

McTaggart's Paradox Defended

No argument has done as much to stimulate debate in the philosophy of time as McTaggart's argument for the unreality of time.¹ On the one side are A-theorists who believe McTaggart's positive thesis that time involves the A-series and temporal passage, but deny his negative thesis that the A-series and temporal passage are contradictory.² On the other side are B-theorists who believe that McTaggart's positive conception of time is mistaken, but that his negative thesis is true.³ At least part of the reason why McTaggart's paradox has failed to convince defenders of passage is because they fail to appreciate his positive thesis and thereby misunderstand the rationale behind his negative thesis. The purpose of this paper is to prove that point. I shall proceed by first explicating what I take McTaggart's positive and negative theses to be. I shall then show how and why one recent response to McTaggart's paradox, which is representative of many, is unsuccessful because it misunderstands it. And finally, I will explain how a subsidiary benefit of my account of McTaggart's paradox is that it can provide a clear criterion for distinguishing passage from non-passage views of time.

¹ J.E.M. McTaggart, "Time," in C. D. Broad (ed.), *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927; reprinted Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1968): 9-31. All page references will be to the 1968 edition. J.E.M. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," *Mind* 18 (1908), pp. 457-74, reprinted in S.V. Keeling (ed.), *Philosophical Studies* (London: Edward & Arnold & Co., 1934): 110-34. All page references will be to *Philosophical Studies*.

² See for example, Quentin Smith, *Language and Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). William Lane Craig, *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). William Lane Craig, *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). Michael Tooley *Time, Tense and Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

³ See for example, Robin Le Poidevin, *Time, Cause and Contradiction: A Defense of the Tenseless Theory of Time* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991). D. H. Mellor, *Real Time II* (London: Routledge, 1998).

L. Nathan Oaklander, *Temporal Relations and Temporal Becoming: A Defense of a Russellian Theory of Time* (Lanham: MD: University Press of America, 1984).

According to McTaggart, we ordinarily (or commonsensically) conceive of time as involving the notions of past, present and future (A-determinations) and earlier than/later than and simultaneous with (B-relations). Although McTaggart claims that the A-series (defined in terms of A-determinations) and the B-series (defined in terms of B-relations) are both essential to our *ordinary* concept of time, he believes that A-determinations and the A-series are more fundamental, more ultimate and more essential to the *ontological* nature of time than B-relations and the B-series. In fact, his view is that the B-series is dependent on the A-series, not only because there would be no B-relations unless there were A-determinations, but more fundamentally, because the B-series is ontologically reducible to the A-series and the non-temporal C-series. The C-series gives the B-series its permanent *order*, and since the C-series contains a genuine (non-temporal) relation, when it is conjoined with the A-series the two series together give time a *direction* by providing a metaphysical basis for the temporal B-series.⁴ In other words, the A-series and the C-series are jointly necessary and sufficient for, and thereby the ontological ground of, B-relations.

The evidence that McTaggart does in fact hold the positive view of time that I am attributing to him is both textual and structural. That is, on the one hand, he basically says what I say he does, and on the other, by interpreting him as I do we can make sense of his argument that the A-series is contradictory and that therefore, time is unreal. I shall consider the textual evidence first. McTaggart says that the A-series and the C-series are jointly *sufficient* to constitute the B-series:

We can now see that the A series, together with the C series, is *sufficient to give us time*.... Thus to our previous conclusion that there can be no time unless the A series is true of reality, we can add the further conclusion that *no other elements are required to constitute a time-series except an A series and a C series*...⁵

Furthermore, the C-series and the A-series are jointly *necessary* for the B-series.

⁴ Whatever its virtues or vices, McTaggart offered the following definition of “earlier than”: “The term *P* is earlier than the time *Q*, if it is ever past while *Q* is present, or present while *Q* is future” (McTaggart 1927, 2, p. 271).

⁵ McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” *op. cit.*, p. 118; emphasis added.

The C series, however, is as ultimate as the A series. And this — the B-series — cannot be got out of the A-series alone. It is *only when* the A-series, which gives change and direction, is combined with the C series, which gives permanence that the B series can arise. (p. 118, emphasis added.)

