

Questions on D.C. Williams, 'The Myth of Passage'
PHIL 1480 Metaphysics
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1. On p. 458, Williams argues briefly against presentism, the view that everything that exists exists now, and the 'growing block view', according to which everything that exists exists now or in the past. We'll be talking about these views in detail later on, so let's mark these arguments as something to come back to.
2. On pp. 459–460, Williams responds to an objection to his view, according to which there is 'an intolerable anomaly in the statement that what was but has ceased, or what will be but has not begun, nevertheless *is*'. How big a problem is this objection, and how convincing is Williams' response?
3. What does it mean to claim 'that the temporal spread, though real and formally similar to a spatial spread, is qualitatively or intuitively very different from it' (460)? What is Williams' ultimate attitude to this claim (467–468)? How might the physical considerations favouring the replacement of Newtonian absolute space with spacetime bear on this question?
4. On p. 463 Williams considers what it might mean to claim that something 'moves in time', and comes up with a definition according to which moving in time is logically equivalent to moving in space. What other ways might there be to make sense of the claim that things move in time? Are there any ways of making sense of the claim on which it is both plausible and inconsistent with the theory of the manifold? What about the related claim that *times* or *events* "move" (from the future towards the present and then into the past)?
5. How exactly does the crucial argument in the paragraph on pp. 463–464 work? How should an opponent of the B-theory respond?
6. The next paragraph, on p. 464, is also quite interesting. What is the connection between the idea of passage and the idea that "taking place" is 'a formality to which an event incidentally submits'? Does this paragraph contain an argument against passage, or an objection to an argument for it, or what? Is it compelling?
7. In the paragraph on p. 465 Williams discusses several different ways of making sense of the claim that time 'has a direction'. In which of these senses do we in fact have good reason to think that time has a direction? Is there any plausible reading of the sentence 'time has a direction' on which this claim is inconsistent with the theory of the manifold?
8. On p. 468 Williams imagines a human life 'slewed around at right angles to the rest' of the manifold, with 'its conscious stream perhaps running alongside someone's garden path'. What would that look like?
9. Most of the final part of the paper is devoted to a kind of philosophical therapy, diagnosing the source of peoples' resistance to the theory of the manifold with a view to curing it. If you are someone who is initially inclined to resist the theory, how effective do you find this therapy?
10. How does the theory of the manifold relate to what ordinary people believe about time? Is it all just common sense, or is it radically at odds with common sense, or what?