What Is the Past?

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Abstract

This thesis explores the question: what is the past? I take up the radical view that the past exists, but the present and future do not. The four main theories of time have described the past in a variety of ways: Presentism says it is non-existent; eternalism describes it as on a par with the present and future; the growing block and moving spotlight views describe it as being ontologically on a par with the present or future, respectively. I investigate how these theories have addressed the nature of the past question using a logico-semantic approach, which generates ontological *problems of absence* because the past objects that statements about the past denote are absent from their ontologies. Presentism, which accepts that the past is non-existent, faces the greatest challenges concerning the past because it cannot account for the truthmaker of statements about the past. Eternalism, along with the growing block and moving spotlight views, must reconcile the significant differences in our experiences of the past, present, and future with their view that all or some of them are ontologically on a par. I consider the traditional logico-semantic approaches to responding to the nature of the past question and argue that actualist versions of presentism are ill-equipped to answer it. Of the theories of time that do not rely upon a logico-semantic analysis, four seem promising. Meinongian presentism, which argues that *there is* a non-existent past accepts an ontological response to the question of the past, but I argue that it incorrectly defines the point of contrast between the existent and the non-existent. Although eternalism, the growing block, and moving spotlight views can explain the ontological ground of references and truths about the past, we may question whether there is a past since these views treat its nature as ontologically on par with that of the present or future. This steers the investigation towards intentionality, the directedness of our thoughts toward objects. I analyse thoughts about the past, as well as those about the present and future to understand their nature and their relationship to an external mind-independent world. I argue that the past's uniquely immutable nature differentiates it from the mutable present and future,

and that immutability entails substantiveness, while mutability entails nonsubstantiveness. The past's substantive nature entails its existence while the nonsubstantiveness of the present and future entail their non-existence.

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Chapter 1: The Question of the Past

Introduction

The philosophy of time is primarily concerned with accurately characterising the past, present, and future, and the relation(s) between them. I wish to focus on the past and its ontology, which, in turn, sheds light on the present, future, and time itself. My analysis concerns *the question of the past*: what is the past? My view is that the past exists. In this chapter, I motivate my thesis by showing how concern about the ontological status of the past emerges from the debate between presentists and eternalists. Presentists deny that the past exists beyond the traces of it found in the present, while maintaining that what is now past did exist. Eternalists assert the temporal relativity of the past: which times are past is relative to an observer's position within time, while maintaining that all times—whether earlier than, simultaneous with, or later than the frame of reference—are equally real. I will introduce two methods of approaching the question of the past: *the truthmaking principle*, a truthmaker makes a truthbearer true, and *the problem of negative existentials*, statements about non-existent things lack truthmakers. Approaches to the ontological status of the past by theories of time have focused on logico-semantic issues. Heather Dyke (2013) has said that the debate regarding the temporal nature of reality "is purely metaphysical […] However, the debate is often couched in linguistic terms" (p. 335). I will consider the *intentionality* or directedness of thoughts about the past and the objects towards which they direct. Then, to complete this motivating chapter, I will reinforce the value of considering the question of the past by explaining its significance for not only metaphysics but also moral philosophy. Finally, I will outline the plan of the thesis, providing an overview of each of its chapters.

1.1 The Question of the Past Emerges from the Presentism-Eternalism Debate

The question of the past is not an isolated concern but emerges from the main debate between presentism and eternalism. These competing views force us to grapple with the question of

what the past is. If, as presentism would have it, the past is non-existent, then the past is either non-present non-existent, something real yet lacking existence, or something wholly present but abstract that can be reduced to things that exist in the present. If, as eternalism would have it, the past is ontologically on a par with the present and future, then the nature of the past is just like that of the present and future.[1]

Central to the debate between presentists and eternalists are: truthmaking principle, propositions (truthbearers) have truthmakers,[2] and the problem of negative existentials, to what does a statement about something non-existent refer? [3] The truthmaking principle helps explain how true propositions about the past, present, and future are *ontologically grounded* or not true. Claims, statements, utterances, etcetera that are not ontologically grounded are said to "float free from the world," and cannot be considered true. So, we have a good reason to examine whether the explanations of the past given by different theories of time provide a sufficient explanation of the ontological ground for truths about the past.

The problem of negative existentials, which is a particular instance of the problem of reference, also lends support to the emergence of the problem of the past out of the debate between presentists and eternalists. We may say of something that it "does not exist." For that statement to be true, its referent must not exist. For instance, the statement "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" is true because Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character and fictional characters do not exist. Yet, nothing serves as a truthmaker for the statement. Various responses to this puzzle have been offered: the statement is false or meaningless, true but lacking a truthmaker, the non-existent Sherlock Holmes makes it true, or it is true in the Sherlock Holmes stories. It

[1] Throughout this thesis, wherever I claim that the past and present, or future are "on a par" or "just like one another" I am primarily referring to their qualitative identity, meaning that they share the same fundamental existential and ontological natures. I do not necessarily mean they are quantitatively identical, i.e., that "the past" and "the present," or "the future" refer to the very same thing.
[2] For an overview of the theory of truthmaking, see Armstrong (2004).
[3] For classic introductions to this problem, see Kripke (1980), and Russell (1905/2005).

is worthwhile to consider the problem of negative existentials because it suggests a range of approaches for responding to the question of the past.

The problems of truthmaking and negative existentials involve logico-semantic analyses of statements about the past. Presentists and eternalists disagree about the implications of these analyses due to their different approaches in applying the principles. This disagreement has resulted in a stalemate where neither side is willing to give ground and what the past is remains uncertain.

