent the book fails it may be said to reflect the fact that its author has undertaken an over-ambitious task.

Adolf Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiv + 310 pp.

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Many philosophers are reluctant to inject themselves into a substantive debate about the evidence for a scientific theory. That reluctance may generally be well founded, but in at least this one case, a lack of such caution has proved fruitful. Adolf Grünbaum has produced the most detailed, most powerful and most damning indictment of the clinical foundations of Freudian theory that has appeared so far. His book is a seminal work that is likely to be discussed for many years. It already has been the subject of both a special editorial in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (Shapiro, 1985) and a multiple book review by leading scholars in *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, and has been described by one leading psychologist as “the most important discussion of the topic to be found in the literature” (Eysenck, 1985, p. 90).

Grünbaum's Introduction is 96 pages long and could stand by itself as a small book. His purpose in writing it was to blunt the “hermeneutic” criticism that a detailed examination of the clinical evidence for Freudian theory is unnecessary either because it is not a scientific theory and should not be judged by canons of science or even because the theory, properly interpreted, makes no causal claims. His conclusions have implications, however, for hermeneutical views about psychology in general. For example, anyone trying to work out a hermeneutic construal of behavior therapy, as has been recently proposed, or of other theories besides psychoanalysis, should confront his arguments. They are powerful, and will not be easily overthrown.

Professor Grünbaum begins his Introduction by citing textual evidence that Freud viewed psychoanalysis as a part of science. Freud's view of his own creation, however, has been challenged by some psychoanalysts, such as George Klein, and hermeneutical philosophers, such as Jürgen