The words “only when” signify that the A series and the C series are necessary for the B-series, and his claim from the previous quote that “no other elements are required to constitute a time series except an A series and a C series” (p. 118) implies that they are sufficient for the Bseries as well.

Finally, McTaggart claims that while the A-series and the C-series are each ultimate,

The B series, on the other hand, is not ultimate. For given a C series of permanent relations of terms, which is not in itself temporal and therefore is not a B series, and given the further fact that the terms of this C series also form an A series, and it results that the terms of the C series become a B series, those which are placed first, in the direction from past to future, being earlier than those whose places are farther in the direction of the future. (p. 118)

I think that these passages make it clear that for McTaggart there are no ontologically primitive or simple temporal relations. Metaphysically, time is entirely constituted by the A-series, and it together with the non-temporal but ordered C-series ground the commonsense view of time as involving *both* A-determinations and B-relations.

My interpretation is not only textually sound, but it also enables us to clearly bring into view the central issue in McTaggart’s paradox, namely, the ontological status of *succession*, the B-relations of *earlier/ later than* and *simultaneity*, and the *direction of time and change*. To see what is involved consider that time and change not only have an *order* they also have a *direction*, or what C. D. Broad referred to as an “intrinsic sense” in *Scientific Thought*⁶ and as an “intrinsic direction” in his *Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*⁷. If we have three objects M, N and O, then either M is between N and O, or O is between M and N, or N is between M and O, and this is so from any point of

⁶ C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* Broad, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1923). Reprinted in (Patterson, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1959). The phrase “intrinsic sense” is quoted from the 1959 edition, p. 61.

⁷ C. D. Broad, *An Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 269.

view. But regardless of what order a series has, that still leaves two different directions. If, say, N is between M and O, then the *sense* or *direction* of the series can be either MNO or ONM. To say that time and change have an intrinsic sense means that if MNO is the direction of change, then that is the direction from any point of view. Thus, for example, if an apple is *successively* green, red and brown, then it is green *before* it is red and it is red *before* it is brown. The direction of change from green to red to brown is intrinsic to the series since it changes in that direction from any point of view. The intrinsic direction of time is that feature that distinguishes a temporal series from a spatial series, since the direction of a spatial series is extrinsic to the terms since it depends on a point of view outside the series.⁸ What, then, is the ontological basis for the direction of time and change, that is, for the *succession* of one event/thing/time coming *after* another? Giving the A-theory answer to that question leads us directly to McTaggart's paradox.

On the A-theory, according to McTaggart, the direction of time is grounded in the application of the A-series to the C-series. That is, if there is a C-series in which A is related to B is related to C in that order, and if A is past, B is present and C is future, then we have a temporal series with an intrinsic direction: A is earlier than B is earlier than C from any point of view. The direction of time is from A to B to C and not the other way around. It is important to emphasize that McTaggart does *not* being by assuming that every event is (timelessly or simultaneously) past, present and but, but rather he denies it. Thus, the common critique of McTaggart that he errs at the first step by *assuming* every event is past, present and future is a *non-sequitor*. On the con-

⁸ Broad sums this up in the following passage that I shall quote at length:

In the temporal series of experiences that constitutes a person's mental history there is a genuine dyadic relation that is intrinsic to the series and involves no reference to any term outside the latter. This is the relation of "earlier than". ... In the temporal series there are two intrinsically opposite directions, earlier-to-later and later-to-earlier. In the linear spatial series there is no *intrinsic* direction. If direction is to be introduced, this must be done *extrinsically*, either by reference to motion along the line (and therefore to time), or by reference to the right and left hands of an external observer, or in some other way. (*Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, *op. cit.* vol. 2, p. 269)

trary, McTaggart begins by *insisting* that an event or moment in time can have *one and only one* A-determination.

Consider, for example, the following passages:

And we *must* say that a series is an *A* series when each of its terms has, to an entity *X* outside the series, *one, and only one*, of three indefinable relations, pastness, presentness, and futurity...⁹

And again in "The Unreality of Time" he says,

Past, present, and future are incompatible determinations. *Every event must be one or the other, but no event can be more than one.* ... And, if it were not so, the A series would be insufficient to give us, in combination with the C series, the result of [B-] time.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the story cannot end here. For if the terms of the A-series and C-series have *one and only one* A-determination, then nothing changes since no term has an A -determination and then loses it, and without change there is no time (or B-relations), and *a fortiori* no direction to time and change.