1.2 Beyond Logico-Semantic Analyses

The stalemate between presentists and eternalists prompts the need for a complementary approach to the question of the past. While presentists and eternalists have focused almost exclusively on how to account for what makes a statement about the past true, my investigation also involves intentionality, the thesis that mental states are *about* something, so I pose the question, what is a thought about the past *about*? This question raises a distinct challenge from those posed by truthmaking and negative existentials. Those questions pertain to the point that linguistic expressions or statements require a referent in the world to make them true. However, mental states are directed at mental representations. Mental states about the past represent the past. This leads us to ask what a thought about the past represents, given that the past does not now exist. Furthermore, what distinguishes a thought about the actual past from one that is false? An analysis of the aboutness of thoughts provides an insight into the ontological status of objects that we may think about, including most especially the past.

1.3 Motivating the Question of the Past

In this section, I will motivate the project by showing how answering the question of the past is motivated by metaphysical and non-metaphysical considerations. Metaphysical considerations include developing a deeper appreciation of time, existence, and the

fundamental nature of reality. Such considerations inform questions in nearby philosophic fields of research, such as the philosophy of mind, epistemology, truth and truthmaking, and the philosophy of language. The question of the past also impacts areas of research that are less closely connected to metaphysics, especially moral philosophy.

1.3.1 Metaphysics

Let's begin with how the question of the past is motivated by metaphysical considerations. First, this inquiry develops a comprehensive appreciation of the past and the past is at least one element of time. The nature of time is one of the most central questions in metaphysics. Thus, if we seek to better understand what time is and what it is like, then we have good reason to explore the nature of the past.

Second, a deeper understanding of the past informs our understanding of existence. The past has a fundamental connection to existence because the past either exists or what is now past did exist but no longer exists. Say the past exists. Then we can explain its existence like any other existent thing. In contrast, if the past does not exist, then this suggests that the past is equivalent to anything else non-existent. However, if there is a distinction between something that did exist but no longer exists and something that has never existed, then existence and non-existence are not strictly binary. The analysis may suggest that we introduce additional modes of being to explain the difference between the past's non-existence and fiction's non-existence. Understanding what the past is brings us closer to comprehending the nature of existence and the distinction between things that exist and things that do not exist.

Finally, entities, events, and states of affairs that occurred in the past form a part of our ontology. We want to know what to include in the ontology and what to exclude from ontology and why. Ontology may be constituted by existent things alone, or it may be constituted by both existent and non-existent things. Either way, how ontology accounts for the past is

relevant to the ontological question. Therefore, enhancing our awareness of what the past is facilitates a deeper appreciation of reality, as well as unreality.

1.3.2 Moral Philosophy

It is worthwhile to examine not only the metaphysical motivations for the question of the past, but also how the question is motivated by moral considerations. Incorrect interpretations of what the past is may result in flawed assumptions for questions in moral philosophy. Coming to a better understanding of the past and its nature helps to avoid such errors by clarifying the nature of the object of analysis.

I will discuss how the question of the past impacts our moral inquiries. The ontological nature of the past is significant because it may give rise to the problem of establishing moral obligations for past wrongs. For instance, if the past exists, then rectifying past wrongs not only has a moral foundation but an ontological one, too. If the past does not exist, then there is room to say that our obligations to rectify the moral wrongs of the past have no moral or ontological foundation.

I will discuss four moral motivations: (A) A clear appreciation of the ontological status of the past leads to a better understanding of whether we have *moral obligations towards past people*, or for past wrongs. (B) Considering the nature of the past informs our understanding of our *moral obligations towards future generations.* (C) We may think of past generations as abstract objects. Assuming moral obligations towards past generations or past events implies we have *moral obligations towards abstract objects*. Understanding what kind of things past generations and events are deepens our appreciation of the kinds of things we have obligations towards. (D) A deeper appreciation of the ontological nature of the past permits a greater understanding of the sources of our sense of *subjective value* which may enhance our personal sense of value.

First, suppose anything non-existent has no value. If only existent things have value and things that have value are something to which we have moral obligations, then one has no moral obligations to non-existent things, even non-existent past people.[4] The argument against our moral obligation to non-existent entities assumes that all non-existent entities have equal status. However, if we may distinguish between non-existent things that once existed but no longer exist and non-existent things that have not existed and will never exist, then our moral obligation to non-existent things may not be so easily dismissed. Ontology permits a distinction between such non-existent entities.[5] Hence, it is possible that we have moral obligations to past things even if they are non-existent.

The way we speak and act suggests we do assume moral obligations to the past. For example, think of the moral principle: "we owe it to our forefathers." This is a shortened way of expressing a moral obligation to do something that respects our ancestors. The phrase reflects a moral guideline that presently existing people have moral obligations towards people who lived in the past but who no longer exist in the present. We can add to this example obligations such as overturning posthumous wrongful convictions, honouring people posthumously with awards, and paying reparations for past injustices such as slavery or the colonisation of indigenous people's lands. Thus, we do assume moral obligations to individuals who lived in the past but who no longer exist in the present.

One can distinguish between convictions, awards, and reparations. Overturning posthumous wrongful convictions and honouring people posthumously with awards concerns past persons directly because the convictions and awards are credited to them directly. In contrast, paying reparations for past wrongs is different because paying reparations to deceased

[4] This perspective contrasts with other views, such as subjectivism, which holds that values are subjective and depend on individual beliefs and preferences. Such a view allows for obligations to non-existent things.
[5] This is a complex issue that I revisit throughout the thesis, so I set further discussion of it aside for the time being. For now, let us suppose that the status of non-existent things is equivalent.

people is impossible. Therefore, we direct reparations towards the living descendants of the past individuals who suffered injustices. One may argue that moral obligations for such reparations are toward the presently existent descendants of wronged past people.[6] However, obligations towards presently existing descendants of past wronged people depend on recognising the harm caused to those past people in the first place. The harm suffered by the descendants of past wronged people is a compelling reason for paying reparations. Nevertheless, that harm follows from the persecution of their ancestors. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that part of the rationale for reparations is to recognise a debt to their ancestors, which is impossible to pay.

