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PhD Thesis

The C+A Theory of Time:
Explaining the Difference between
the Experience of time
and the Understanding of Time

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Summary of Thesis

The central problem addressed by this thesis is to attempt and reconcile our experience of time with our scientific understanding of time. Science tells us that time is static yet we experience it as dynamic. In the literature there tend to be two positions. Those who follow the science and claim that time is static and that our experience is mind-independent; those who favour our experience and question the science. I attempt to reconcile these positions.

To do this I adopt terminology set out by McTaggart (1908) who termed the static view the B series and the dynamic view the A series. The literature that has developed out of this breaks down into the A Theory where time is the past, present and future; and the B Theory, where time is just involves events being earlier than or later than other events. I reject both positions as accounts of ontology. I adopt McTaggart's C series, a series of betweenness only, on the grounds that it is this series that is mostly aligned to science.

Given the C series, our experience requires explanation. A claim of mind-dependency is insufficient. I argue that the A series really refers to mind-dependent features that are brought out by our interaction with the C series; much like the way that colour is brought out by our interaction with a colourless world. The B series is the best description of the contents of time, not time itself.

To examine the experience of time I adopt phenomenology to describe that experience. From within experience I show that certain features of that experience cannot be attributed to a mind-independent reality and use this as further evidence for the above claims.

Finally I suggest that most theories of time are driven by the view that a theory of time has to be consistent. I examine recent developments in logic to see whether such a consistent requirement is needed. I conclude that the most we can get out of paraconsistent approaches is inconsistent experiences, not inconsistent reality.

I conclude that the A series is the best description of our experience of time, the C series the best description of the ontology of time, and the B series as the best description of the contents of time. This reconciles our experience with our understanding of time.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available in all forms of media, now or hereafter known.

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