Thus, in order for there to be change and change in a given direction something more has to be added to a single A-series whose terms are related by non-temporal C-relations: The A-series and its terms must undergo *temporal becoming*. For only by undergoing temporal becoming can we have change in a given direction. McTaggart puts this point as follows:

Therefore, besides the C series and the fact of change there must be given- in order to get time - the fact that the change is in one direction and not in the other. We can now see that the A series, together with the C series, is sufficient to give us time. For in order to get change and change in a given direction, it is sufficient that one position in the C series should be Present, to the exclusion of all others, and that *this characteristic of presentness should pass along the series* in such a way that all positions on the one side of the Present have been present, and all positions on the other side of it will be present. That which has been present is Past, that which will be present is Future. (*Ibid.* pp. 117-118)

Temporal becoming is thus the passage of *presentness* along the non-temporal C-series thus generating the direction of succession in the B-series. Thus, the further claim that every event/thing/moment has all

⁹ McTaggart, "Time," *op. cit.* p. 20; emphasis added.

¹⁰ McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," *op. cit.* p. 123; emphasis added.

three A-determinations is not assumed but is implied by the view — endorsed by A-theorists — that change requires temporal becoming.

We can already begin to see, in outline, the obstacles facing the reality of A-time. In order for B-relations to exist, the terms of a single A- and C-series must have *one and only one* A-determination. (Whether an A-determination is construed as an A-property or an A-relation to some term outside the A-series makes no difference.) However, if the terms of the A-series form a B-series by having one and only one A-determination, then there is no change (because there is no temporal becoming) and hence there are no B-relations. Thus, the first contradiction with the A-series is that it together with the C-series implies that there are B-relations and yet the A-series together with the C-series implies that there are no B-relations. From that it follows that the B-series does not exist, and thus no temporal item can have incompatible properties *successively*, i.e., change is impossible. On the other hand, if there is change, because there is temporal becoming in the form of the moving present or moving NOW, then a contradiction still ensues because every term will have every A-determination, and for that reason the A-theorist cannot account for the direction of time and change. Thus, with or without temporal becoming the A-theorist cannot account for succession in time and the direction of change.

The problem then is this: if we have the A-series of past, present and future temporal items superimposed on the C-series, then we presumably have a B-series with an intrinsic direction. However, the resulting series is not really a B-series because B-time requires change and there is nothing in a single A-series superimposed on a C-series that changes. There is nothing that has a property and then loses it. Thus, to account for change and change in a given direction we must introduce temporal becoming, or the movement or passage of time along the A- and C-series. However, there is no way that can be consistently done.

If temporal becoming is explained by positing a term outside of the temporal series that moves along the terms of a *single* A- and C-series, then each of the terms in the A-series and C-series have incompatible A-relations to the moving NOW, or incompatible non-relational A-properties. Clearly, this account of temporal becoming is *contradictory* since it is logically impossible for each term of the A-series to have

incompatible A-determinations, as it must if temporal becoming involves a NOW literally moving along a single A-series. Furthermore, temporal becoming *destroys the fact of change* since if all the terms of a single A- and C-series have all three relations to the NOW (or all three monadic A-properties), then nothing has a property and then loses it. And finally this account of temporal becoming is *self-defeating* because it undermines the *raison d'être* for temporal becoming, namely, to account for the direction of time. For if each term in a single A-series has each A-determination, then there is no basis or ground for the terms of the A- and C-series occurring in succession, one after the other.

Perhaps an A-theorist could construe temporal becoming as involving a second series whose terms are each an A_1 -series (of the first level). On this view, each A_1 -series has terms that have one and only one A-determination. Therefore, if time (or temporal becoming) is the totality of A_1 -series (A_{1a} , A_{1b} , A_{1c} , ... A_{1n}), we have a *single term* having one A-determination in one A_{1a} -series and the same term having a different A-determination in a different A_{1b} -series, and so on, and presumably that is sufficient for real change; a single thing having a property and then losing it.