The question then, is not so much whether we have moral obligations to the past, but what precisely the objects of these obligations are and how their ontological status influences our moral obligations. Are these objects actual past people and events, are they non-existent past people and events, or are they really present things? Because we differentiate our moral obligations according to ontological status, coming to a better understanding of the ontology of the past informs our understanding of toward what these obligations direct.

The ontological status of the past and future is not the only thing that is relevant in determining whether we have moral obligations towards past or future entities. For instance, the direction of causation may be relevant. However, because the primary aim of this discussion is to understand the implications of ontological equality between the past, present, and future, we will set aside other factors, such as causation, to isolate and inform how the ontological status of the past and future might influence our moral obligations.

Next, consider our obligations towards future generations. The reasoning presented in response to the first moral motivation applies equally well between the present and future.

[6] For a recent excellent discussion of this issue, see Táíwò (2022).

However, we also need to compare our moral obligations between the past and future in the case that they are both ontologically distinct from the present. All else being equal, if the future is ontologically equal to the past, this provides a reason to treat any moral obligations we may have toward the future equally with those we may have toward the past. If the future and past are distinct, this may provide a reason to treat our moral obligations towards them differently. I will briefly outline a set of closely related issues showing how the question of the past informs our moral reasoning about the future.

B.1 If we have no moral obligations to past people because they do not exist (or do not presently exist), then we also have no moral obligations to future people if they do not exist (or do not presently exist).[7]

B.2 If future generations do not exist (or do not presently exist) and we have moral obligations to future generations, then we have an equally good reason to have moral obligations towards past generations if they do not exist (or do not presently exist).

B.3 If we have moral obligations to future generations and, relative to those generations we are in the past, then we have moral obligations to the past. From the viewpoint of future people, we are in the past. If we accept that we have moral obligations to those in the future, then past people have moral obligations. *Ipso facto*, we have moral obligations to the past. This argument depends on an ontological equivalence between the past and future.

B.4 We can equate past people with future people on the basis that neither exists, or at least that neither presently exists, which suggests we should treat them equally and

[7] This issue is not to be confused with the non-identity problem. That problem concerns whether we can have moral obligations to future people if their individual identity is not yet determined and our actions or inactions in the present will alter the identity of the individuals that will exist in the future. For discussions of the non-identity problem, see Kavka (1982), Noonan (1989), Parfit (1984, 2017), and Woodward (1986).

distinguishes them from present people. However, we may not agree with this equivalence if we think there is a distinction between past and future people. While past people *did exist*, future people *will exist*, suggesting a difference between the two. This provides a reason to think our moral obligations towards past people may differ from those we have towards future people, regardless of the existential status of past and future people.

If we have a clearer understanding of what the past is (and, equally so, what the future is), and if such an understanding reveals moral obligations between present and non-present people, then that should inform us of our moral obligations towards future people and generations.

This brings us to the question of our moral obligations towards abstract objects. It is possible to think of past and future generations as abstract objects.[8] If we have moral obligations to past and future generations, and past and future generations are abstract objects, then we have moral obligations towards abstract objects.

We do not want to get carried away with justifying moral obligations toward abstract entities. One may believe that this implies we are morally obligated to a fictional character like Sherlock Holmes. However, let's remember that we cannot murder, maim, or harm Sherlock Holmes in a morally significant way. A prevailing view is that only those things that can be harmed amount to something towards which we have moral obligations. Thus, while we may have moral duties to abstract entities, like past and future generations, we do not have a moral duty to *all* abstract objects. Exploring the ontological status of the past provokes a deeper understanding of the kinds of things we may have our moral obligations towards, including abstract objects.

[8] For example, versions of presentism espoused by Bigelow (1996), and Ingram (2016, 2018, 2019) treat the presently existent surrogates of past individuals in this way.

The fourth and final moral motivation to consider regards the subjective value we may gain from thinking about the past. “Subjective value” is the worth of an emotional or intellectual experience, thought, or memory that one ascribes to an event or occurrence, which results in happiness, satisfaction, contentment, prudence, and goal attainment. By understanding the ontological nature of the past, we can gain new perspectives and insights into our own lives and the history of the world, which in turn may enhance our personal sense of value.

Many people gain subjective value from remembering a well-lived life or thinking about their past experiences, the experiences of others, or some aspect of the history of the world. A better understanding of how we ought to conceive of the past may enhance the subjective value one gains from thinking about it. Without a thorough understanding of the objects that bring us subjective value, we cannot fully realise their potential for enhancing our wellbeing or experiences.

Subjective value from our thoughts about the past may be maximised when it is derived from events that actually occurred in the past rather than events that did not occur. There is no reason to value fabricated events. Although thoughts of fiction may have subjective value, this value is distinct from that of true thoughts. Hence, subjective value about the past stems from its correspondence or congruence with reality. This provokes a reason to understand which part of reality our thoughts of the past align with and their connection to the actual events of the past.

To illuminate how subjective value may be enhanced by thoughts about the past, and diminished by thoughts that float free from reality there are two cases that we should consider. The first has to do with the disappointment that one may feel upon discovering that a thought believed to be about the past is about events that never actually occurred. The second case

highlights the importance we place on the connection between our mental experiences and reality.

First, suppose that Margot remembers a holiday she had with her family, how her family gathered, mended old wounds, and strengthened familial bonds. She derives great satisfaction from the memories that she has of the occasion. Margot's family, however, inform her that the holiday she assumes to remember never actually occurred. Margot's mental state is really about something unreal. We value memories of the past because of their connection to reality. If a purported memory is of something unreal, then its value is diminished. For this reason, Margot, realising that her mental state refers to events that never actually occurred, has misplaced all the positive subjective value that she derived from the mental state when she believed it was a genuine memory of an actual past event. Margot's learning that her thoughts were not about real events diminishes her subjective value.

