

The Stillness of Time and Philosophical Equanimity

Author(s): George Schlesinger

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THE STILLNESS OF TIME AND  
PHILOSOPHICAL EQUANIMITY

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I

Being a philosopher has been traditionally associated with the ability to resist being both dazed by prosperity and broken by adversity. The philosopher is supposed to remain unperturbed by his changing fortunes and face the future with equanimity. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "Philosophical: ... befitting or characteristic of a philosopher: wise; calm; temperate ..." Now it may well be that only a fraction of the class of philosophers, especially among the analytic or linguistic variety, is actually endowed with these qualities, but there are, as I shall point out at the end of my paper, well known reasons why these should be commonly attributed to philosophers. The purpose of this paper, however, is to examine two modern views on the nature of time and to show that one of them may force upon its holders a somewhat astonishing reason to adopt a 'philosophical attitude' to a certain class of experiences. Since the particular attitude is quite unnatural, the fact that it should be required seems to count heavily against that specific doctrine concerning time. But let me begin at the beginning.

II

There are basically two different views on the nature of temporal relations that exist; one is due to McTaggart, the other to Russell. According to McTaggart, temporal particulars possess, in addition to the commonly agreed relations, some very special ones, while Russell denies this. The opponents of Russell regard his temporal universe as essentially impoverished while Russellians hold that their opponents admit into their universe non-existent properties. The fascinating thing about this controversy is that although it is by no means about some remote aspect of the world — on the contrary, it concerns a most immediate and constantly encountered feature of the

empirical universe — it is nevertheless not within the scope of ordinary observation or of scientific experimentation to decide which is the correct view. Only through philosophical analysis seems there to be any hope of making some progress toward the resolution of this very fundamental controversy affecting one of the most ubiquitous aspects of the universe we live in. A preliminary requirement, of course, is to understand exactly the two views, both of which have been subject to serious misinterpretation.

The controversy concerning temporal relations expresses itself also, of course, in a controversy about what kind of temporal statements exist. According to McTaggart<sup>1</sup> there are two fundamentally different kinds of temporal statements: *A*-statements and *B*-statements. The latter are the more familiar kind of statements, for *B*-statements, like all statements in general, have permanent truth values. “ $E_1$  is before  $E_2$ ” is a typical *B*-statement, which if true at any time is true at all times, and if false at any time is false at all times. *A*-statements, on the other hand, are statements whose truth-value is subject to change. “ $E_1$  is in the future” is an example of an *A*-statement since it is true if asserted at any time which is earlier than the occurrence of  $E_1$  but false if asserted at any other time.

It is essential for McTaggart that there be *A*-statements, for in their absence there is no possibility for change, and time would not be real if it did not permit change. But change occurs only when a fact which at one time has obtained ceases to obtain at another, or to put it differently, when a given statement which was true at one time becomes false at another or vice versa. Russell tried to argue that *A*-statements may be dispensed with since changes may be expressed with the aid of *B*-statements alone, as for example in the case of a poker which is hot at  $t_1$  but cold at  $t_2$  and thus undergoes a change which manifests itself in the fact that “The poker is hot at  $t_1$ ” is true while “The poker is hot at  $t_2$ ” is false. To this McTaggart objected that no genuine change in the properties of the poker has been expressed with the aid of these sentences since the first statement is true and never ceases to be true while the second statement is eternally false. In other words, it has been and will always be a fact that at  $t_1$  the poker is hot, and similarly it is an unchanging fact that at  $t_2$  the poker is not hot. Only the truth-value of the *A*-statement “The poker is hot now” really undergoes a change, for the statement is true when asserted at  $t_1$  but the self-same statement is false when asserted at  $t_2$ .