However, before we accept that gambit we must ask, what is the relation between each A_1 -series? If the relation is *non-temporal*, so that each A_1 series does not exist before or after the other in a temporal relation, then it is always true that each term of each A_1 -series has all its A-determinations timelessly, and that is contradictory, and destroys the fact of change. On the other hand, if the relation between the series of A_1 -series is a B-relation so that the different A_1 -series occur in *succession*, then the account is viciously circular. Given that B-relations are reducible to the A- plus C-series, if the series of A_1 -series constitute a temporal series, then there must be an A_2 -series superimposed on a C_2 -series. In that case, however, the problem we originally faced still exists, only this time at the level of the A_2 -series. Each term of the A_2 -series has one and only one A-determination and so does not change, and without change the relation uniting the series of A_1 -series (A_{1a} , A_{1b} , A_{1c} , ... A_{1n}), *cannot* be a B-relation. And if we

introduce temporal becoming in the form of the NOW moving along a single A_2 series, then we have a contradiction. Clearly, the appeal to another series, namely, that composed of a series of A_2 -series will neither remove the contradiction from the A-series nor give a direction to time and change.

Finally, if we treat temporal becoming as an A_2 -series of A_1 -series whose terms have different A-determinations at different *moments* of absolute time then the A-theorist must face the following difficulty. The moments of time at which each different A_1 -series exist must be occurring one after another in a B-series to avoid the contradiction of each of the terms in the A_2 -series having incompatible A-determinations timelessly or simultaneously. However, if they are moments of *time*, then we need some account of the direction of those moments to account for the direction of change in the terms of the A_2 -series. But then, this account is viciously circular. For to say that a term in the A_2 -series has different and incompatible A-determinations at different times presupposes and does not establish that the times at which it has those properties occur in succession one after the other in a given direction. For times were introduced precisely to account for the succession and direction of A-change.

So, McTaggart's point is that the A-series and the C-series are necessary and sufficient for the existence of B-time, but that they are not sufficient for A-time or B-time, which is contradictory. For time requires change and the A- and C-series cannot account for change without introducing some metaphysical correlate of temporal becoming. However, there is no consistent, non-circular way to metaphysically interpret temporal becoming so that change is not contradictory. Since, for the A-theorist, B-time requires temporal becoming and temporal becoming is contradictory, it follows that there is no B-time and without B-time there is no time at all.

With this background we are ready to turn to one recent defense of passage against McTaggart's attack, namely, Steven Savitt's in his recent article, "A Limited Defense of Passage."¹¹ Savitt gets off on the

¹¹ Steven F. Savitt, A Limited Defense of Passage," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 Q"uly 2001), pp. 261-270.

wrong foot immediately since he assumes at the outset that for McTaggart B-relations are ontologically on a par with A-properties, both being equally real. Savitt claims that “all instantaneous events belong to equivalence classes determined by the binary relation ‘is simultaneous with’ and completely ordered by the binary relation ‘is earlier than’ (or by its converse ‘is later than’)” (p. 261). Savitt clearly does assume the existence of temporal relations and assumes that McTaggart does so as well since he interprets McTaggart to be claiming that there are A-properties “*in addition to the B-series and its unchanging relations*” (p. 261; emphasis added). This assumption misunderstands what is at issue with regard to the dispute between A- and B-theories of time, and it begs the question against McTaggart’s claim that time is unreal. As I have indicated through a judicious selection of quotes, at the level of ontology, McTaggart clearly does not believe that there are B-relations in addition to the A- and C-series, and this is so even before his complete rejection of time. To see why the assumption that there are B-relations vitiates Savitt’s arguments against McTaggart let us turn to them.

The heart of McTaggart’s argument rests on the premises that the past, present and future are incompatible properties (or incompatible relations) and that every event has all three of them. We can symbolize these two premises as follows:

$Pe \supset \sim Ne; Ne \supset \sim Fe; Fe \supset \sim Pe; \text{etc.},$
 $Pe \ \& \ Ne \ \& \ Fe.$ (pp. 262-263).

