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The Reality of Time and the Existence of God. by David Braine

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painful deaths not only of the menfolk with the guns, but also of babes in arms and other innocents?... Yes (p. 110)

By this standard the Warsaw Uprising is perhaps the only just war ever fought, not a bad result in my view. So the pacifists are right in saying that war is such an evil that it is never obligatory to fight and the just war theorists are right that the alternatives may be so bad that it is sometimes permissible to fight, provided the choice is truly forced. How chastened just war theorists will be by this restriction I cannot say. For my part, I wonder, if it is permissible for the Tasmanians to use the poison that is their sole hope, why is it not permissible for me to supply them with poison, even though my choice to give it to them is not forced?

Teichman's discussion of nuclear deterrent threats presumes, as most do, that the actual execution of the nuclear threat is impermissible. The idea that the use of nuclear weapons could be made sufficiently precise as to make the collateral civilian casualties acceptable never gets on the boards, perhaps because the argument requires some principle of double effect, a doctrine that Teichman never stoops to analyze, despite its popularity in just war circles. Accordingly, her discussion focuses on the argument that the nuclear deterrent threat is merely a conditional threat, one which, if successful, prevents the fulfillment of its own condition. Teichman ingeniously notes that an unconditional nuclear threat also might fail to come off, and (we might add) it might fail to come off precisely because it has been made. If non-fulfillment is the moral core of the issue, conditional threats are no better than unconditional threats, and few grant the permissibility of unconditional intentions to use nuclear weapons. No further rationale for nuclear threats can be found, Teichman argues, since there is no forced choice to make these threats. This argument will not impress that generation of politicians who mistakenly but sincerely have believed that conditional nuclear threats are the best or only way to prevent nuclear attack.

From the above I must conclude that Teichman's systematic arguments are largely unsuccessful. But her book contains many sharp barbs, sudden illuminations stemming from the *mot juste*, and penetrating jabs at the pious cant surrounding just war rationalizations.

David Braine *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God* (Oxford U. Press, 1988) xvi + 383pp., \$74.00 cloth.

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The aim of this ambitious work is to derive theism from the premise that finite things are incapable of persisting through time without Divine sustenance. It is virtually impossible to give a summary of the book. Merely to mention to the unusually large number of topics dealt with would produce an oversize list.

In the early part of the book where the groundwork for the central thesis is laid, we are presented, among many other things, with an elucidation of the fundamental nature of time.

On p. 46 Braine describes the three main pictures philosophers have formed of time. In the first picture, time (as well as space) is seen as a container capable of independent existence. Braine says that,

...this picture leaves it open whether the Creator is coeval with what He creates, Himself in time, or whether He is outside time, but it leaves it doubtful whether there could be any sense in which God creates Time or is above it.

Thus Braine implies several difficulties with the notion of time existing prior to the physical universe, among them:

- 1) If we accept the idea that time preceded the universe and is 'coeval with God' then the theist is forced to concede that it was not created by the One who is supposed to have created everything.
- 2) The idea of Him being outside or above time has never been precisely articulated, there is thus reason to suspect it to be incoherent.

Braine touches on very fundamental problems here. Few contemporary analytic philosophers have felt surefooted enough to tread on such uncharted, slippery grounds. It is not entirely clear, for instance, why someone subscribing to the first picture just referred to, might not try to solve the problem of how time came into existence, by saying it was neither coeval with God, nor with the physical world; God created it just before creating everything else, for it to serve a container into which in turn He placed the material universe.

Admittedly such a view has its own problems. It seems now however, in the context of this specific issue, the relative notion of time fares no better either. Suppose the theist claims God created time together with all the temporal things he created. Surely then the same theist could not coherently speak also of the Creator existing *prior* to any of these created temporal things, that is, coherently speak of a time, prior to time itself having begun!

To avoid contradicting himself, the theist may therefore be impelled to maintain Divine eternity in a different manner: speak not of God preceding the world along a linear temporal succession, assign Him instead to a different temporal dimension. This, of course, would amount to assuming that it makes good sense to talk about God as being outside ordinary time. In any case, Braine is reluctant to subscribe to this view.

Braine adopts in the end a fourth view, concluding that God is altogether a-temporal. I find it difficult to gain a grip on this notion; some might go even further and claim it to be incoherent, since to say 'actually exists but does not occupy a single moment' is self-contradictory. But since the notion of Divine a-temporality and its implications play a central role in the development of many of the book's arguments, there is much in Braine's book I feel incapable to evaluate.

While on such a highly speculative plane, some might be willing to consider the following suggestion. God is not outside time, yet the problem who created time does not arise. It does not arise because time is not a thing existing independently of temporal

particulars. Everyone agrees that 'Divine benevolence', or the 'power to create a universe', and all the other actually instantiated Divine attributes are "coeval" with Him, since He never existed without possessing these attributes. These attributes are of course not "autonomous", non-divinely created attributes; just as God himself, so all His attributes, are (necessary and) eternal; the question of who created them does not present itself. Similarly, if we are ready to grant that it is part of God's nature to be temporal, that is, to persist through time, then the question of the author of Divine temporality, just as the question of the author of Divine temporality, just as the question of the author of Divine existence itself, should not arise.

Among topics that have received wider philosophical attention, Braine considers the question, why monotheism, and not some other form of theism are we to accept? He states clearly some of the arguments that have been offered by others as to why, e.g., that the unity of the universe implies the unity of its Creator, an argument he rejects. A swift answer would have been to say: given that He is greater than which is inconceivable—or is "unsurpassable" to use Braine's felicitous term—and thus omnipotence, the unity of God follows at once: there can be no more than a single omnipotent being. No independent power is compatible with an omnipotent force. Braine however favors a less compelling, more involved answer (313–17), which is interwoven with his special view on the prerequisites of temporal continuance.

It is unlikely that anyone will find this an easy book to read. Many are likely however to be impressed, and even to be moved, by the fervent, passionate spirit that informs the entire work.

Georgia M. Green, *Pragmatics and Natural Language Understanding* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.), xi + 180 pp., 1989.

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This is a useful textbook to introduce undergraduate students to the issues of meaning and interpretation in which the communicative exchange of information is a central concept. Pragmatics is characterized here as the mechanisms that allow more to be communicated than is actually said. The book is well-organized into eight chapters on more traditional pragmatics topics as indexicals, demonstratives, speech acts, presupposition, implicatures and Gricean maxims, but also on clearly semantic concerns as reference and indeterminacy of sense, reference to kinds, and anaphora. Since the walls between pragmatics and semantics have fallen some ten years ago with the development of logical theories of interpretation in context, this book contains an appropriate mixture of current topics in an appetizing presentation. It is interesting that the author emphasizes early in the book that the content of linguistic expressions can only be specified in a nondeterministic way. Even a fully competent user cannot always tell what is meant by a certain assertion and this leaves room for intentional ambiguity, vagueness, and does justice to the fact that understanding involves real work and presents a real risk of failure. I find this an important