According to McTaggart, *A*-statements are statements which refer exclusively to temporal properties of events or moments and in no other

domain do we encounter any such peculiar statements. For example, "*O* is here" does not have the feature characteristic of *A*-statements that it changes its truth-value. At first look this may not be clear since it may seem that it is true when asserted at the same place where *O* is, but false when asserted elsewhere. This, however, is not really so. I am fairly certain that McTaggart would accept the analysis according to which "*O* is here," when asserted at two different places, amounts to two different assertions. The correct analysis of "*O* is here" is "*O* is at the place where I am", so when I am at  $p_1$  the proposition in effect asserts that *O* is at  $p_1$  but when I am at  $p_2$  then through the same words I assert that *O* is at  $p_2$ . Thus if *O* is in fact at  $p_1$  and so am I and I utter "*O* is here", then I make a true assertion and one which remains always true. When at  $p_2$  I again utter "*O* is here", I make a false assertion but one which is different from the assertion made at  $p_1$ , *for now I am asserting* in effect that *O* is at  $p_2$  and this is false and was false in the first place.

According to Russell<sup>2</sup> there are no *A*-statements. All statements have permanent truth-values. To a sentence like " $E_1$  is in the future" Russell applies basically the same kind of analysis as everybody does to a sentence like "*O* is here", namely, that when uttered at different times it expresses a different proposition. One variation of this kind of analysis is due to Reichenbach<sup>3</sup> and is also embraced by several other philosophers, among them J. J. C. Smart.<sup>4</sup> According to this view " $E_1$  is in the future" is reduced to the *B*-statement " $E_1$  is after the event of the utterance of this token", where 'this token' refers to the sentence-token just being uttered. Consequently, when this sentence is uttered on two different occasions, once before  $E_1$  and the second time after  $E_1$ , the first time the proposition asserted is true and is unalterably so. The second time the proposition asserted is a different one, since, unlike the first proposition which claimed that  $E_1$  is later than the first token, it claims that  $E_1$  is later than the second token. The second proposition is now, and has always been, false.

### III

It is instructive to consider briefly Gale's attempt to give an accurate definition of an *A*-statement. On p. 49 of his *Language of Time* (N.Y., 1968) he says:

Any statement which is not necessarily true (false) is an *A*-statement if, and only if, it is made through the use of a sentence for which it is possible that it is now used to make a

true (false) statement and some past or future use of it makes a false (true) statement even if both statements refer to the same things<sup>5</sup> and the same place.

Disregarding some of the details of this definition, we note its most outstanding feature, which is that according to Gale an *A*-statement is one which is expressed by a sentence that may on different occasions express statements with different truth-values. According to him it is only the sentence-type which remains the same from one occasion to the other; the statements which are made are different. Thus, even according to McTaggart it is not the case that the self-same statement may have different truth-values on different occasions.

It should be obvious, however, that Gale is mistaken. It may, for instance, be debated whether Russellians are right when they say that "*E*<sub>1</sub> is in the future" means no more and no less than the *B*-statement "*E*<sub>1</sub> is later than the event of the utterance of this token", but everyone agrees that the latter statement is a *B*-statement. However, if Gale's definition was correct, "*E*<sub>1</sub> is later than the event of the utterance of this token" expresses *A*-statements, since it is a sentence which when used on different occasions may express statements with different truth values. Further, if Gale was right, why did McTaggart think that once we have *A*-statements we have secured genuine change? After all, the true statement which we make through "*E*<sub>1</sub> is in the future" uttered before *E*<sub>1</sub> remains unalterably true and the false statement which is expressed by "*E*<sub>1</sub> is in the future" uttered after *E*<sub>1</sub> is a different statement. Lastly, McTaggart's own writing leaves no doubt concerning this matter since he explicitly says that the essence of change is embodied by the fact that the self-same proposition changes from true to false or vice versa. He says:

It follows from what we have said that there can be no change unless some propositions are sometimes true and sometimes false. This is the case of propositions which deal with the place of anything in the *A*-series – "the battle of Waterloo is in the past", "it is now raining". But it is not the case with any other proposition.

The interesting thing is that this passage, which Gale ignores, is reprinted in his own *The Philosophy of Time* (Garden City, 1967) p. 93.

Thus, contrary to Gale, *A*-statements are statements which themselves undergo changes in truth-value. In view of this, it also becomes evident that the last phrase in Gale's definition is superfluous. As he himself explains,<sup>6</sup> he has added the phrase "even if both statements refer to the same things and the same places" to exclude first of all a statement like "I am Richard Gale".