Savitt claims that the copula involved in these sentences is the ordinary tensed copula, and in that sense of the copula there is no reason for the A-theorist to accept (6). In other words, if the copula in (5) has the ordinary tensed sense, then (5) is true, but (6) is false, for

No A-theorist ever *intended* to assert that any event is (in the ordinary, tensed-sense of the copula) currently present and past and future. No reason has been given to suppose that the A-theory is willy-nilly committed to holding that some event *e* is (again in the ordinary, tensed sense of the copula) future, present, and past. But if the A-theory is not committed to (6), ... McTaggart’s argument fails at its *first* step (p. 263; emphasis added).¹²

¹² This standard response is also made by Quentin Smith, *The Language of Time*, *op. cit.* p. 174; William Lane Craig, *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination*, *op. cit.* pp. 203-205, and C. D. Broad, *Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, *op. cit.* p. 313; and virtually every other A-theorist who discusses McTaggart’s paradox.

The problem with this well-worn response to McTaggart is that it attacks the argument at the *second* step and overlooks the *first* step. Once the first step is taken, however, the second step that every event *is* (in the ordinary tensed sense of the copula) past, present and future does follow.

The first step in McTaggart's argument for the unreality of time is that temporal relations are not ontologically primitive, but grounded in the application of the A-series to the C-series. Once that step is taken paradox is not far behind. Thus, although Savitt believes (6) is obviously false if we adopt the ordinary tensed sense of the copula, he is mistaken. Savitt also believes that (6) or what he refers to as (6') is false if we construe the copula as tenseless, but here matters are more complicated.

Savitt claims that if the copula in the key premises of McTaggart's argument is tenseless, in the sense that "Seven BE prime" is a tenseless copula, there is no reason to suppose that A-theorists are committed to

(6') e BE past & e BE present and e BE future. (p. 264)

I demur. There *is* reason to believe that the A-theorist is committed to the truth of (6') and given the truth of

(5') e BE past $\supset \sim (e$ BE present); e BE future $\supset \sim (e$ BE past); etc. (p.262)

in the same sense of the copula, a contradiction does indeed follow. Recall, if there is to be change, and change in a given direction, temporal passage must be added to the application of the A-series to the C-series. To avoid the contradiction of having passage added to a single A₁-series, we can postulate a series of A₁-series each of whose terms have one and only one A-determination. Admittedly, if what is added is a *series* of At-series, then *prima facie* we have change: a single thing that has a property and then loses it. However, if the relation between the series of At-series is a *non-temporal relation* then the terms of each A-series exemplify their A-determinations timelessly. Thus, given the

same tenseless copula in (5') and (6') it does follow that every event is timelessly past, present and future, and since, given (5'), that is impossible, it follows that passage yields a *bona fide* contradiction.

Of course, the A-theorist can maintain that the relation between the series of A₁-series is a temporal relation. In "A Limited Defense of Passage," Savitt does not consider that option, but in his "Critical Notice of Paul Horwich's *Asymmetries in Time*,"¹³ he does. There he basically agrees with Broad¹⁴ that there are no problems with temporal passage since events have different A-determinations *successively*, which in this context implies that the relation between the series of A₁-series is a B-relation. But then Savitt (and Broad) must face a dilemma: either there is no change or there is a vicious infinite regress. Given McTaggart's ontological assay of B-relations, the existence of a temporal relation between the series of A₁-series, implies the existence of an A₂-series superimposed on a C-series. In that case, however, nothing changes since none of the terms of the A₂-series (i.e., the series of A₁-series') has a property and then loses it. If we introduce change into the A₂-series by postulating the NOW tenselessly moving along each A_{1i} so that each term of the second A₂-series BE past, present, and future, then we have a contradiction unless we introduce a third series. However, to introduce a third A-series whose terms are the series of A₂-series does not avoid any of the problems of the previous level, since the fact of B-time and A-change is either left unaccounted for or is contradictory.

Savitt considers two other interpretations of the tenseless copula that he believes avoids the existence of any genuine contradiction. According to the first, the copula is tenseless and time is introduced in an existentially quantified sense, or as I would rather put it, by time indexing the predication of A -determinations. On this interpretation of the de tensed copula, "'e BE present' means (for example) there is a time at which e is present and 'e BE past' means that there is a time when e is past" (p. 264). If that is done then (6') is true, but (5') is false.

