“I believe that time is unreal.”

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By Caroline and Michael

Introduction (What Is It)

J.M.E McTaggart was a British idealist thinker in the late 19th century and a staunch advocate of the work and thought of Georg Friedrich Hegel in an era and intellectual culture where the German thinker’s ideas were not widely studied. This meeting focused on discussing an article by McTaggart that provides an argument for the claim that time is not real, in a vein similar to earlier British philosopher Berkeley’s view on matter. McTaggart establishes that time cannot be conceived of as being real without recognizing the distinctions of past, present, and future. If an event in time can exist without reference to the series of relations consisting of the past, present, and future, then it must necessarily be imaginary. But if the realness of time is dependent on this series, then we arrive at an epistemological hole, for the concepts of past, present, and future can only be properly delineated from each other if the existence of time is acknowledged in advance: referring to these concepts separately without recognizing any notion of time is impossible, as this would make the past indistinguishable from the present, and the present indistinguishable from the future. Therefore, to define time requires the tripartite categorization of events into past, present, and future that falls apart unless time is assumed to be real. Because an event cannot be all three at once, the proposed definition is logically contradictory, and McTaggart concludes from this that time cannot be real.

We begin this meeting by briefly walking through the paper in order to review McTaggart’s argument. We then attempted to raise objections against McTaggart’s reasoning and his incredulous result, including the ambiguity of tenses in certain languages, and the potential objectivity or infinitude of time. We concluded by incompletely analyzing what actual implications the unreality of time would have on the way we perceive the world.

Transcript

Caroline
Okay, Michael, do you want to give a quick rundown of what happened?

Michael
Okay, so *The Unreality of Time* by... what's his first name? John. You guys can chime in. He argues that time is not real. In physics, we might expect a basis for it, but he uses a very clever argument. He introduces the A, B, and C series. Do you remember those?

Caroline
The A series is about past, present, and future. He says they can be seen as either relations or qualities.
The B series is about earlier and later.
The C series is just a set order—it doesn't have any temporal aspect.

Michael
And there's a lot to analyze in those distinctions. But first, why is this important to his argument? He argues that the A and B series are both essential to the concept of time.

Caroline
What does that mean?

Michael
It means you can't have time without either the A series or the B series. You can have time without one or the other, but not without both. Without both, logically, our language breaks down. He says this is part of his argument, but he also argues that the A series is more fundamental. Does anyone recall his justification for that? Why is the A series more fundamental?

Zezhi Lu

Because the A series has change. It's the only series that has change.

Michael
Exactly. So... I'm struggling to phrase this well. Basically, because we can't conceive of change in the B series—well, it's not exactly like that—but the A series allows for change. It's more expressive in that way. It allows change to happen more naturally than

the B series does. I'll skip the technical explanation, but it feels more fundamental totime, compared to the B series.

Caroline
And he talks about ultimate distinctions. I think the A and C series together have ultimate distinctions or something? That part I didn't really understand. He also said the B series wasn't ultimate, so I was confused—what does that mean?

Michael

So, the way he shows the unreality of time is he...

Caroline
I think we can basically summarize it into two sections. In the first section, he talks about how the A-series is fundamental. Then in the second half, he argues that if the A-series is so fundamental, it's actually contradictory and therefore unreal. By combining the first and second conditions, he concludes that time is a contradiction, and therefore, time is unreal.

Zezhi Lu
He pointed out something about the "specious present"—I was initially confused, but later I realized he's arguing that the present is actually just a point, and it's unreasonable to think we can truly perceive that point. So what we think of as the present is actually a "specious present," not the real present, and this shows that the A-series doesn't work.

Michael
This supports his argument that real time shouldn't involve the present as a duration. It's similar to a frame of reference in physics—relativity deals with this—and it further suggests that time is illusory.

Caroline
I was also wondering how much this argument hinges on language. Like, how different is it in English compared to other languages?

Michael
Jackie, since you operate in Chinese, do you think the first part of this—where he distinguishes between past, present, and future—could be translated into Chinese?

Zezhi Lu
I think it could be translated, because—wait, I didn't find that part. Yeah, I'll just start talking, and you can interrupt me if needed.

Michael
A lot of us here are Chinese speakers. We know that in Chinese, there's no future declension or conjugation—just one verb form.
If you say something like "I sit down" or "I run," it could refer to the past, present, or future, depending on context. To specify the future, you'd add a marker or expression of intent. In Greek, you have something similar with the aorist tense—like in "Eureka"—which originally signified the past, but can also be used in imperative form to refer to the present or future.
In contrast, English makes very fine distinctions between present, future, and perfect tenses.

