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*OTHER TIMES: PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.* By DAVID COCKBURN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xiv, 355.

The content and style of this book differ from those of most recent works on the topics listed in its title. In its first part, Cockburn does indeed address the current debate between advocates of tensed and tenseless views of time. Not however to try and settle it—God and Wittgenstein forbid!—but to argue that we who do try mistake for a metaphysical issue what is really an ethical one, namely the “place which tense should occupy in our justifications of action and feeling” (8). In part 2 he provides what he calls “three extended, and moderately independent, discussions of the present, future and past.” In part 3 he rounds off the discussion of part 1 in the light of part 2.

Part 1 starts with a summary of ontological and semantic differences between tensed and tenseless views of time. This contains the unargued (and untypically clear and unqualified) claim that “to the extent that ‘the past’ is a realm of events as independently real as those now occurring at the centre of the earth, it is, surely, a realm to which we are denied access” (5)—a statement that illustrates the author’s cultivated ignorance of relevant physics. To make it while declining (on page 12) to take account (if only by denial) of the relativity of simultaneity, and hence to some extent of what *is* past at a distance, is odd enough. To deny the obvious consequence of the finite speed of light, and of the other causal processes on which our senses depend, that past events are just what we *do* have perceptual access to, is bizarre. It conflicts moreover with Cockburn’s insistence (in chapter 8) that most present-tense statements imply facts about the past, to which he also insists (in chapter 4) that memory gives us direct access. And so perhaps it does; but then so do our senses, most obviously, if not most importantly, when we see celestial events happening millions of years ago.

This, however, is a side issue compared with Cockburn’s unwarranted extraction of ethical consequences from metaphysical views of tense. It is not, as he claims (19), “a short step” from a tenseless view to the conclusion that “all past, present and future events are, in themselves, of equal significance.” For few, if any, events are of any significance “in themselves”; typically they are significant only for people, for whom, on any view of time, an event *e*’s significance at any tenseless time *t* can perfectly well depend on where in McTaggart’s *A* series *e* is at *t*, that is, on whether *e* is then present, or past or future—and, if the latter, on how past or future *e* is, that is, on how much earlier or later *e* is than *t*.

Nor does Cockburn justify reinterpreting our metaphysical disputes about tense as ethical. No doubt the *A* series location we think an event *e* has often affects how we do and should feel and act as a result. But it does not follow that what it is—or what makes it true—to credit *e* with such a location depends on how that does or should make us feel or act. It is the other way round: how we do or should react to having a tensed belief about *e* will generally depend on where in the *A* series our belief says *e* is. *How* it depends on this will also of course, as Cockburn stresses in chapter 4, depend on what kind of event we take *e* to be, that is, on what else we believe or know about *e*.

This does not however, as Cockburn claims (e.g., 45), stop the meaning of all similarly tensed sentences having a common temporal core, whether that be given in terms of tensed or tenseless truth conditions or assertibility conditions. To suppose it does is like taking the fact that the significance of owning more or fewer things of kind *x* varies with *x* to stop the meaning of sentences of the form 'I own two *x*'s' having a common numerical core. That would only follow if the way the value of a function  $f(x,y)$  of two variables *x* and *y* varies with *y* could not itself vary with *x*, which of course it can. So in particular, if *y* is not the number but the *A* series location of an event *e* of kind *x*, the way the meaning or significance  $f(x,y)$  of '*e* is *y*' varies with *y* can easily vary with *x*: as indeed it will, being quite different, for example, for births, deaths, and fleabites. That is quite compatible with any given '*y*' having the same meaning in all sentences of this form, with  $f(x,y)$ 's variation with *y* for any given *x* being simply part of the meaning of that '*x*'.

In short, the failure of metaphysicians to discuss the variety in the ethical consequences of tensed knowledge and belief that Cockburn emphasizes is merely a sensible division of labor. For the metaphysical issues that concern them do not, as Cockburn thinks, turn on the ethical issues that concern him. The nature of time and tense in general, and the reality or otherwise of past, present, or future events in particular, do not depend on how our tensed beliefs do or should make us feel or act. On the contrary: for whereas wishful thinking, however ethically motivated, is no way to discover what exists and what does not, how we should feel and act does depend on what there is. In other words, while ethics depends on metaphysics, metaphysics does not depend on ethics, and cannot be reduced to it.

None of this diminishes the value of Cockburn's discussions in part 2 of the significance he thinks we do or should attach to the pastness, presentness, or futurity of events of various humanly important kinds. Those with a taste for his kind of conceptual botanizing will find him an agreeably discursive and undogmatic (not to say equivocal) guide to several topics on which time and tense have a bearing. But to the metaphysics of time

itself I fear his mistaken view of what it is and how to do it prevents him making a significant contribution.

Nor do I admit that Cockburn's habit of claiming not to understand what other authors say shows the superiority of his insight. Take his professed inability (on page 73) to understand the claim that "nothing in reality is past, present or future" when this means neither that all tensed statements are false nor that they are reducible to tenseless ones. Compare the claim that reality contains no such person as Nobody when this means neither that all statements about nobody (like 'Nobody is smaller than a point') are false nor that they are reducible to statements about people. What it means is that 'Nobody is *F*' is never made true by someone (Nobody) being *F*—there being no such person—but by *no* one being *F*. Likewise, what my tenseless claim means is that '*e* is past' is never made true at any time *t* by *e*'s being past then—there never being any such fact—but by *e*'s being earlier than *t*, and similarly for all other *A* series locations. We need not expect all philosophers of time to accept this claim to expect them to understand it.

Cockburn says in his preface that within his Wittgensteinian tradition "there has been little very explicit treatment of the issues that which are the central concern of this book." If his book is a fair sample of what that tradition has to contribute to them, this seems to me no great loss.

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*SYMBOLIC WORLDS: ART, SCIENCE, LANGUAGE, RITUAL.* By ISRAEL SCHEFFLER. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. viii, 214.

*Symbolic Worlds* contains fifteen chapters, with all but the first published between 1972 and 1996. (Five chapters come from Scheffler's earlier books.) The unifying theme concerns aspects of the symbolic function in language, science, art, ritual, and play. The approach is nominalist and heavily influenced by the work of Nelson Goodman.

The notion of mention-selection is presented in chapter 2. Mention-selection relates a term not to what it denotes but to those representations that it appropriately captions. 'Tree' denotes trees but mention-selects tree-pictures, tree-descriptions, and the like. That we use the same terms ties together the things we recognize and acknowledged representations of those things. Mention-selection is applied to a wide range of topics, including open texture and reference to fictions. It accounts for the ambiguity of phrases such as 'Argus-description' where this mention-selects rep-