¹³ Steven F. Savitt, "Critical Notice of Paul Horwich's *Asymmetries in Time*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 3, (September 1991), pp. 399-417.

¹⁴ Broad, *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, *op. cit.* p. 313.

For if the tenseless copula BE is read so that $e \text{ BE } \phi \equiv e \text{ BE } f \text{ at } t$, then (6') can be true since there is no incompatibility in e tenselessly BEING past, present and future since e has those A-determinations *at different times*. Given that interpretation of the copula, Savitt maintains the inferences in (5') no longer obtain. For example, if $e \text{ BE } \text{past at } t_3$ is true, it does not follow that it is not true that $e \text{ BE } \text{present at } t_2$; and if $e \text{ BE } \text{future at } t_1$ is true it does not follow that it is not true that $e \text{ BE } \text{past at } t_3$; etc. As Savitt puts it,

The point of this argument is that, for those tenseless senses of 'BE' in which the A-theory *is* committed to (6'), it is no longer clear that the A-theory entails

(5') $e \text{ BE } \text{past} \supset \sim (e \text{ BE } \text{present})$; $e \text{ BE } \text{future} \supset \sim (e \text{ BE } \text{future})$; etc.

Where 'BE' is the same tenseless copula used in (6'). (p. 266)

His thesis is that "If any such copula is detensed enough that (6') can be made plausible, ... (5') will not be plausible" (p. 266).

Admittedly, given the introduction of times (understood as equivalence classes determined by the relation of simultaneity), there is no contradiction in (6'), because then A-determinations are temporally qualified. But the problem with this way out is that the appeal to "t" is gratuitous and unwarranted. In order for this tenseless interpretation of the copula in (6') to be true "t₁" and "t₂" must refer to different *times*, i.e., different members of a temporal sequence, and according to McTaggart this cannot be done unless the "times" are members of a C-series and have one and only one A-determination. However, if the terms of the A- plus C-series have only one A-determination then there is no change, no B-relations and no A-time or temporal passage. In other words, the introduction of time to render (6') plausible just gets us back to the original problem that we began with before we introduced time: An A-series without passage cannot ground a temporal B-series, and an A-series with temporal becoming, in this case in the form of "moments" at which events have A-determinations, cannot ground a temporal B-series either because it is contradictory.

Savitt suggests a second interpretation of the tenseless copula so that (6') is true, but (5') turns out to be false. Instead of introducing time in the form of moments, relational or otherwise, he exploits a gambit originally put forth by Sellars and introduces time in the form

of *tense*.¹⁵ If we adopt the Sellarsian interpretation of the tenseless copula we get:

(17) $e \text{ BE } \phi \equiv e \text{ is } \phi \text{ or } e \text{ was } \phi \text{ or } e \text{ will be } \phi.$ (p. 265)

In this sense, (6') is true, but the analogue of (5') clearly fails, and no contradiction has been restored. One can agree that the appeal to the ordinary tensed copula to explain how different A-determinations can be exemplified by the same event/moment/thing provides a *linguistic* resolution to an apparent contradiction, but it can hardly defend the A-theoretic *ontology* against McTaggart's critique of passage.

Savitt states at the outset "it does seem as if there is a deep *metaphysical* difference between the [passage and nonpassage] views, however difficult it is to distill, and the following discussion will proceed on the assumption that *there is such a difference*" (p. 261; emphasis added). Given that assumption some account of what the tenses stand for or represent is absolutely necessary if Sellars' explication of tenseless copula is to be metaphysically enlightening. To shirk the responsibility of giving such an account is to contradict the assumption that there is a metaphysical difference between the passage and nonpassage views. On the other hand, to give an account of the ontological significance of the past, present and future tense within an A-theoretical framework has proven to be elusive, if not downright impossible (contradictory). For if McTaggart's positive A-view of time is correct, and B-relations are ontologically reducible to A-determinations and the C-series, then the introduction of ordinary tensed copulas, as in the definiens of (17), cannot account for B-time or A-change since their introduction leads to a vicious infinite regress. As McTaggart puts it:

The attribution of the characteristics past, present, and future to the terms of any series leads to a contradiction unless it is specified that they have them *successively*. This means, as we have seen, that they have them in relation to terms specified as past, present and future. These again to avoid a like contradiction must in turn be specified as past, present and future. And, since this continues infinitely, the first set of terms never escapes from contradiction at all.¹⁶

¹⁵ Wilfred Sellars, "Time and the World Order," in Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 527-616.

