

Preface and Acknowledgments

One of the characters of Raymond Queneau's mesmerizing world, Valentin, the protagonist of *The Sunday of Life*, spends his days trying "to see how time passes."¹ A shopkeeper, Valentin finds that "It's especially in the afternoons that he is able to devote himself to following the movement of the clock-hand, with his mind clear of the pictures that everyday life deposits in it." The mornings are also suitable: "up at five o'clock, he opens the store at seven, thus gaining two hours in which to watch time, in the limpidity of morning, or the mists of daybreak." But, he discovers that, if following the clock-hand is easy, "to see how time passes is an undertaking as difficult as that of catching yourself fall asleep." This immediately invites the question: does time itself move, in addition to, or over and above, the movement of the clock's hand, or is time's passage merely an illusion?

I've posed this question to several shopkeepers myself, and then pestered with it colleagues from various university departments. I expected people to be outraged by the notion that time's passage is an illusion. And, although many were, to my surprise, here and there I ran into someone who vehemently insisted that, to the contrary, it was self-evident that time's passage has to do only with how we apprehend things from our subjective, human perspective, and not with how they really are. The question, at any rate, is a difficult one, even if it appears simple. And the semblance of simplicity too is deceptive—it turns out to be complicated to make sense of the question. But for those interested in time, it is well worth putting in the effort.

Philosophy makes, at times, for a hard read. Still, my conviction that Valentin represents a curiosity that is practically universal guided my efforts to render this book accessible to as wide an audience as possible. Indeed, I believe not only that time is something that might intrigue

anyone, but that many of the insights philosophy has to offer on the subject can also be enjoyed by anyone willing to seek them, regardless of background.

Time's passage, naively, at least, consists of the becoming present of future events and then their becoming past. So the notion of time's passage is intimately implicated with the distinction between the past, present, and future. Analytic philosophers dealing with the above question tend to belong to one of two camps: the tensed camp, which defends the reality of time's passage within a framework in which the present is conceived as "ontologically privileged" with respect to the past and the future; and the tenseless camp, which denies the reality of the distinction between the past, present, and future and so of time's passage, holding instead that all events, irrespective of their temporal location, are on an "ontological par."

For defenders of either view, the position they espouse is supposed to be the definitive word on the nature of time. In this book, however, the debate between the tensed and tenseless camps is conceived as a first stage in the philosophical investigation of time, a crucial stage, but not a conclusive one. The next stage belongs to phenomenology. I will claim that phenomenology grows naturally out of the analytic enterprise, which is shown to, in itself, rely on phenomenological observations. I will also claim that although mature phenomenology takes the inquiry to places beyond the reach of analytic efforts, in doing so it should be supported by the kind of edifice the analytic arguments provide.

Time and Realism, then, has two related goals: to analyze, and then move beyond, the tensed/tenseless or presentist/eternalist² debate in the metaphysics of time, resolving along the way some of the central difficulties in the field; and to serve as a bridge between the analytic and the continental traditions in the philosophy of time, both of which I claim are vital to the philosophical examination of time.

Here's a brief rundown of the book's chapters. After the introductory chapter, the book turns to a presentation of the main arguments in favor of both the tenseless and tensed theories of time (chapters 2 and 3). One of the main theses educed (in chapter 4) from this presentation is that, contrary to the received view, the two rival theories have much in common, and in fact are generated and sustained by a joint metaphysical presupposition. The presupposition, referred to in the book as the *ontological assumption*, is, crudely, that tense concerns the ontological status of

things, and that therefore the question the philosophical investigation of time ought to focus on is whether or not something's being "real" depends on its location in time. In addition to uncovering this joint assumption, I am concerned to establish (also in chapter 4) that this assumption and the questions it engenders emerge naturally and *inevitably* once time is posed as the subject of a philosophical inquiry. Hence the predominance and liveliness of the tensed/tenseless debate, which is underpinned by the assumption and concerns the questions derived from it. However, further examination of the ontological assumption shows it to be untenable, from which it follows that neither the tensed nor the tenseless view has the final word in the metaphysics of time. The investigation is then carried beyond the tensed/tenseless debate. Transcending the debate and leaving ontological theses behind creates a new viewpoint from which to study central topics in the metaphysics of time. Chapter 5 is devoted to such a study. The results obtained turn out to depend on the kind of meticulous attention to our firsthand experiences that drives phenomenological investigations. Realizing this sets phenomenology as the venue in which the investigation can advance. The transition from the analytic study to phenomenology is discussed in the final chapter (chapter 6).

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