

**Comments on “Ain’t Nobody Got Time for That: The Nature of the Capacities Inherent in Space that Permit the Illusion of Time” by David Milliern**

Kevin Lower – Miami University (Ohio)

As a reader who is unfamiliar with the contemporary literature surrounding the philosophy of time, I nevertheless find the author’s attempt to motivate an understanding of change as metaphysically prior to time—and of time as a construct that is parasitic upon a purely spatial conception of change—provocative and insightful. While reading, however, I found myself grappling with basic assumptions that were made by the author, and I worry that my criticisms arise due to simple misunderstandings of the background in which this project is situated. Unfortunately, the paper in its current state does not aid me in navigating the conceptual space it presupposes, which likely results from trimming the paper to its current length for this conference. Regardless, my first recommendations for the author are to reflect upon whether the content of this paper has been adequately prioritized and to ensure that readers have been given enough information to understand the background that this paper assumes. Ignoring these preliminary obstacles, the author’s efforts have yielded an interesting interrogation of the relationships between the concepts that find their place in this paper.

My primary criticism concerns the author’s claim that anthropocentrism should be avoided as the motivational force behind the position he proposes. The attempt to provide an account of change that is metaphysically prior to time trades upon the view that an anthropogenic conception of time is intrinsically undesirable, but the author provides almost no support for this claim. He suggests that science and the philosophy of science have generally adopted the trend of removing anthropocentrism from their

narratives. However, considering the account of scientific revolution provided by Thomas Kuhn suggests quite the opposite.<sup>1</sup> He writes, “As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice—there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community. To discover how scientific revolutions are effected, we shall therefore have to examine not only the impact of nature and of logic, but also the techniques of persuasive argumentation effective within the quite special groups that constitute the community of scientists” (94). In other words, Kuhn attributes the acceptance of new paradigms to an inherently political deliberation that takes place within a community of scientists—a notion preserved through his parallel between political and scientific revolutions. This account places the self-regulating activity of the scientific community at the heart of scientific progress, which we might recognize as falling within the grasp of anthropogeny. Kuhn thus provides a narrative that conflicts with the trend that the author assumes is present within the philosophy of science, and I propose that such an influential account of scientific development cannot be overlooked by the author.

More importantly, even if we grant the author’s claim that science and the philosophy of science tend to avoid anthropocentrism, this assumption cannot motivate his project. When we consider the author’s attempt to provide an account of time as a product of a purely spatial conception of change, one will notice that he seems to reduce temporality to the spatial capacity that gives rise to it. He writes, “the essence of time will be, in the end, stripped down to the capacities of space itself, leaving no ontological remnant of time” (2). This reduction of time to space might itself be problematic, though it is most relevant first to emphasize that this translation results

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<sup>1</sup> As a brief aside, Karl Popper’s discussion of conjecture and criticism in his *Conjectures and Refutations* would provide an equally compelling (if not more relevant) example of this.

from the author's attempt to remove the human contribution from an account of time. My worry is that reducing time to spatiality does nothing to fulfill this condition. If we pause to consider the account of space provided by Immanuel Kant, we will notice that spatiality may fall victim to the same criticism the author levels against temporality. Kant writes, "in order that certain sensations be referred to something outside me ... the representation of space must already underlie them. Therefore, the representation of space cannot be obtained through experience from the relations of outer appearance; this outer experience is itself possible at all only through that representation" (A23/B38). In this passage, Kant claims that the concept of space is not acquired through one's experience of the external world. Instead, space and time are conceived as the *a priori* forms of intuition that make possible one's outer experiences to begin with (A39/B56). The account of space provided by Kant therefore succumbs to the same anthropogeny that the author seeks to avoid by reducing temporality to a spatial conception of change. Thus, without further support, it is not clear that appealing to a spatial account of change does anything for avoiding anthropogeny.

My aim in discussing this passage by Kant is to suggest that the motivation for the proposed account cannot be secured by granting the author's assumption that anthropocentrism should be avoided. In addition to not adequately motivating the eradication of anthropocentrism, this framework alone cannot provide the necessary motivation for the author's project. It will be fruitful to deliberate whether it is worthwhile to salvage the current motivation for this paper since doing so will require new reasoning in support of adopting a non-anthropogenic conception of time and

thinking that anthropogeny can be avoided by appeal to a spatial account of change. As a final note of clarification, it is helpful briefly to consider the critique of spatial accounts of time provided by Henri Bergson. In *Time and Free Will*, he argues that a satisfying notion of time cannot be produced by representing moments side-by-side, as if extended through space and ordered around the present (98-102). While this criticism is not immediately applicable to the present paper, two philosophers who are targeted by this critique are Zeno and Aristotle—both of whom exemplify the ancient Greek perspective that the author claims is “thoroughly anthropocentric” (11). What interests me here is that these thinkers can be criticized both for having spatialized accounts of time and for being anthropocentric. I invite the author to think about how he might clarify his position to ensure that readers understand his commitments as narrowly as possible and to avoid potentially confusing generalizations such as this.<sup>2</sup>

In closing, I would like to ask for clarification on a few points throughout the text to motivate discussion. First, I am a bit confused by the notion of a substantial conception of space. The author writes that “substantialism will be assumed, i.e., that space is either a substance over and above that substance contained in it, or that space is some pseudo-substance” (3). What does it mean for space to be a second-order substance or pseudo-substance? Further, is there any potential for undesirable influence upon the conception of change and temporality offered within this account? Second, I am having trouble understanding how applying both ‘filled’ and ‘not-filled’ as “truth-functional values to  $x_1$ ” constitutes a logical contradiction if we understand that these valuations hinge upon the respective time indexes of  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  (4). Is there a way

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<sup>2</sup> It might also be helpful to visit pages 231-256 of Heidegger’s *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* for its brief historical outline of time (with remarks on Bergson) and its detailed analysis of Aristotle.

to motivate this contradiction more clearly? Finally, I am not sure what precise points are being made in the following passage: “change, as something that occurs in space but not time, is not a natural idea to embrace, because time is so ever-present in the human perspective; but the human perspective is a materially generated one. Therefore motion—not as normally conceived in a quantitative sense of distance in time, but in a qualitative sense of change—is prior to time, too” (5-6). Three claims here seem vague and potentially unsupported: first, that the human perspective is materially generated, second, that there is a distinction between quantitative and qualitative motion, and third, that motion is prior to time due to this distinction. What is the significance of noting the material generation of the human perspective? Does this have the potential for being problematic? And how does the quantitative/qualitative distinction figure into our understanding of motion? Any general clarifications on these points will be beneficial for my understanding of this paper, and I hope that these questions provoke revisions to the manuscript that will improve its clarity.

To summarize my suggestions, I recommend for the author to reconsider the current motivation of this paper to ensure that readers understand what is truly at stake in providing an account of time derived from a purely spatial conception of change. While the author has provided some interesting thoughts by engaging with a wide variety of sources on the philosophy of time, I also recommend ensuring that enough space has been dedicated to fleshing out the basic points upon which his account depends. I hope that these recommendations are helpful, and thank you for the opportunity to read and provide feedback on this paper.

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