Without a special proviso this statement satisfies his definition of an *A*-statement, since it is logically possible that two non-simultaneous uses of the sentence expressing it make statements differing in truth-value. This would happen – as he points out – if one of these statements was made by him and the other by someone else. Another example of a kind of statement which he needs to exclude is “*O* is here”. But of course on the correct understanding of the nature of *A*-statements we need make no special provisions to exclude these sentences. The statement expressed by “I am Richard Gale” does not qualify as an *A*-statement anyhow since when the sentence is uttered by two different people it makes different statements. Similarly, as we have already said, “*O* is here” when uttered at different places makes different statements. It is only a sentence like “*E*<sub>1</sub> is in the future” which is such that no matter when uttered, it expresses the same statement, a statement which may on one occasion be true and on another false.

## IV

Many people feel intuitively dissatisfied with the Russellian analysis of temporal statements. By eliminating *A*-statements, they feel, Russell is left with an essentially impoverished notion of time. However, it seems extremely difficult to give a correct expression to one's dissatisfaction. Gale makes several valiant attempts to do so but does not seem to succeed very well. He considers, among others, that particular Russellian suggestion according to which the correct analysis of “*S* is now  $\phi$ ” is the statement “*S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with theta” (*is* is a tenseless cupola), where ‘theta’ is a metalinguistic proper name for the occurrence of the tensed sentence token in the analysandum. Gale claims that this analysis must be wrong since:

The *B*-statements in the analysans of these two analyses do not entail the *A*-statements in the analysandum; that *S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with theta (the occurrence of a token ‘*S* is now’) does not entail that *S* is now  $\phi$ . These *B*-statements describe a *B*-relation between *S*'s being  $\phi$  and a certain token event without entailing that either of these events is now present (past, future). That they do not convey or entail information about the *A*-determination of an event can be seen by the fact that whenever someone uses the sentence “*S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with theta (the occurrence of a token of ‘*S* is now  $\phi$ )’”, he has not forestalled the question whether *S*'s being  $\phi$  (or the occurrence of theta) is now present (past, future).<sup>7</sup>

Till now we have been speaking of *A*-statements, but in the passage just quoted we find the term ‘*A*-determination’. *A*-determination stands for that

peculiar property which may be predicated of events and which may change with respect to events. For example, at  $t_1$  John may like a given event, and at  $t_2$  he may cease liking that event, yet it would be wrong to think that the event in question has undergone a change with respect to the property of being liked by John between the times  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . For, strictly speaking, it is the property of being liked by John at  $t_1$  which the event has and never ceases to have, whereas the property of being liked by John at  $t_2$  the event lacks permanently. On the other hand, a property like "being in the future" is a property in itself, and, according to McTaggart, one with respect to which an event may undergo changes.

What Gale seems to have overlooked is that the whole point of the Russellian analysis has been to show that there is no such thing as *A*-determination and that all temporal properties are, strictly speaking, permanent properties. Hence there is no room for complaining that the analysans put forward by Russellians conveys or entails no information about the *A*-determination of *S*'s being  $\phi$ , for that event, just like any other event, has no *A*-determination. Events can have only such unchanging relations as being before, after or simultaneous with other fixed events or moments. There just do not exist such extra and variable properties as being before, after or simultaneous with the 'present'. According to Russell, when we say of an event that it is occurring now, we merely assign to it the property of being simultaneous with some other fixed event, for saying that an event is occurring now is no more than an abbreviated way of saying that the event in question is simultaneous with a given token. On the Russellian view, "*S* is now  $\phi$ " is no more or less than "*S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with theta" and therefore the latter sentence fully expresses all that the first sentence expresses. Only on McTaggart's view does it make sense to ask, after it has been said that *S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with theta, "But does *S*'s being  $\phi$  occur in the present?", and this is in effect to ask whether *S*'s being  $\phi$  is simultaneous with the shifting present. On the Russellian view there is no such thing as the 'shifting present' and after we have affirmed that *S*'s being  $\phi$  has the permanent property of being simultaneous with theta, there is no room to inquire further about the variable properties of the same event. There are just no such properties.

