I have articulated two general motivations why someone might question the reality of time. The first frets over the apparent absence of any identifiably time-like existents among the denizens, constituents, and phenomena in our universe. The second is the seeming incoherence of certain ways in which we think about time—for example, so that its reality includes, or even consists of, unreality.

This chapter examines further the suggestion that we ask, not ‘what could our temporal concepts, or predicates, in reality denote?’, but ‘what renders our universe a temporal universe (rather than an atemporal one)?’ This suggestion accords especially well with an approach to time’s reality which alleges, in effect, that both of the motivations articulated in Chapter 1 for denying time’s reality confuse time and temporality.

Roughly, according to this defense, time connotes the fact that ours is a temporal universe. Establishing time’s reality requires that there be something about our universe sufficient to warrant declaring that it is not an atemporal universe. Whereas, temporality encompasses the many distinctive and particular ways in which we think about temporal existence (for example, in ways pertaining to the three sorts of temporal concepts introduced in Chapter 1), and perhaps certain of the more general ways in which we commonly think about it (for example, as introduced in Chapter 1 as well, pertaining to past and future).

The approach alleges further that our discussion of time has thus far focused instead on temporality; but, temporality may have little (if anything) to do with time. Temporality, accordingly, may indeed be unreal. It may indeed be akin to an illusion, a delusion, or otherwise derive from certain peculiarities of human thought and awareness, or from certain pragmatic needs or other psycho-social conditions, disconnected from our surrounding “outer” environment as such. However, the approach continues, this need not impugn the reality of time.

Our universe is real. It also is a temporal universe. Therefore, time is real. But, whether its temporal reality conforms to ways we think
about, perhaps even experience, time—that is, to time as temporality—is immaterial.

The distinction between time and temporality may, however, extend to certain particular concepts and also to certain more general temporal notions as well. An example is the conundrum introduced with Chapter 1 regarding past and future. Someone may argue, that is, that the past is in fact real. Its reality consists in whatever has real existence when we make a (true) past-tensed assertion. Whereas its temporality (for example, that it consists of what was or has been but no longer is) may indeed be paradoxical, because unreal. Likewise, someone may argue, the future also is real. Its reality consists in whatever has real existence when we make a (true) future-tensed assertion. Whereas its temporality (for example, that it consists of what will be but is not yet) may indeed be paradoxical, because unreal. In sum, then, the past (as a constituent or feature of time) may be real even if its pastness (as a constituent or feature of temporality) is not; and, likewise, the future may be real even if its futurity is not.

An immediate difficulty for this approach is its “Huh?” factor. Arguably, time without temporality, whatever it might be, is not time. Likewise, for instance, without pastness the past is not the past; and without futurity the future is not the future. Consequently, whatever this approach’s proponents might have in mind for ‘past’ and ‘future’ to denote, they do not denote constituents or features of time.

A chief proponent of time’s distinctness from temporality is Twentieth Century scientific Eleaticism, especially physics as based in General Relativity Theory. This strain of Eleaticism differs from traditional philosophical Eleaticism in purporting to elucidate the reality of time instead of denying it. It presumes that ours is a temporal universe, and searches for something about it to warrant this presumption.

Accordingly, this chapter will, more specifically, examine contemporary scientific Eleaticism’s pretense to account for the reality of time, especially as it attempts to designate a physical counterpart or manifestation of the so-called “arrow of time”—roughly, the notion that time is uni-directional and irreversible. This notion will itself be clarified by examining also the distinction between linear time and cyclical time. Finally, this chapter will explain further the contrast just alleged between (contemporary) scientific Eleaticism and traditional (philosophical) Eleaticism, and in so doing also the crucial distinction between static and dynamic approaches to time.