Klob
So yeah, it's much more nuanced in English. It's quite different.
I think there's a lot of nuance in how you would think about time, but there's definitely a lot to consider here. Well, Michael, I don't think that not having that distinction in Chinese would necessarily weaken the argument. You still have words for past, present, and future, and you still have words for terms like "earlier" and "later."
It's just that we still make those distinctions. If anything, I think it's a weakness of the language that it doesn't convey that more clearly. But we still care about these distinctions. I don't think that not having them in certain languages necessarily weakens the argument. You're right, though. It's more of a nuance.

Michael
McTaggart argues that time, or how we treat it, would be contradictory if a moment had multiple aspects or relations—so it can't simultaneously involve the present and the future. This seems specific to English and other languages. In languages like German or French, the present can refer to the future, and in certain English contexts, it can as well.

Wait, can you give an example? It's getting weird for me; present in the future?

Zezhi Lu
I think that's just a linguistic difference, yes.

Caroline

Well, it is a linguistic aspect. I think language really lays the foundation for how we understand things.

Yes, I think it has its logic.

I think McTaggart does use the fact that we differentiate between tenses as an argument for the importance of time for us. But I'm not sure if it hinges on the language. Sorry, what were you saying before, Michael? I remember you saying something, but I don't recall what it was.

I was just talking about how tenses can be simultaneous. Right, right, right, right—the contradictory thing, right? I didn't really see it as judging the language. It's not that our words can't mean all three tenses at once; it's that the events themselves can't be all three at once. The words are just how we describe the events.

And so, yeah, you could discuss the strength of different languages based on how well they describe specific events, but the events themselves still have to be either past, present, or future. The events themselves have to be discrete.

Klob

They do. Well, why do you think they don't, depending on the language?

Michael

So if you use the same word for an event in the past and the future, and there's no other context by which you can assert the moment or position in the framework, then it's like the moments are occurring in both positions, in my view.

Zezhi Lu

Then that language is ineffective without the context.

Michael

Okay. But what if, in that language, you don't need to make a distinction? But in your head, you're still making a distinction, you just can't communicate it. I'm wondering if a monolingual Chinese speaker would even register the distinction.

Klob

I know, but first of all, there's also the distinction that, no matter what language you

speak, you know what happened in the past, but you don't know what's going to happen in the future. That's a distinction right there. Is it something to differentiate between something that happened in the past and the future?

Michael

You have a point, but it's really a knowledge problem. For example, if I say "I make a cup of coffee," "I will make a cup of coffee," or "I made a cup of coffee," you can't distinguish the time or the quality of time during which the action took place.

Wait, do you want the exact term, or do you just want past, present, or future?

Klob

Actually, I can. So, like, in the same way McTaggart says, we're only ever perceiving things in the present, and we're only ever speaking on things that are in the past.

So, no matter what, if you're saying it, it's always going to be about the past. Unless, I guess, if you're giving a conditional, then you would know it's probably in the future, if it's a conditional.

Caroline

Well, it's interesting to talk like that—don't talk in future tense unless it's conditional.

Klob

I mean, okay, McTaggart says that when we're talking about the future, the experience we're having isn't the actual future event.

When we talk about the past, the event that's happening is the recollection, and when we talk about the future, the event that's happening is the prediction, right? And so all the recollection and the prediction are in the past now, and in a way, we can only speak about the past in the same way that we can only perceive the present.

Michael

Okay, I think this is an argument that's beyond the scope of McTaggart's argument, because you can't say the statement "I will go to the gym tomorrow" is invalid just

because you don’t know you’ll go. You’re expressing a surmisal, or an assumption, or an assertion of intention, right? But that assertion is made in the past now.

Myles

Wait, guys, why is this important?

Klob

Thank you. I think soft arguments can be very interesting, especially in terms of linguistics, but I don't think it's as relevant to this argument.

Caroline

I agree with what you all are saying—that every person has a sense of past and present, I think, yeah. Even if it’s expressed differently in different languages.

Klob

Yeah? Wait, wait, everyone here has taken the SAT at least once, right? Yes. Wait, do you guys remember that one SAT question about how different civilizations tell time—like using the hills or something?

Michael

I haven’t done that one. That was really tricky.

Klob

I mean, OK, it kind of sucks for my explanation if you didn’t get that question before.