In another attempt to show the inadequacy of the Russellian analysis Gale says:

... that *X* is now present, unlike the statement that *X* is simultaneous with this token does not entail that there is a token and moreover one which is simultaneous with *X*. The statement that *X* is now present seems to have different truth conditions from the statement *X* is simultaneous with this token; for that a token occur simultaneously with *X* is a truthcondition of the latter but not of the former statement. The statement that *X* is present although no token occurs, unlike the statement that *X* is simultaneous with this token although no token occurs does not appear to be a contradiction.<sup>8</sup>

Once more what Gale says is true only for McTaggart. According to him an event just is or not in the present, irrespective of any token being uttered. But not so on the Russellian view. On this view being present is a diadic relationship between an event and a token referring to it, and when there is no such token there is nothing with respect to which the event in question may have this relation. On the Russellian view, time is essentially similar to space. Just as it would be wrong to insist that "O is here" may be true whether I am or am not at the same place as O so it cannot be said that "X is present" may be true when *X* is not simultaneous with any utterance.

Another objection to Russell I have heard from Asa Kasher. When two different people say at the same time that *X* is now, commonsense tells us that they are making the same assertion. According to Russell, however, each one is claiming that *X* is simultaneous with his utterance, thus relating *X* to a different event and thereby making a different assertion. Once more, however, it is useful to compare the temporal and spatial situations. When two different people at the same place say that *O* is here they may be viewed as expressing the same statement since both of them claim that *O* is at the same place as they are, that is, they assert the co-spatiality of *O* and the same point in space. Similarly "X is present" can be taken to mean "X is simultaneous with the time at which the utterance of this token is occurring", in which case both are asserting the co-temporality of *X* and the same point in time.

## V

The strongest motives for preferring McTaggart's view to Russell's, however, are due to the deeply entrenched impression shared by all of the transiency of time and the generally held belief that time is moving. According to Russell, there is no room for any transiency, as all temporal relations between events themselves and events and moments are permanent and no temporal particular changes its fixed position in the temporal series of moments.



According to McTaggart, however, it is possible to look upon the 'now' as a particular which shifts its position relative to the series of events in the direction of the future. This movement is manifested by the fact that at one stage it is a fact that  $E_1$  is in the future which means that  $E_1$  is a point in time which is later than the time at which the 'now' is situated. Yet at another stage this ceases to be a fact and the 'now' reaches the same position in time at which  $E_1$  is situated and the two are simultaneous; then, of course, it becomes true that  $E_1$  is in the present.

Now while nobody denies that a deeply felt impression that time indeed flows relative to the present is a part of our mental makeup, many philosophers have already cited very strong reasons why this impression must be mistaken. After all, if there really was a relative movement between the 'now' and the series of moments, it would make sense to ask how fast this movement took place. A moment's reflection, however, reveals that it is not because we lack this or that information that we cannot provide an answer to this question, but because it is in principle impossible to measure the speed of this movement. Such movement must therefore be deemed nonexistent.

A second and even stronger argument consists in pointing out that a movement always essentially involves two series so that points in one may be correlated to points in the other. For example, when a car is moving along the road this is embodied in the fact that one position of the car in the series of spatial points corresponds to a given point in the series of moments while a second position of the car in the same series of spatial points corresponds to another point in the series of temporal positions. But how could the movement of the 'now' along the series of moments be realized? What other series is there in which two different points correspond to any two positions the 'now' occupies along the time series?

Another famous objection is due to Broad.<sup>9</sup> When a car reaches a given point in space, that is one event, and when it reaches another point, that is another event. It is events of this kind which form the elements of moments that constitute our time series. When the 'now' reaches a given point in this series of moments that must also be some kind of an event, but one which surely cannot be a member of the very set which constitutes that moment. Thus, unless we are prepared to introduce an additional, meta-series of moments made up of these events, we must deny the reality of these events and resign ourselves to the fact that the 'now' hitting moments in time is not something that really occurs.