Second, recall Robert Nozick's famous Experience Machine thought experiment (1974, pp. 42–45). According to Nozick, a machine creates experiences for those who are plugged into it that are more pleasurable and less painful than the experiences that one has outside the machine. Nozick asks, "Would you plug into the machine?" Nozick has claimed that most people would choose not to live the life of the experience machine because there is a higher subjective value on experiencing reality than the life offered by the experience machine counterpart. As Nozick (1974) puts it, people prefer to be "in contact with reality" (p. 45). Like the Margot case, Nozick's experiment reinforces that we value experiences that are connected to reality more highly than those that are not.

Because we value thoughts that are in contact with reality more highly than thoughts that are not in contact with reality the subjective value derived from thoughts of the actual past is greater than the subjective value derived from thoughts generated by the machine. If our

thoughts have a sound basis in reality, then we have a good reason to distinguish them from thoughts about fiction, and therefore to value them more highly. On the other hand, if our thoughts lack a sound ontological basis in reality, this suggests that we do not have a good reason to derive any more value from them than we do from thoughts about fiction. I am not suggesting that we ought not derive any more value from our thoughts about the past than from thoughts about fiction. I am merely arguing that our thoughts about the past present a strong case that there is a closer connection between thoughts about the past and reality than between thoughts of fiction and reality. This provokes the need to better understand the relationship between our thoughts about the past and reality. A deeper understanding of what the past is provides a deeper appreciation of the value of our thoughts about it.

These cases shed light on the importance of contemplating the nature of the past to enhance the subjective value we may derive from thinking about it. To draw any meaningful conclusions from the Margot case or the experience machine thought experiment we need a clear understanding of what the objects of our thoughts are, especially our thoughts about the past. These examples do not imply that the past must be existent for us to derive value from it. They merely highlight that clarifying the nature of the past serves to illuminate the objects we derive satisfaction from. This not only improves our comprehension of the world but also deepens our understanding of the things that bring us satisfaction, ultimately enriching our appreciation of our experiences.

1.4 The Plan of the Thesis

In this chapter, I introduced the main research question of the thesis, “what is the past?” and explained how it emerges from the main debate in the philosophy of time between presentists and eternalists about how we should characterise the past, present, and future, and in what sense they exist. The truthmaking principle and the problem of negative existentials were introduced to draw out the point of disagreement between presentists and eternalists. I argued that we

should look beyond these logico-semantic approaches and consider the intentionality of our thoughts about the past. Then, I emphasised the importance of developing a deeper understanding of the ontological nature of the past. Such an inquiry not only contributes to metaphysics but also informs our moral reasoning. I will close out this chapter by presenting a statement of procedure to give an overview of the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2 explores the four main theories of time to provide an understanding of how each theory views the past. The chapter starts by introducing two classifications for the different theories of time, the A-theory, which views reality as genuinely dynamic, and the B-theory, which views reality as static. The chapter motivates each theory and explains their ontological commitments, especially for references to the past and for statements about the past. This, in turn, helps readers understand how each theory views the past, ultimately providing a choice space of how we may understand the past. I introduce some critical challenges the theories face as I go. Introducing these problems highlights the kinds of challenges, especially regarding the past, that follow from each theory's ontological commitments, setting up the discussion for the remainder of the thesis.

In Chapter 3, I introduce a range of challenges, which I name the "problems of absence," that various theories of time face in explaining what the past is in light of their ontological commitments. These problems arise for theories that accept the past does not exist, or that the past is distinct from how we characterise it. This is due to the need to be able to account for the referents of references to the past and the truthmakers for statements about the past. The chapter concludes by outlining the ontological implications that these problems have for theories of time, specifically regarding their explanations of the past.

Chapter 4 outlines and critically analyses serious presentism demonstrating that views denying the past's independent existence, separate from the present, cannot account for references to and statements about the past. I argue that, despite the actualist thesis, and the

non-existence of the past, presentists must account for the truthmakers for statements about the past. I then argue that the versions of serious presentism, such as *ersatz* presentism, Lucretian presentism, and thisness presentism, fail to adequately account for the past because the proposed truthmakers, surrogates, either lack an ontological ground, are merely hypothetical, or violate the *aboutness constraint*, the principle that a truthmaker must be that which a statement is about. Any form of serious presentism fails to not only account for the problem of the past but also adequately address the problems of absence. I will also show how these challenges have impacted other theories of time, besides presentism.

I turn to non-serious presentism in Chapter 5. To do justice to non-serious presentism, I provide an overview of Meinongianism.[9] Meinong's theory of objects provides a way for presentists to address the problems of absence. I aim to present Meinongian views of time in a positive light to demonstrate the logical and semantic coherence of a theory which distinguishes between existence and non-existence. To this end, the chapter carefully outlines the core of Meinong's thesis, providing an interpretation of it that informs my theory. Next, I introduce a range of challenges that Meinongian views have faced. The common reasons for rejecting Meinongian theories do not necessarily apply in the philosophy of time. Extant approaches overcome many of the criticisms levelled at Meinongian theory, reinforcing that a theory of non-existent objects can be coherent, thereby diminishing the reasons to reject such views out of hand. However, I will argue that MP mistakes the point of contrast between the past, present, and future because the past's immutability sets it apart from the mutable present and future.

Chapter 6 explores intentionality as an approach to answering the question of the past. The problem of how we represent the past is analysed by considering the work of Brentano,

[9] Wherever I use the term "Meinongian," I intend to capture views aligned with the spirit of Alexius Meinong's theory, which accept that there are non-existent objects. I am not using it in a strictly technical sense. Strictly speaking, there are nuanced differences between the views held by Meinong, Meinongians, and neo-Meinongians. To avoid getting bogged down in these details, which do not impact the substance of this thesis, I will mostly pass over these distinctions.

Twardowski, Searle, and Chrudzimski. Considering these contributions offers a range of ways to conceive of the past, so far as it may be the object towards which a thought directs. The chapter concludes by showing that theories of intentionality do not provide support for theories of time that deny the past the properties we ascribe to it. This suggests that admitting the past into the ontology is essential to explain the connection between our thoughts about the past and mind-independent reality.

