

Ethics 110 (2000): 885.

Le Poidevin, Robin, ed. Questions of Time and Tense
Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. 293. \$65.00 (cloth).

This book comprises twelve essays—all new but one—on the central debate in the philosophy of time. That debate, whose nature and history are carefully explained in the first paper (Le Poidevin), is over whether time is “tensed” or “tenseless.” To get a feel for what is at stake, note that if time is tenseless, any difference between past, present, and future is merely “perspectival,” akin to the difference between here and there. If time is tensed, however, some such differences are objective, ontological.

The essays in this collection explore how competing conceptions of time interact with topics like identity over time (Lowe), empirical science (Butterfield, Nerlich, Q. Smith), emotional attitudes toward, e.g., past versus future pain (Cockburn), modality (Dyke), freedom (Oaklander), duties toward future persons (Benn), philosophy of religion (Craig, Helm), and fiction (Currie).

This book is meant to demonstrate that time’s nature, with regard to tense, has substantive implications for a wide range of other issues. I know of no other book with this worthy goal. (And this book should, among other things, silence naysayers who think the debate over tense is merely verbal.) Questions of Time and Tense is a welcome and useful addition to the literature.

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