But in spite of the formidable obstacles to giving a coherent account of the transient aspect of time, we remain strongly reluctant to accept the idea that “*X* is now” is no more than an abbreviation for “*X* is simultaneous with this token”. Such analysis impoverishes time greatly since it renders all moments equal; for every single moment is equally simultaneous with all the tokens that are uttered at that moment. But all moments in time are by no means equal; there is always a privileged moment. Suppose  $t_1$  is simultaneous with a certain set of utterances and all that distinguishes  $t_1$  from any other time  $t_2$  is that the latter is simultaneous with a different set of events. There is a most significant feature which sets  $t_1$  apart from any other time. All the utterances made at  $t_1$  as well as all other events occurring then are in the predominant position of having the capacity of being directly presented to that part of one’s awareness that is being lived. Along a human consciousness, which may stretch out over several decades, each point is not like every other point. In fact there is one particular point which is real and alive while every other point exists only in one’s memory or in one’s anticipation. All events which are simultaneous with that point in one’s consciousness which is being experienced are privileged events in that they are occurring now.

This move, however, does not succeed. The Russellian will ask which particular moment is privileged in the sense just described at any given time, and the only possible answer to this is that at time  $t_1$ , time  $t_1$  is so privileged. But then he too is ready to admit the trivial truism that, at time  $t_1$ , time  $t_1$  is privileged, as is every point of time at its own occurrence. By voicing this truth we are actually claiming that ultimately all points in time are similar to one another.

## VI

We have described several reasons why it is impossible to give an account of the movement of time in terms in which movement is normally understood. Yet it is conceivable that we should be forced to acknowledge that moments and events have certain features which are essentially features of particulars that partake in motion. In that case we should have to side with McTaggart and concede that time must be moving even though the movement in question must be a very peculiar one, very unsimilar to movement in general or one which we cannot even hope ever completely to understand. So what we have to ask ourselves is whether this deeply entrenched impression concerning time’s motion is soundly based on some undisputed phenomenon.

If the answer is yes, then, while the difficulties attending the notion of movement as applied to time do not disappear, the existence of this movement must be acknowledged. The difficulties in question would present a problem we may either hope to solve one day or which we may have to learn to live with.

Let us look at an attempt to point out such a phenomenon. An event which is in the future does become an event in the present. Surely this undeniably true proposition is indicative of the movement of the series of moments. The reason why an event ahead of us becomes an event to be experienced is because the distance between the event and us disappears due to its movement toward us eventually making contact with us. One may perhaps want to say on Russell's behalf that while it is true that an event which is in the future does become an event in the present it does not imply any movement. The statement could be analysed in Russellian terms in this way: An event which is later than this token is simultaneous with a token which occurs later than this token. But this does not seem to be correct. After all, it is false that an event which is in the past does become an event in the present. Yet if the previous was a correct translation of the proposition concerning the event in the future then the translation into Russellian terms of the proposition concerning the past event is: An event which is before this token is simultaneous with a token which occurs before this token. This however is true.

Upon further reflection, however, it should become clear that the proposition in question is not really indicative of the movement of time. In attempting to render it in Russellian terms, we overlooked the fact that the term 'becomes' has to be translated too and that it means "is at a later time". Consequently, the first proposition turns out to have been translated acceptably, but the second proposition translates either into "An event which is earlier than this token is *at a later time* simultaneous with a token which occurs at an earlier time" or "An event which is earlier than this token is simultaneous with a token which occurs at a later time than this token". Both propositions are of course false.<sup>10</sup>

## VII

And yet there seem to exist some inescapable facts which may be construed as evidence, not entirely conclusive perhaps, but strongly indicative that the

temporal universe does have the richness attributed to it by McTaggart and that the more austere Russellian view concerning what temporal relations exist is inadequate. This evidence basically consists in our very different attitudes toward the future and the past. The existence of these differences is universally acknowledged and they are shared by Russellians no less than by others; nobody denounces these differences in attitudes as irrational; nobody advocates that our attitudes are to be reformed in the light of a clear-headed analysis of temporal relations. But there is a strong case for claiming that these differences are justified only if time also has a transient aspect and moments do partake in a movement the direction of which is specifically from the future toward the past. On the Russellian view, which does not permit any changes and according to which all temporal relations are permanently fixed, it is very hard to justify such differences in attitude.

Consider the difference in attitude we have toward a very unpleasant experience like a painful operation which we know has been performed on our body in the past and the attitude toward the same kind of event which we know is going to occur to us at some given time in the future. In the first case thinking about the harrowing experience is accompanied by a feeling of relief; in the second case contemplating the experience in question arouses in us a feeling of anxiety and dread. Now why the relief in the first case? Obviously because the highly disagreeable experience is 'over', that is, it is receding from us and we are escaping from it rather than still experiencing it or moving toward it. On the other hand, the feeling of dread in the second case is explained by the fact that the agonizing experience is seen to be approaching us and is known to be about to overtake us.