But still—everyone has very different ways of telling time. At least we still have the notions of past, present, and future.

Though I’ll agree, there’s a potential problem if there’s a language in the world that doesn’t distinguish between past, present, future, or between earlier and later.

If there's no difference between Series A and Series B, that would be a problem linguistically.

Michael

OK, now I can bring up something more relevant.
First of all, yes, everyone can make a distinction between past and present—but it's a matter of how fine that distinction is.
In Greek, we sometimes blur that line entirely, but it's not like Greek doesn't have past, present, or future tenses.
In Chinese, you can distinguish them too, but you don't have to.
Um, has everyone watched the film *Arrival*? Or—do you know what it's about? It's about these aliens who come to Earth.

Myles
Yeah. Yeah.

Michael
Okay, I'll just give a quick rundown. So—um—aliens called, I forgot exactly, something like "heptapods," come to Earth.
They're not hostile—they try to communicate with us, and a linguist is sent to speak with them.
She learns their language, and she starts seeing the future. This is kind of a dramatic version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Their language doesn't recognize tenses—you speak about the present as if it were the past or future, so once the linguist learns their language, she starts seeing all events in her life simultaneously. So, when her daughter dies, she's obviously sad—but she had already seen it before. Same with her divorce—she had foreseen it all. It's interesting.

Klob
I think I'd believe what Michael says in relation to what he mentioned earlier—like, what if there was a model Chinese speaker, and just like with the aliens, I'd buy that *they* might see everything at once.

But I don't buy that we could just learn the language and start seeing everything at once. That's not how thinking works.

The language you *think* in and the language you *speak* are very different.

So, I think we need to agree on that—I don't want us to just leave the language discussion and jump into Series A or B theory, because I think that's problematic.

Alida, what do you think?

Alida

Very quickly—I don't really like this theory about time, because I think Caroline mentioned in passing that the past, present, and future are discrete.

Yeah, I think McTaggart is basically saying that the contradiction lies in claiming that the future, present, and past all happen in time, but they also can't because they're supposed to be discrete.

I think that assumption is flawed. In reality, sure—something that was in the future becomes the present, then the past. But saying that means they all happen at once is misleading. If you think about it, we never *feel* all three at once. We perceive the past by moving on from it, the future from the present, and we experience the present directly. So they unfold, and we feel them sequentially.

Klob

I think he addresses that. Yeah, he does.

Zezhi Lu

You can be successful in the end—but to be fair, I don't really like his explanation for that.

Klob

He says that by calling something "successful," you already have to assume time exists—which makes the argument circular.

But then he gives this whole concession about how for concepts like good and evil, you *can* explain them with themselves, and that's okay.

He tries to explain why you *can't* do that for time, and I honestly don't understand why not. He says the explanation for time's existence is not only circular, but contradictory.

And if something is inherently contradictory, you can't apply it to reality.

But if you can reformulate that circular argument so that it's not circular, then you don't

need to rely on a contradictory explanation. Then you can go for a more successful explanation. Also—something I think he didn't address—are you familiar with St. Augustine?

Alida
Yeah—St. Augustine's theory of eternity. He says everything technically happens at once in this realm called "eternity." But we experience time linearly because we're positioned differently in relation to that eternity. That's why we feel events unfold in succession.

Klob
That's kind of like spatial movement, right? But not temporal?
Yeah, I don't really get that part, though.

Jack
Has anyone here read Bergson?

Caroline
Only a few books, yes.

Michael
I haven't read him, but I know some of his arguments on time.
Jack, do you want to explain?

Jack
Yeah—so I've only read his *Creative Evolution*. In it, he defines time as something we can only understand intuitively.
Any scientific or logical attempt to understand time—like dividing it into discrete dots or laying it out on a timeline—actually moves us *away* from what time really is.
He calls real time "duration," and it's basically change.
We understand it in our everyday lives, intuitively—when we're not consciously thinking about what time is, but just living through it.
And he gives this really interesting example: if nothing changed, then we could see the

entire universe—from beginning to end—as a single picture.
Because there'd be no change to separate one moment from another.
So if nothing changed, we could see everything at once.
I'm not sure how that connects with McTaggart's argument, but I don't think it fits cleanly into either the A-series or B-series of time.

