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McTaggart's Paradox by R. D. Ingthorsson (review)

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Wissenschaftslehre 1812: to investigate and posit being in its “purity” means to lose track of the living movement of appearing and its subject–object division. Thus, a tension arises between the immediacy proper to the unity of being, on the one hand, and the logical form implying mediation, on the other. It is this tension that both Hegel and Fichte try to resolve.

The second comparison, by Girndt, further enlarges the debate to Indian and Asian thought in general (Vedanta, Buddhism), as it reminds us of the requisite of universality inherent to the philosophical project. Girndt also highlights Plato’s influence on Fichte, while stressing the latter’s original conceptualization of freedom.—Frédéric Seyler, *De Paul University*

INGTHORSSON, R. D. *McTaggart’s Paradox*. New York: Routledge, 2016. xiii + 154 pp. Cloth, \$140.00—John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart’s infamous argument for the unreality of time (or McTaggart’s paradox) has left an enduring impression on the philosophy of time. Few contemporary philosophers agree with McTaggart’s conclusion that time is unreal, but the argument is discussed frequently, and the core debate in the philosophy of time, between so-called A theorists and B theorists, turns on insights and distinctions that originated with McTaggart. Ingthorsson’s valuable book is a focused study of the paradox, which offers an insight into McTaggart’s overall metaphysical system and discusses a range of responses to the paradox.

Ingthorsson begins by challenging the widely held assumption that “McTaggart’s argument for the unreality of time is a stand-alone argument that does not rely on any metaphysical assumptions.” For Ingthorsson, McTaggart’s paradox is not asserted as a discrete argument, to be understood and assessed in isolation; Ingthorsson asserts that the paradox must be understood alongside McTaggart’s methodological and ontological idealism, keeping in mind his views on, for example, “the general nature of the existent in Absolute Reality.” Thus, the task of chapter 2—before the argument is introduced and dissected in chapter 3—is to present some of the key points of McTaggart’s idealist metaphysics, the points that Ingthorsson takes to be crucial for a proper understanding and appreciation of the paradox. One illuminating aspect of chapter 2 is the statement of McTaggart’s metaphysical system in axiomatic form. That is: existence and reality coincide and do not permit degree; existence (reality) is constituted by substances, their qualities, and relations between them; a substance is something that bears qualities and stands in relations without being a quality or a relation; qualities and relations (characteristics) depend for their existence on the existence of substances; and, substances are individuated by their characteristics. From these axioms, Ingthorsson asserts that McTaggart derives three

surprising consequences: there are no abstract entities like propositions or possibilities; if time is real, it must exist and be part of “existent reality” rather than a condition upon it; and, if the past or future are real, they must exist in the same way as the present. Philosophers with little or no knowledge of McTaggart’s system will likely find chapter 2 to be extremely illuminating.

Chapter 3 is a focused discussion of McTaggart’s argument for the unreality of time (as it appears in “Time,” chapter 33 of McTaggart’s *The Nature of Existence*). Ingthorsson offers a step-by-step analysis of the argument, working through the relevant sections of *The Nature of Existence* (§§303–33), providing a general commentary on the argument and a sense of how it all hangs together. This chapter is largely exegesis, but even readers familiar with McTaggart’s paradox will find some interesting insights contained within. Chapter 4 continues the exegesis and deals briefly with the under-discussed “C series.” Ingthorsson holds that a comprehensive discussion of the nature of the C series is beyond the scope of the book. Even so, the brief discussion is very welcome.

The rest of the book concerns reactions and responses to McTaggart’s paradox. Chapter 5 focuses on defenses of the paradox, specifically the main way that some propose to defend one element of it, that is, that the A series involves a contradiction. Ingthorsson asserts that many misconstrue McTaggart’s positions and don’t succeed in defending the paradox. Chapter 6 surveys a variety of prominent and important objections to the paradox. Once again, Ingthorsson’s considered view is that the objections to the paradox all rest upon misunderstandings. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on how B theorists and A theorists, respectively, encounter particular difficulties with McTaggart’s paradox (that is, the paradox properly understood). Ingthorsson concludes in chapter 7 that the paradox makes special trouble for the B theory of time, namely, “there is no good answer to McTaggart’s argument against the B series,” and goes on to offer a partial defense of a specific version of the A theory, presentism (the view that “only the present exists”) in chapter 8. For Ingthorsson, McTaggart’s paradox doesn’t show that all A theories in general are inherently contradictory, and so this family of views is where success against the paradox will be found. As I see it, some of the arguments and insights in chapters 7 and 8 will likely be of interest to anyone working in the metaphysics of time and not just those thinking about McTaggart’s paradox.

Ingthorsson’s *McTaggart’s Paradox* is a valuable and well-researched addition to the literature on McTaggart’s infamous argument, and scholars interested in the paradox will benefit from careful study of it.—David Ingram, *University of York*