On the Russellian view, however, there is no room for such talk since no events are receding from us and none are approaching us; distances between all temporal particulars remain fixed permanently. Consider for instance our state of mind at  $t_2$  which lies between the two times  $t_1$  and  $t_3$  at both of which a painful event occurs. Neither of these events is being experienced at  $t_2$ , so why are we at that time so concerned about the event at  $t_3$  in the future? The explanation is that it is thought of as threatening us because it is *going* to be experienced by us. But this feeling of being threatened seems to make sense only if "going to be experienced" is understood not merely as claimed in the last section — "it is experienced at a time which is later than  $t_2$ " — but if it is taken to have the stronger connotation "it is shifting its position toward us". But it is only according to McTaggart that it is legitimate

to think of events as engaged in the process of moving toward or away from the present. As we have already said, according to Russell time is essentially like space in which all relations are fixed. If it is given that I have a painful experience at a spot which is one mile to my left and also one at a spot which is one mile to my right, from this we cannot derive that there must be a difference in my attitude toward these two experiences. The spatial relations of these two relations are symmetrical with respect to my position and knowing them alone does not warrant that I should be concerned more by the one than by the other. Similarly, when an unpleasant experience occurs at a given temporal distance from the time at which this token occurs, why should it matter in which direction this experience lies?

Another question which we may raise is that of why our attitude toward the event of our birth should be different from that toward the event of our death. Both events represent a dividing point between a period of existence and non-existence; why does it so crucially matter that in one case the period of non-existence lies before the point of division and in the other it lies after? Russellians might perhaps want to reply that the difference is due to the fact that in the first instance one begins to exist; in the other, one ceases to exist. But to them the time at which one begins to exist means no more than the time later than which one does exist, earlier than which one does not. And the time at which one ceases to exist is the time later than which one does not exist, earlier than which one does. The question then once more returns: why is it so crucially important on which side of the division point the periods of existence and of non-existence lie? On McTaggart's view, of course, matters seem to be self-explanatory. To begin to exist means to move away from a state of non-existence into a state of existence, and, given that it is desirable to exist, births are occasions for joy. To cease to exist, on the other hand, is to move away from a state of existence into a state of non-existence, which is something to bemoan.

An entirely similar point emerges from the difference between our attitudes toward pleasant events which are known to have occurred in the past and those which are expected in the future. Pleasant experiences of the past are recalled with nostalgia, and we regret their passing, that is, we are sorry that they are getting further away from the 'now' which is the point in time at which events are real to our experience. On the other hand, pleasant experiences of the future are being looked forward to with joy since they are approaching the 'now' and are about to overtake us.

Philosophers like Donald Williams<sup>11</sup> and J. J. C. Smart<sup>12</sup> have argued eloquently that it is completely wrong-headed to speak of the 'river of time' or of time as 'flowing', 'marching on' and the like, for moments and events do not partake in any movement. The relative positions of all temporal particulars with respect to one another are fixed forever. Yet nobody has deplored our attitudes to different sorts of events of the future and the past. Nobody has advocated that our states of mind ought to be the same when contemplating our death as when contemplating our birth, or that we should be no more pleased by the pleasant events the future holds for us than by those which occurred in the past, or that we should not dread the misfortunes of the future more than those of the past.

### VIII

Perhaps it may seem to some Russellians that their greater concern with the future than the past could be justified simply by the fact, not denied by anyone, that causes precede their effects. Russellians agree that at  $t_2$  we may affect events occurring later at  $t_3$ , but not events occurring earlier at  $t_1$ . Hence fear at  $t_2$  of the disasters of  $t_3$  fulfills the useful function of spurring us into action at  $t_2$ , action which may prevent those disasters. Also the thrill with which we anticipate at  $t_2$  the happy events of  $t_3$  plays the role of inducing us to help these events to come about. Concern at  $t_2$  with the happenings of  $t_1$  has no such usefulness.