Chapter 7 focuses on the ontology of the past. I argue for three theses about the past: its immutability, distinctiveness from the present and future, and unique existence. I analyse change to draw out the fundamental difference between the past, present, and future. The past, as something unchanging and immutable, is unlike the present, and future, which are dynamic and mutable, and the significance of this difference is not captured by the extant theories of time espousing an existent past. I consider these differences through the lens of Plato's distinction between appearance and reality to show that while immutability suggests substantive reality, mutability suggests something nonsubstantive, leading me to conclude that the past is substantive, while the present and future are nonsubstantive. This view challenges the commonly held belief that the present is the paradigm of existence. Instead, I argue that immutability implies substantiveness, and substantiveness entails existence. If the past is immutable, then the past exists. Conversely, due to their mutable nature, the present and future are non-existent.

Chapter 2: Theories of Time, Ontological Commitment, and the Question of the Past

Introduction

In this chapter, I offer an overview of four major theories of time—presentism, eternalism, the growing block (GB), and the moving spotlight view (MSV)—to explore their motivations, ontological commitments, and how they describe and understand what the past is. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of A- and B-theories of time to explain how the four contemporary theories of time and their associated frameworks are species that fall under this genus. Next, I turn to presentism, introducing two different versions of it: serious presentism (SP), which only accepts actual objects, and non-serious presentism (NSP), which accepts non-actual objects. Then, I discuss how eternalism, GB, and MSV have addressed the problem of the past. Discussions of GB and MSV give rise to Ghostly Growing Block (GGB) and Ghostly Moving Spotlight View (GMSV) views which treat the past as existent but strip it of certain properties that the present possesses, leading to the need for distinct analyses. These discussions provide an understanding of how each theory of time has addressed the question of the past and why these explanations have fallen short.

2.1 Genus and Species: Theories of Time

Just as closely related species belong to the same genus, theories of time that share a common understanding of the nature of time are classified under the same category. We can classify theories of time under two distinct groupings: the A-theory and B-theory. A-theories accept that the world genuinely changes, and that time really passes. B-theories deny genuine change and the passage of time. Heather Dyke has explained this,

> (A-theorists) think that there is an observer-independent distinction between past, present and future, and furthermore, they think that time flows inexorably with respect

> to this distinction. […] (B-theorists) think that there is no objective flow of time. (Dyke, 2013, p. 333)

Understanding these general classifications illuminates the critical point of departure between different theories of time, providing a basis from which the finer details of specific temporal theories can be discussed. I present the A- and B-theory as general frameworks for understanding theories of time. However, ultimately, this thesis will contend that describing the nature of the past and time requires more nuance than is provided by a straightforward reading of the A- or B-theory.

According to McTaggart (1908) a temporal series may be read in two ways.[10] In A-theory members of the time series are ordered: past, present, and future. In B-theory members of the time series are ordered: earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than.[11]

Being future, being present, and *being past* are so-called *A-properties* that may be possessed by an object at a time, or just by a time itself, where a "time" is understood as a whole-world state of affairs at a particular instant in the temporal continuum. Dyke has highlighted the contrast between A- and B-theoretic views:

> For the A-theory, the B-series lacks an essential feature of time: the distinction between past, present and future, so it adds this feature to the B-series to generate an A-series. (Dyke, 2013, p. 334)

[10] McTaggart also discussed a third series, the C-series. However, I will not consider it because as McTaggart explains, "the C series […] is not temporal, for it involves no change, but only an order [for example] M, N, O, P […] It is only when change and time come in that the relations of this C series become relations of earlier and later, and so it becomes a B series" (p. 462). For more on McTaggart's C-series, see McTaggart (1908. p. 462). Notably one contemporary philosopher who has adopted the C-series or a C-theory about time is Matt Farr (2020).
[11] For McTaggart's original presentation of this analysis, see McTaggart (1908).

A consequence of the A-series is that the A-properties possessed by times change: a state of affairs that is future becomes present, and then, past. Presentism, the growing block view, and the moving spotlight view are A-theories.

According to the B-theory, an event, *x,* is *earlier than* another event, *y*, *simultaneous with* another event, *z*, and *later than* another event, *w*. Therefore, *earlier than*, *simultaneous with*, and *later than* are *B-relations* that stand between *x* and other events. Dyke explains,

> For the B-theory there is no objective present moment, or distinction between past, present and future; there is just a network of events and times related to each other by the temporal relations of precedence, succession and simultaneity. (Dyke, 2013, p. 334)

Because B-relations do not change, the B-series gives rise to a static picture of reality; eternalism is just such a view. A- and B-theorists understand change differently. While A-theorists think that change amounts to an object's intrinsic properties coming into or going out of existence, B-theorists say it amounts to an object having different properties relative to different times. However, B-theorists, such as Mozersky (2015), belong to a growing cohort of B-theorists who argue that the B-theory can accommodate temporal passage—sometimes referred to as tenseless or minimal passage—and think it is misleading to think of a B-theoretic world as "static." B-theorists do not deny that an event can exemplify different characteristics at different times. For example, at an earlier time, t_0, an object, *e,* may exemplify a set of properties, *P,* while at a later time, t_1, *e* may exemplify a distinct set of properties, *Q*. This is how Mozersky understands change. Nevertheless, the set of properties possessed by *e* at each respective time does not change. Moreover, the relation of *earlier than* between *Pe* and *Qe* does not objectively change. The "static" label reflects these fixed aspects. This explanation of change contrasts with a view of so-called *genuine* change where the A-properties possessed by

e come into and go out of absolute existence. This means *Pe* is objectively future, then present, then past, not merely relatively.[12]

McTaggart's A-series cannot account for the truth of statements about the past because he claims that the dynamic passage from future to present to past—which the A-series requires—leads to a contradiction. Consider a time series, t_1, t_2, t_3. t_2 is past relative to *t3*, future relative to t_1, and present relative to itself. However, any combination of these absolute A-properties—past, present, and future—ascribed to t_2 simultaneously is contradictory.[13] Nevertheless, the A-theory correctly characterises the present and future as mutable, and the past as immutable.