Like some guy like thanks soccer or something and it was like it was like oh my god what are you doing I don't like that obviously. Okay but yeah maybe think about like time like we in physics too I think like time isn't continuous although we like we sense that it is like we feel that it is and it's like it like Jack said it's it's a flow to us even though it might not be like continuous as as we think it to me like is that is that related to his argument I mean if we go to page 470 in like a after all these are called footnote like I'm not sure this answer is the concern because frankly I don't understand what the rebuttal here is against spatial movement but but he does address spatial spatial movement as a

Caroline
I think what you said about "if nothing changes, there is no time"—McTaggart actually talks about that too.
So are you saying that if nothing changes, time doesn't exist?
Yeah, that makes sense. I think McTaggart would agree.
But what you said reminded me of calculus—like, when we were learning about limits. My teacher showed us a series of images that demonstrated change.
I think there was some guy—maybe Zeno?—who was like
Also, in physics, we think time isn't actually continuous—even though we sense it that way. Like Jack said, it's a *flow* to us, even if it's not continuous in reality.
Is that related to McTaggart's argument? If you look at page 470—after all these footnotes—I'm not sure the rebuttal about spatial movement really answers the concern. But he does address spatial movement.

Zezhi Lu
I want to talk about the concept of appearance that was mentioned earlier. I've read Kant, and he says that time is appearance. McTaggart brings up appearance multiple times, especially in the last paragraph. It's again about the theory of appearance in the temporal series, which is infinite—or at least possibly infinite in length.
So my question concerns the nature of time: is it finite or infinite? He asked whether the theory is finite or infinite in length. Kant also talks about this. At the end of McTaggart's argument, he mentions that the series is just an order—it doesn't necessarily have a

direction. Well, actually, it does, but it's still an order. Kant also discusses something similar—this idea of ordered appearance—and I want to explore that more. Can anyone explain what "appearance" means in this context?

Jack
I think what Kant is saying is that time is basically like a lens—or glasses—we have to wear to perceive the world.
You can't perceive anything that isn't in time or space. So time and space are the fundamental structures of our perception.
He also argues that cause and effect are a priori, just like time and space.

Caroline
So, I think time is necessary for our perception. But do you think time is also necessary for existence itself—that things need time in order to exist?

Zezhi Lu
But if you want to talk about time, you have to assume that time exists.

Alida
That's basically what Heidegger talks about with the concept of *Dasein*. Time is necessary not only for existential meaning, but for existence itself. This also relates to what Jack said earlier about Bergson and change.
Saying "time is change" is a reductionist view—it assumes a temporal structure just by invoking change.
Instead, it might make more sense to say that time allows for change to happen, rather than equating the two.
And this can apply to the meaning of life as well. If time is infinite but we are finite, then once perceiving beings are gone, time may still exist objectively,
but it could lose its meaning because there's no one left to experience it.
So... is time infinite?

Klob
We don't know.

Caroline
I mean, if we go by the theory of spatial movement...

Klob
Like Jack said, it would have to be finite, I guess.

Zezhi Lu
Yeah, I want to link that to what Kant said—each appearance in space and time creates a sequence or order, because you need a prior condition to lead to the next.
I think he was talking about the progression of condition and conditioned. And I think that makes sense.

Michael
Sure.

Alida
If you say time is finite, then you're basically saying there was a start to time and there will be an end.
But that's something we, as humans, probably can't ever truly know.

Michael
Yeah... I mean... it is... I think... oh.

Jack
I think the reason we think time is infinite—or that the future exists—is because of how we, as humans, perceive time.
We understand time because we have memory—it's how we comprehend the past.
If we didn't have memory, we wouldn't even understand what "past" means.
And we believe the future exists because we know the present and the past, so we assume things will continue into the future.

Caroline
I think part of it is that we can predict things, and that seems to be part of our instinctual nature. Even animals can sense danger or anticipate future events.
So, for survival, we need this instinct for the future—this ability to predict what's coming.

Klob
But that could also be a biological weakness, right?
Like the story of the turkey who observed that he was fed every day, so he predicted he'd be fed the next day—but it was Thanksgiving, and they killed him.
So relying on predictions about the future can actually be a vulnerability.

Michael
That also shows that we actually can't predict the future—we only think we can.
But the fact that we can think about the future might be enough for the argument.

Klob
So... is time a biological necessity?

Michael
Okay, I think we've brought up too many propositions at once.
The discussion has jumped around, and we're not really getting to a unified understanding of what time *is*.
I'm trying to sort this out because I have a couple of points I want to respond to.
There are a lot of things that were said that I want to address too, but the conversation keeps shifting.

Alida
Obviously, we also need to consider how radical some of these ideas are.
If there's an explanation we're currently excluding from the set of possibilities, that suggests the entire temporal structure of the universe is based on human understanding.
And I think that's a very valid point—especially if you take Heidegger seriously.

Michael
From a Heideggerian perspective, humans need time, but time doesn't necessarily need humans.

Alida
That's different from McTaggart, who says that if humans don't perceive time, then time isn't real.

Michael
But how can we know something is real?

Klob
That's a classic philosophical issue. If nothing is truly real, we might as well believe Berkeley.

Zezhi Lu

Wait, he's drawing a line between what's real and what isn't. But how do we usually determine what is real?

Klob
He's arguing that, logically, it can't exist—but let’s set time aside for a moment.

Zezhi Lu
How do we know anything is real—not just time?

Caroline
Ontology makes that question really difficult. But I'm not asking from an ontological perspective.

Zezhi Lu
I'm asking how you know an apple is real. What makes you think it’s real in the first place?

Michael
Like, in terms of it being a proper subject?

Jack
I think this could be explained biologically—we're sensitive to certain stimuli.

Zezhi Lu
So sensory information convinces you it’s real? But what about time?

Jack
It’s good for evolution.

Alida
But evolution…

Jack
If you thought everything was fake, you might ignore a real predator.

Klob
If people realized everything was fake, society might collapse. People function because they believe things are real. Sorry—I derailed that. Let me be more specific.

Zezhi Lu
Is our subjective opinion essential to something being real?

Klob

To the reality of a thing? No, absolutely not.

Alida
But McTaggart argues that it is.

Zezhi Lu
But it isn't? No—McTaggart himself isn't real?

Alida
Exactly—that's why it only exists in our subjective opinion.

Zezhi Lu
Reality is objective, so subjectivity doesn't affect it—but it depends on the perspective.

Klob
No, I don't think so.

Alida
Let's go back to the classic dogmatism example. If a tree falls and no one witnesses it, did it fall? I believe it did.

Caroline
But you only think it did—not that you know for sure.

Jack
I think you already have the belief that it happened.

Klob
Maybe we should revisit dogmatism versus skepticism. Personally, I don't think it did.

Alida
I do think it did happen.

Caroline
I still think skepticism is valid, even if it's a bit slippery.

Alida
I don't think skepticism is easily refutable.

Michael
Okay, let's get back to the topic of time.

Klob
Yeah, because time is running, guys.

Michael
Yes, we're not under a lot of pressure. And I don't want to edit this part of the transcript.

Klob

Wait, I think I actually have something I can contribute here, right?
So why can't time exist with only the C series? Because what's missing is direction—and change. But here's the thing: we have the theory of the Big Crunch, where once we reach the end of time, time starts going backward until it reaches the beginning, then it repeats.
That suggests time is prewritten from the start. Everything that will ever happen is already recorded. So, first of all, nothing changes because it repeats the same loop. Second, it doesn't need direction—it goes in both directions.
How does it go in both directions? The Big Crunch suggests a reversed Big Bang. Everything contracts and resets.
Maybe that's not the best reasoning. Eternal recurrence doesn't mean we go backward in time—it just means we restart from the beginning.
Wait—have you all read *The Three-Body Problem*? Have you read the fourth book? It's kind of obscure, but it was recognized as canon by the author. It's actually well-written, or at least the ideas are cool.
Basically, it says that in the tenth dimension, everything happens instantly and can be viewed at once. It's just spatially distributed. In the third dimension, things unfold more slowly, so we experience time's flow. But at the end of the book, everything reverses again.

Zezhi Lu
So time flows backward until you return to the beginning, then flows again—you repeat in cycles. But can it be identical?

Klob

Yes, identically.

Alida
Can I ask something? You mentioned time moves in both directions, but could there also just be no actual change in reality at all?
Could the perception of change just be a subjective experience?

Klob
Yeah, from our perspective, we experience it one way, so we think everything is happening for the first time.
But if everything just follows a script, then nothing is really changing. Time feels real if you...

Caroline
Okay, I'd like to see you empirically prove Taggart's view and the reality of time. I still think it's a bold claim.

Michael
The problem with your reasoning is that you're interpreting the Big Crunch in a misleading way.
Well, thermodynamics as given on its own... Right, but I do think it's a cohesive theory.

Klob
Obviously.

Michael
But it's a cohesive theory of time. It gives us a model of the universe and addresses Taggart's concern about the lack of an A series.
It's plausible. Still, I can't get past solipsism and skepticism. There's reason to doubt objective reality.
That seems like a conclusion someone like Heidegger would come to—that everything is in spite of what we think.
We can't interact directly with objective reality. We perceive it through time as a kind of intuition. The "truths" we think are objective are really just phenomena, not noumena.

Klob
I love skepticism. As Hume said, it's all sophistry and illusion. There's no reason to treat it as a final theory—it's a good consideration but not a foundation.
You can't positively assert anything through skepticism.

Alida
You can't say skeptics are wrong, but they can't make any positive assertions either. In argumentation, it's a weak position to land on "we can't know."
About Heidegger—my interpretation is that he says the world around us might not be real, but it feels the most real.
Therefore, we take it as real—and that makes it real. That's my interpretation of his conclusion.

Michael
I'd be inclined to agree with that, but I'm not sure what we're even trying to argue anymore. We're trying to justify relationships, right? I guess we're trying to come up with the most believable account of time.

Klob
Oh, we have five minutes left.

Michael
Does anyone want to try and come up with something with me?

Klob
No, I've given my theory. I do actually believe that time can flow.

Alida
I actually believe it.

Klob
I think it's logically defensible. According to McTaggart's kind of structure, it's logically defensible.

Caroline
Wait, did we talk about the actual implications of the idea that time is unreal? If time is unreal, then what? Does that destroy anything we take as real right now? I think it's all

about perception. We could say that time is illusory, and that anything we perceive is subjective and relative. But does that destroy reality as we know it?

Michael
So we can't define reality yet, because when he says things only exist entirely in...

Klob
If things are in time, assuming that time exists—and if it doesn't—then I would assume there's a different criterion for existence.

Michael
I feel like it would destroy a certain worldview of reality, but I'm not sure if it actually changes reality.
If time is an illusion, but we still believe in the illusion of time, then what does that make us? What does that mean for the intuition we call time?

Zezhi Lu
Wait, he does mention that in order for something to be real, it has to exist. Can you mention that?

Caroline
It exists—assuming time is real.

Klob
A thing only exists in time. So does reality mean existing?

Zezhi Lu

If something is real, it means it exists. Yeah, probably.

Alida
I think so.

Zezhi Lu
If time is essential to existence and time is real, then sure. But I don't think time is essential to our existence.

Klob
It's only under the assumption that time is real that time is essential to our existence. I think we're getting into language games now.

Alida
Well, if time is fake, then the entire idea of causality breaks down because there's no precedent and result. But no—you can use the C series, you just can't time it like in the A series.

Klob
So we can still live with the C series.

Michael
I guess, but causality was never a given. I mean, if you read Hume, I think that's indisputable.
Yeah, with time too—we talked about causality, right?

Klob
Just an order of events. That's all we have.

Michael
And that would be plausible and even acceptable. But if you don't have time, there isn't an order of events.

Alida
There's no order.

Klob
It's not temporal. The C series isn't temporal.

Michael

So just based on that, I can try—and we have one minute left.
So we don't have the A series—we don't have past, present, and future. We give a lot of representations of it, but what we really have is the C seriesan order of events. Even though time is unreal—it's all in our heads, logically impossible—the C series exists. That's the basis for our illusion. Just recognizing the C series might help us alleviate the implications of not having real time. I think that's a much wider discussion—one we can pick up in the next conversation.

Caroline
Okay, next time I'll speak with the professor—he has a lot of thoughts to share. Also, you guys should check out the chat—we have a minute left.

Conclusion

Humans have a linear concept of time, and for us, time seems to flow and be continuous. We can experience change, and thus we can experience time. At our meeting, we brought up how we understand the present through active experience, we understand the past through memory, and we understand the future through our minds' abilities to predict and make decisions. Thus, we considered whether the concept of time is natural and endowed to each being through the nature of their existence as a biological necessity. But indeed, McTaggart's argument was rather egocentric — that if we found time to be contradictory for our reality, time must therefore be unreal.

As a whole, we analyzed McTaggart's argument through various lenses, ranging from linguistics to physics to metaphysics and discussed theories of time from Kant, Heidegger, and St. Augustine, focusing on the conceivability and implications of "The Unreality of Time." We considered how our perceptions often depended on language, how non-English languages like Chinese, Greek, French, and German had different ways of expressing successive events and time. Eventually, we concluded that linguistic distinctions did not challenge McTaggart's argument, as each human being instinctually has a sense of time and the A-series.

Attendees

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