This defense will surely not do since we dread no less the calamities of the future that are absolutely unpreventable and look forward no less jubilantly to great pleasures that are sure to materialize without our help. And it seems that we do not find our attitudes irrational.

The only way out of this difficulty that seems to remain is to deny what has been said in the last Section and to insist that since time is no more flowing in one direction than in another, a true philosopher ought indeed to face the future with no less equanimity than the past.<sup>13</sup> The enlightened thinker will view events ahead with the same detachment as the ordinary person views past events which have no further repercussions.

This strikes me as a most unlikely solution. It should do no good to quote the traditional notion of the philosopher as being calm and unperturbed at all times; to cite the example of Socrates who was entirely unafraid even of death; to refer to the fortitude of the Stoics and so on. The special attitude

that has been typical of some philosophers and which we feel is justified and even admirable is based on something entirely different. These sages had a different perception of what is of real and lasting value (e.g., life after death, the possession of virtue, and so on), and, being single-mindedly engaged in the pursuance of their higher goals, they became immune to the mundane and transient pleasures and pains that do excite others.

A simple test which distinguishes between such traditional attitudes and the one which would be implied by the Russellian interpretation of time is this: Socrates, the Stoics and other such thinkers were supposedly composed and calm with respect to the present too, while the Russellian view of time has no implications whatever concerning the required attitude toward what is going on now. We know that it is by no means contrary to human nature to view more or less with indifference one's past and future, as well as present, fate. All of us have encountered people who have to some degree emulated the ways of these luminaries of the past and remained — because being absorbed in the world of the intellect, the spirit, the soul or morality — relatively unperturbed by what had happened, was going to happen, and was happening to them. The Russellian doctrine of time, on the other hand, permits one to be completely ecstatic about pleasures of all kinds one is experiencing now and also to bewail bitterly one's present perplexities. It is only about the events of the future that one must not feel any differently than about those of the past. I do not believe that many of us have met people exhibiting such strange attitudes. Nor do I believe that, should the Russellian idea of the stillness of time gain wider acceptance, such peculiar partial philosophical equanimity is going to be manifested by many more people.

The last sentence of the last Section should therefore read “Nobody, or hardly anybody, who has been concerned considerably with his present well-being and comforts, has advocated that our states of mind ought to be the same when contemplating our death as when contemplating our birth, etc.” The sentiments required by the Russellian doctrine of time seem contrary to human nature.<sup>14</sup>

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, Volume II, Book 5, Chapter 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Mathematics*, Section 442.

<sup>3</sup> *Elements of Symbolic Logic* (New York, 1947), pp. 284–287.

<sup>4</sup> *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (London, 1963), p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Things’ is to be taken as ‘material things’ referring in particular to human beings.

<sup>6</sup> *The Language of Time*, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> *An Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, Vol. II, Part I, Section 1.22.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Richard Taylor's *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965). In Chapter 6, ‘Time and Becoming’, in the last section entitled ‘The attempt to expurgate pure becoming’, pp. 80–83, he considers four statements which seem impossible to reformulate in terms of *B*-statements (he himself does not use this terminology). One of these is “*Y* is receding even further into the past.” Among other things, he says:

We cannot just say that *Y* is *earlier* or *anterior* to some time, for instance, for this is true of all times whatever, including those which are not receding into the past – namely of all future times. We must identify the time to which *Y* is anterior, either as being the present time or some time itself anterior to the present, and the hopelessness of this is quite obvious. (p. 82)

But surely a Russellian could suggest a partial translation of Taylor's statement which would go something like “*Y* is earlier than this token and even earlier than any token later than this token” – which of course is true only if *Y* is a past moment. And what about a full translation? Russell's answer to this would be that the original statement contains also some incoherent elements, i.e. the notion that *Y* is *engaged* in (some sort of activity) of receding into the past. While recognizing how strongly such notions are fixed in our minds, he would insist that they have to be expurgated. The suggested *B*-statement captures all that is factual in Taylor's statement.

<sup>11</sup> ‘The Myth of Passage’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1951.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The River of Time’, *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*, Ed. A. Flew (London, 1963), pp. 213–227.

<sup>13</sup> Professor Smart has suggested – tentatively – this as a possibility in a recent conversation.