For McTaggart's B-series, the past, present, and future have the same ontological status. If we accept the B-theory, then it must explain how the present is mutable and constantly changing, the future is open, and the past is unchanging and closed despite their ontological parity. What a B-theoretic reading of the past gets correct is its fixed nature.

For the remainder of the chapter, I focus on the species of the A- and B-theories to explain what motivates them, what they are, and the specific challenge the past presents for them. This discussion will help inform the chapters that follow by showing how each theory understands the past and why these understandings are problematic.

2.2 Presentism

Presentism, often represented by the slogan "only the present exists," takes seriously the intuition that time passes. For presentism, non-existent future times become existent as they become present. When a moment is no longer present, it becomes a non-existent past time. The

[12] I address different notions of change in Chapter 7.
[13] McTaggart's argument has been widely criticised because it relies on the assumption that t_2 simultaneously possesses incompatible A-properties, such as being both present and future, or present and past. However, if these properties are understood as being possessed in succession rather than simultaneously, then the alleged contradiction is avoided.

present alone exists. This view has three main motivations: intuition, experience, and parsimony.

2.2.1 Motivating Presentism

First, as I have just mentioned, intuition motivates presentism; many presentists, and even some opponents of presentism, have argued that the view is the "intuitive" or "common-sense" view.[14] The view that *only the present exists* is accepted because it is intuitive; it just *seems like* only the present, inclusive of present things, exists.

Intuition provides a strong motivation for adopting presentism due to the close relationship between the *feeling* of existing in the present moment and the time we assume to be the present moment in which we have this experience. The time *feels* privileged compared to past and future moments that we do not and could not perceive directly.

While presentism is intuitive, what we see is not always what presently exists. For example, one may observe a star in the night sky and have the sense that what appears to them is the star that they see as it is at that very moment. However, even the light from the Sun takes approximately eight minutes to reach Earth. Thus, a conscious experience of the Sun is a representation of the Sun as it was eight minutes prior to the person who experiences it. The light from the stars that we see in the night sky has taken many thousands, if not millions, of years to reach us. The present *feels* real because we have a sense that what we observe is present and exists, which is distinct from our experience of the past and future. They do not give rise to the same sense of reality. Nevertheless, because what we perceive as present may really be something that occurred in the past, we need to question whether our experiences truly suggest that only the present exists.

[14] For example, see Bigelow (1996, p. 36); De Clerq (2006, p. 386); Hinchliff (1996, p. 131); Ingram (2019, pp. 39–43); Markosian (2004, p. 48); Sider (2001, p. 11); and Tallant (2009, p. 407) amongst others.

A second motivation for presentism is ontological parsimony.[15] Our preferred metaphysical view should be more ontologically parsimonious than a less parsimonious rival because a more complex explanation involves more assumptions than a simple explanation (we apply Ockham's razor).[16] A less parsimonious view is more likely to include flawed assumptions.

A parsimonious explanation is different than a simple explanation. A simple explanation does not always trump a more complex explanation.[17] For instance, one may say that a rain gauge is full because of the recent rainstorm. That is the simplest explanation of a full rain gauge. However, there may be other reasons for a full rain gauge. Perhaps a devious neighbour added water to the gauge to make one believe that the rainstorm filled it. When we speak of a parsimonious explanation, we do not necessarily mean that it is simple. Nevertheless, simplicity suggests a theoretically more parsimonious view as a simple explanation requires less hypotheses, and consequently, less possibility of error.

While presentism may be ontologically more parsimonious than its rivals, it is arguably theoretically less parsimonious as it requires more hypotheses to explain, for example, past and future tense truths, and to bring itself into line with the special theory of relativity. With each additional hypothesis there is an increase in the possibility of error.

Presentists have argued that presentism is parsimonious because it involves the existence of present objects, whereas other theories of time involve the existence of additional objects. Presentism involves fewer assumptions than its rivals. Therefore, it is the more parsimonious view.

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[15] For a good discussion of this motivation see, Bourne (2006, pp. 68–69).
[16] For a foundational discussion of Ockham's philosophical method, see Ockham (1974); for discussions of the history of the principle commonly known as "Ockham's razor," see Brampton (1964) and Maurer (1984; 1978).
[17] One may attribute this argument to "Hickum's dictum," the idea in the medical field that a patient's presentation may result from multiple underlying medical conditions and not a single cause. See, Mani, Slevin, & Hudson (2011).

If quantitative parsimony is all there is to determine which view of time is correct, then this offers a strong motivation for adopting presentism. However, we can view parsimony in qualitative terms, too. For example, suppose presentists only postulate the same *kinds* of objects that other theorists of time do. In that case, presentism may not be the most parsimonious view in qualitative terms. In essence, a view that postulates fewer *kinds* of objects is preferable to a view that postulates more kinds. David Lewis (1973) has said, "I subscribe to the general view that qualitative parsimony is good in a philosophical or empirical hypothesis" (p. 87). Suppose presentism is more qualitatively parsimonious. Given Lewis' sentiment about qualitative parsimony and Ockham's razor of quantitative parsimony, there are reasons to adopt presentism over its rivals.