¹⁶ McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," *op. cit.* p. 22; emphasis added).

In short, the attempt to analyze B-relations in terms of A-determinations is fruitless because the existence of A-determinations *and* the fact of change, i.e. temporal becoming or passage, are contradictory unless one reintroduces the B-relations that one is attempting to analyze. To do so, however, gives rise to a regress in which the contradiction involved in the existence of A-determinations and passage is never removed.

Savitt maintains “One need not become embroiled in the dialectical complexities surrounding this regress if one denies that there is a genuine contradiction at the first or basic level” (2001, p. 266). We have seen, however, that the first or basic level of McTaggart’s argument is not the claim that every event is (either timelessly or simultaneously) past, present and future, as he and so many other critics of McTaggart maintain. Rather, the first level of McTaggart’s negative attack on passage is his positive A-theoretic ontology of time as involving only A-determinations and not B-relations. Given *that* basic gambit, the unreality of time (or passage) follows. I conclude that McTaggart is not guilty of equivocating on different meanings of the copula in the crucial premises, and that Savitt’s defense of passage, like others of its ilk, is unsuccessful.

I shall conclude by mentioning a subsidiary benefit of my interpretation of McTaggart and his argument for the unreality of time. By recounting the difference between the view Savitt is defending and the view McTaggart is attacking, we can make substantial headway in delineating the deep metaphysical difference between the A-passage and B-non-passage theories of time.¹⁷ On the pure A-theory, there are no B-relations. Statements asserting that one event is temporally related to another are commonsensically believed to be true and in some sense they certainly are, and must be, if time is real, but the ontological ground of those statements does not involve a temporal *relation* between items *both* of which exist. On the pure A-theory the ground of

¹⁷ That there is a difference has recently been questioned by Clifford Williams in “The Metaphysics of A- and B-Time,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 46, (1996), pp. 371-381. For two responses to Williams’ see, L. Nathan Oaklander, “Is There a Difference Between the Metaphysics of A- and B-Time?” *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 26 (2001), pp. 23-36, and Josh Parson, “A-Theory for B-Theorists,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

B-relations must be in present-tense facts.¹⁸ On the hybrid A-B passage theory there are B-relations but there is, and there must be, something more if time is real. What more has been debated by hybrid AB theorists. The something more may be A-properties, or A-relations, or tenseless facts that are actual as of a time. There are several such gambits, but what they all have in common is the view that in one way or other, there is something more to time than B-relations, namely, “temporal passage” however that vague term is to be understood. For the nonpassage or B-theorist the ontological inventory is simpler and more parsimonious. There are only temporal relations, and whether they are primitive or analyzable in terms of causal relations they are the only intrinsically temporal entities that exist. There are no A-determinations, there are no A-relations, and there is no temporal becoming or passage, however those notions are to be understood by a pure or hybrid A-theorist. Unless the A-theorist can make sense of temporal passage in a sense that goes beyond simply attributing A-determinations to events (since that does not yet give change in the sense A-theorists require it), the supposition that there are A-determinations is otiose, and rational belief in A-time cannot be sustained.¹⁹

¹⁸ In two forthcoming publications I argue that presentism fails because it cannot give an adequate ontological assay of temporal relations in terms of present-tense facts. See, L. N. Oaklander, "Presentism: A Critique," Hallvard Lillehammer and G. Rodriguez Pereyra (eds.) *Real Metaphysics: Essays in Honour of D. H. Mellor, With His Replies* (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2002), and "Presentism, Ontology and Temporal Experience," in Craig Callender (ed.), *Time, Reality, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2002).

¹⁹ I wish to thank Hugh Mellor for comments on an earlier version of this paper.