

## TIME

### PROGRAMME: Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018

10.00 Welcome and introduction

10.15 Talk 1: **Reflections on the nature and direction of time** - Alan Xuereb

*People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff.*

– *Dr. Who (the 10<sup>th</sup> doctor)*

*Tempus fugit.*

– *Virgil, Georgics*

“Time” is such a familiar and yet elusive concept. What is time? Is time fundamental? Is it emergent? Did it exist before the Big Bang? Why does time move forward? Or does it move? If according to Einstein’s theory of relativity our reality is a 4-dimensional one, “time” being just one of these dimensions, could it be that there is some other dimension of time? Could we move in time in a different direction like we move in space? These questions and many others will be discussed during this talk. The aim of this talk is not to answer these questions, though answers will be tentatively offered, but it aspires to be thought-provoking, and kick-off discussion. That is what lovers of philosophy do.

*Alan Xuereb holds a doctorate in Law awarded by the University of Malta (1996) and an M.Phil. in Philosophy of Law (2004) by the same university. He is currently working as a lawyer-linguist at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. He has an ongoing fascination with the Common Good and with the philosophy of physics. He is particularly interested in the relationship between the fabric of reality and time. This is his second Philsoc talk.*

11.00am Short break

11.15am Talk 2: **‘Que sera sera’** (Doris Day) - Bob Stone

After a preliminary claim that it is a basic fact of experience, and of the world, that some things happen after other things, that the objectification of ‘time’ as an entity leads to all kinds of silly nonsense about ‘time flowing’ and ‘events moving through time’, and that the abstract noun ‘time’ should be consigned to the dustbin along with ‘mind’. I’ll argue (a) that statements can be made about the present, the past, or the future, (b) that they must be either true or false, (c) that they must be either necessarily or contingently true/false, and (d) that their truth value can be either known or unknown. These four divisions are completely independent of each other.

In particular, there is symmetry between statements about the past and statements about the future.

Yet some philosophers (starting with Aristotle, and including many from the 20<sup>th</sup> century) have problems with the idea that future-tense statements can ever be true: we can never *know* if they are true, and, if they *are* true, then what they say must *necessarily* happen, implying determinism.

Attempts to reinterpret future-tense statements include such concepts as provisional truth, indeterminate truth-value, assessment-contextuality, branching future, thin red line; I'll discuss these, finding them wanting.

Conclusion will be that the problems are unreal, depending on a logical fallacy, and that statements about the future are precisely equivalent to statements about the past or present. Que sera sera.

*Bob Stone is a classicist, who specialised in Greek philosophy at Cambridge, taught classics in schools for 35 years, then - since retiring nine years ago - resumed his philosophical studies with a vengeance. He has done most of the OUDCE online courses, attends two or three weekly classes every year, as well four or five of the weekend courses, and enjoys holding forth, both orally and in writing, on any philosophical topic under the sun. The OUDCE and Philsoc are now his spiritual home.*

12.00 Lunch

13.30 Talk 3: **In this Universe of Existence, Motion and Causality, Motion is the most Important** - Seán Coughlan

*Time is. Time was. Time is past.*

- Roger Bacon's Brazen Head (attrib)

*Time is a created thing. To say 'I don't have time', is like saying 'I don't want to'.*

- Lao Tzu

This paper looks at aspects of the nature and idiosyncrasies of Time, perhaps lightly in parts, to illustrate just how casually (even causally) we treat that which is essential to movement and the ability to live in concert with others.

In physics, motion is a change in position of an object over time; it is usually described in such terms as displacement, distance, direction, velocity, acceleration, time taken, and speed of action. Motion implies changeability and we easily recognise things that do not change as those which are unable to move. Conversely, objects that move necessarily change, if only their position, but also cause change in their surroundings. Change may be abstracted, manipulated and quantified in the mathematical language of Linear Algebra, but a non-

mathematical approach, such as that taken in this paper, still requires some discipline. We need to consider entropy (the measure of disorder in a closed system); offer a nod in passing to quantum mechanics (no more than a nod as we are distant acquaintances not bosom buddies); raise our hat to our old friend and kissing-cousin, philosophy and its offspring: anticipation, fatalism, McTaggart's attempt to deny the reality of time; eternalism (with a bow in the general direction of Heaven and Hell); and Turing's never-ending programs; and the apparently uni-directional nature of time. Finally, we shall look, with raised eyebrow at time as a social construct, the leap-second and keeping time in music.

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

- Roman rite (*Gloria*)

**Seán Coughlan** came late to philosophy from a career in sundry technologies, accompanied by Master's degrees in Electrical Sciences and Information System Design. He spent 20 years in the Army mainly as an electronics, avionics and weapons/information specialist. Thereafter, he became a technology and management consultant firstly with an international consultancy, then as an independent. His work ranged across the delivery of biometric identification systems, radiation monitoring of Chernobyl, co-ordination of the Government's responses to each of the Shipman and Bichard Inquires, work for the World Bank/EBRD in Russia, delivery of first-generation operational e-Passports, and the conduct of reviews for the Treasury and Cabinet Office of failing delivery projects across a range of Departments. Seán retired from paid employment about 3 years ago and now his cerebral pursuits concentrate on PhilSoc meetings and OUDCE courses in theology, philosophy and algebra. He has a particular interest in the concept of "Time" ever since he was late on parade as a young officer and earned a sarcastic blast from the RSM.

14.15            Short break

14.30            Talk 4: **Literary Perspectives on Time** - Barry King

*'Our relationship to time is founded on desire... We desire to measure and possess time, to know it and to shape it, to save it and to spend it.'* (Thomas M Allen)

Time has always been a fundamental element of literature. The working assumption in this talk is that literature, though fictional, contains degrees of physical and psychological realism that offer an interpretative vision of human character and experience, of which time is a part.

The chief focus will be on our consciousness of time, with some forays into the nature of time itself. It will start with an examination of time as a tool that writers use to enhance the meaning and the emotional impact of their works. This draws on the recent 'temporal turn' in literary criticism. Informed by certain texts, there will then follow some reflections on:

- The interplay of present perception and memory to create a sense of 'time passing' or a special 'madeleine' moment
- The nature of what may be called the 'continuous present' and the role of the mind in forming our sense of temporality.
- The relationship between 'real time' and psychological time, and the factors that seem to make the latter speed up or slow down.
- Speculations on eternity, immortality, fatalism and the ethical dimensions of time

Given the vastness of the literary *oeuvre* the sources used will necessarily be very selective but, hopefully, illuminating and thought-provoking.

*Barry King studied PPE at Oxford 1964-67. He then taught economics and politics in state schools before becoming one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, working subsequently as a freelance education consultant and inspector. His interest in philosophy was particularly kindled while studying educational philosophy at the Cambridge Institute 1975-76. He contributes to philosophy groups in Bournemouth, catching up with many of the philosophy books he should have read but somehow didn't!*

15.15            Coffee break

15.45-17.00    Questions to panel and discussion

19.00            (optional) Dinner at a traditional restaurant in the old town of Trier.