Qualitative parsimony presents a challenge to my view because I suggest that the past is of a different kind to the present and future. Consequently, my view is qualitatively less parsimonious than some other views. While I agree with Lewis' sentiment, I highlight that he did not regard parsimony as the sole determining factor when choosing between theories. Even Lewis, in his later career, departed from his earlier strict nominalism and courted the idea of the existence of abstract entities within his theory of modal realism (*Cf.* Lewis, 1986, p. 81–86). We should weigh the value of parsimony against the overall best explanation. If the best explanation of reality involves more kinds of things than other explanations, then it is advisable to accept this rather than hold on rigidly to the principle of parsimony. I argue that denying the existence of the past or conflating the ontological status of the past, present, and future has a higher price to pay than admitting that there are more kinds of things than we might expect. Having established two motivating reasons that may incline one towards presentism, I now turn to the theory.

2.2.2 The Theory of Presentism

Presentism consists of two theses: one ontological and one dynamical.[18] Presentism is an A-theoretic, or tensed view of time because it posits a genuine ontological distinction between past, present, and future, and it asserts that temporal passage is a genuine phenomenon. There are two main versions of presentism. On both views, the past and future are non-existent. However, they differ concerning their treatment of non-existence. One version takes non-existence "seriously" and denies that there are non-existent objects, whilst the "non-serious" version admits non-existent objects into the ontology.[19]

Consider the following argument for presentism, which was introduced by Arthur Prior to show that only the present exists (1959, pp. 12–17): if a past experience of a headache exists, one would expect to feel pain presently because a headache causes pain. However, a past headache does not cause one to feel pain presently. Therefore, the past experience of a headache must not exist. Only the present exists.[20] First, Prior shows that experiences which occur in the past or in the future are causally inert and cannot affect anything that occurs in the present. This implies that the present is distinct from the past and future; it also shows that only what occurs in the present can affect our experience. Second, Prior's argument supports the view that causally inert events or experiences do not exist. In that case, it follows that past and future experiences do not exist since nothing that occurs in the past or future causes experiences or emotions presently.

[18] For such statements of presentism, see Ingram (2019, p. 20), Leininger (2015, p. 726), Miller (2013, p. 346), and Price (2011, p. 277).
[19] Strictly speaking serious presentism denies non-actual objects while non-serious presentism accepts non-actual objects. This allows one who denies non-actual modes of being yet posits multiple modes of actual being to claim they hold a serious view. However, usually *actualism* is associated with a single fundamental existential quantifier, "∃," raising a question about whether views that posit multiple modes of being are truly actualist. I am concerned with the distinction between existent being and non-existent being (or *being-less-ness*) so I will not be drawn into this debate. When I refer to "non-serious views," I imply modes of being (or *being-less-ness)* other than strict existence (∃), which on a standard reading of actualism means non-existent.
[20] This argument was first presented by Prior (1959) and later discussed by D. H. Mellor (1998, pp. 47–57).

One might challenge Prior's argument by claiming that certain present effects are caused by past events. For example, one may claim that their consuming large quantities of alcohol yesterday has caused their headache today. Such examples call into question the conclusion of Prior's argument since it appears that an event that occurred in the past *does* affect our experiences today. However, the point of his argument is to show that past experiences do not have an effect on present experience. In the instance of a hangover, one's headache is not the effect of consuming the alcohol yesterday so much as it is the experience that goes along with the dehydration and brain swelling that has occurred after consuming alcohol. It is not like a past headache causes the pain I have today. One does not experience pain in the present due to a past headache.[21]

A definition of presentism has often been sloganised as (*D1*): "Only the present exists." But a general summary of presentism that captures this slogan is: everything that exists presently exists. Consequently, all past times and objects, and all future times and objects do not exist.

D1 is a deficient definition because it leaves unclear what exactly constitutes "the present." We can read *D1* as stating that only the present time exists, which suggests that the objects and events that we consider to be a part of the present do not exist. This is not presentism. Mark Hinchliff (1988) has precisified a definition of presentism by adding a few words to *D1*. He defines presentism as (*D2*): "only presently existing things exist" (p. 8). *D2* is more precise than *D1* because it removes the ambiguity arising from the meaning of "the present," drawing attention to what the ontology should include. John Bigelow (1996), Thomas

[21] There is something unpalatable about Prior's argument. It rests on the premise that temporally distant events and experiences have a direct causal connection. However, even if we think that earlier events exist, we do not then need to accept that they have a direct effect on temporally distant later times. For example, even if the past event involving the atomic bombings of Hiroshima in 1945 still exists then, it does not follow that the people of Hiroshima are experiencing pain now. Prior's argument fails because while a prior cause may lead to a never-ending series of later effects, each effect within the series has a beginning and an end-point in time. Causal relationships do not rule out the existence of the past.

Crisp (2007), and David Ingram (2016) follow Hinchliff defining presentism as "only present things exist" (p. 90; p. 35; p. 2868). Ned Markosian (2004) has replaced *things* with *objects* to define presentism as: "only present objects exist" (p. 47). The slight variation in Markosian's definition highlights a contrast with Bigelow, Crisp, and Ingram's definitions. This difference matters because the meaning of "thing" and "object" vary in different ontological accounts.[22]

A distinction between a thing, object, and entity may give rise to a different definition of presentism. If *entities* are distinct from *objects* and only present *objects* exist, then the definition of presentism permits the existence of non-present entities. Ingram has made this point,

> Without qualification, ["only present objects exist," and "only present entities exist,"] are not equivalent. On one reading, they imply different ontological commitments […] The claims are not logically equivalent if everything is an entity but not everything is an object. Put another way, the claims are not equivalent if the class of entities is not coextensive with the class of objects; more precisely, if 'for all x, x is an entity' is true, but 'for all x, x is an object' is false. (Ingram, 2019, p. 17)

I will use the terms "thing," "entity," and "object" interchangeably. I will primarily use the term "object" and understand this to apply to the maximal ontological class, which includes *everything*. Presentism is the view that only present objects, entities, or things exist. Under serious presentism, there is nothing that is not present. Under non-serious presentism, there is nothing existent that is not present. Hence, for the purposes of this thesis, it is not necessary to differentiate between these elements. In fact, it is preferable to consider the presentist thesis about what exists as applying to the maximal ontological set of elements—bar none, whatever we may take that to include.

[22] For a discussion of this issue, see Ingram (2019, pp. 17–19), who distinguishes between objects and entities.

For the remainder of this thesis, I will follow Markosian's (2004) modal definition of presentism (*D3*)*:* "necessarily it is always true that only present objects exist" (p. 47). The refinement of the definition of presentism to *D3* allows us to avoid the consequence of the triviality argument. Presentism is trivially true if "exists" means "exists now."[23] For example "only present objects exist now" is trivially true. If the triviality argument is correct, then there is a question of whether a genuine disagreement exists between presentists and other theorists of time. Most agree that only present things exist now. However, growing blockers extend the existence thesis to include past things, too; eternalists and moving spotlighters extend it to future things as well. *D3* avoids this concern. It means that in all possible worlds and circumstances, every existent object *is present*. No object exists beyond what presently exists: no object *is past* or *is future*. Any view that accepts that an object exists past or future fails to align with presentism.

Different manners of speaking about time do not amount to claims about time. The term "times" implies that there is a plurality of times. On the presentist's account, there is only one time: the present, and any talk of "times" is merely rhetorical.

It is somewhat misleading to say, "an object exists at the present time" because it implicates that objects exist at other times than the present. However, on the presentist's account, this implicature is conversational rather than conventional in a Gricean sense (Grice, 1989, p. 25). While conversational and conventional implicatures may overlap, the distinction here arises because presentists would contend that when we say "an object exists at the present time," our metaphysical views of time cancel the conversational implicature that there are other times than the present. This perspective does not align with a conventional understanding of times according to presentism because presentism denies that times other than the present exist.

[23] For the triviality argument, see Crisp (2004); Deasy (2019); Meyer (2005); Savitt (2006); and Tallant (2014a).

I take the implicatures as overlapping. Nevertheless, even though talk of "times" may give rise to confusion about metaphysical theses, I will continue to use the term "times," but not in the context of making any metaphysical claims.

A consequence of presentism is that all the objects past and future do not exist. At the present time, t_1, one may speak of a past time, t_{1-n}, or speak of a future time, t_{1+n}, but presentists argue that speaking of a past or future time does not entail that the past or future exists. Markosian expressed this sentiment when he said:

> According to Presentism, if we were to make an accurate list of all the things that exist— i.e. a list of all the things that our most unrestricted quantifiers range over— there would be not a single non-present object on the list. (Markosian, 2004, p. 47)

For the presentist, the set of everything that exists will not include as members those objects which are not present. Any view in which non-present objects are said to exist is not presentism. Theodore Sider explained the ontological view of presentists versus eternalists:

> Presentists and eternalists make competing claims about temporal ontology. According to presentism, only present things exist. According to eternalism, past and future things, such as dinosaurs and human outposts on Mars, exist as well. These are theories about what there is, just like actualism, possibilism, Platonism, nominalism, Meinongianism, idealism, materialism, theism, atheism. (Sider, 2006, p. 75)

Now, let me introduce an alternative version of presentism. I, along with many critics of presentism have found the claim that the past and future do not exist perplexing. We ask, "if the past and future do not exist, what is a thought or statement about the past *about*?" Philosophers, like Kris McDaniel (2017), have offered versions of presentism that distinguish between different modes of being to address this concern. For example, McDaniel (2017) distinguishes the mode of being that past objects enjoy from the mode of being that present

objects enjoy in a view he calls *presentist existentialist pluralism* (pp. 78–108). According to Palle Yourgrau's (1987) Meinongian presentism, past objects possess a mode of being distinct from the existent mode of being that present objects occupy, which I will call "subsistence,"[24] while according to Michele Paoletti's (2016) version past objects simply lack existence (i.e., they are *being-less*). On both views, present objects possess *existence*, while non-present objects lack it. Meinongian presentists follow Meinong in determining this other mode of being non-existent (or no mode whatsoever, i.e., *being-less-ness*). McDaniel differentiates his view from Meinongian views by determining both modes existent. Nevertheless, both approaches involve a distinction between the standard mode of being that presently existing objects occupy and a non-standard mode of being (or *being-less-ness*) attributed to non-present objects. Adopting this handy distinction has allowed presentists to explain what true statements about the past are about. Presentists who deny that there are non-existent (or non-standardly existent) objects are "serious presentists" and presentists who admit such objects into their ontology are "non-serious presentists."

Serious presentism has it that only existent objects can have properties and stand in relations to other objects. Non-serious presentism is the view that even non-existent objects can have properties and stand in relations to other existent or non-existent objects. Both views agree that anything that is not present does not exist.

[24] Yourgrau himself does not call this mode of being "subsistent." I am using the term for ease of explanation, but all I mean by it is a non-existent mode of being. Yourgrau (1987) has said: "the plausibility of this approach turns on our ability to make sense of the quantifier, '($\exists x$)', which no longer expresses existence, but rather "being" (which is not to be considered a kind of *existence*). […] one can go some way toward explicating this new quantifier of 'being'. It can be read: 'there is', or sometimes, 'there is possible', or 'there was' or 'there will be'. One should not exaggerate, however, our unfamiliarity with nonexistent objects that "are," or have "being" (p. 90–91).

The name "serious presentism" is adopted from "serious actualism," the view that the only objects that exist are objects that *actually* exist, which was introduced by Alvin Plantinga when he wrote,

> And let's use 'serious actualism' as a name for the claim that necessarily, no object could have had a property or stood in a relation without existing - the view, that is, that nothing has any properties in any world in which it does not exist. (Plantinga, 1983, p. 4)

The term "serious" differentiates the view from more permissive views that allow for abstract or non-existent objects. According to SP, it is not true that *there are* non-existent objects. Any time a name of a non-existent object comes up in an expression it does not refer to an individual it purports to name. