

Spacetime and the passage of time

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Many proposals concerning the nature of time have been put forward, but most of these fall into two camps. On one side there are advocates of "block universe" views, who argue that, fundamentally, there are no objective distinctions between past, present and future. On the other side there are various stripes of "A theorist", who are typically concerned to defending the robust objectivity of the passage of time, and who normally endorse mind-independent distinctions between the past, present and future. It is clearly natural, in the context of relativistic physics, to adopt a block universe view. Nonetheless, several authors have claimed that one can resist this picture while being entirely faithful to the spirit of relativity. Claims along these lines have been made by (or are suggested by the work of) Howard Stein, Nuel Belnap and collaborators, and Raphael Sorkin and Fay Dowker. While each proposal is reasonably well known, their relations to one another are largely unexplored. There is also no consensus concerning their philosophical morals. In this talk I will seek to provide a unifying picture in which this work can be situated, and to assess the prospects of a relativistic A theory of time.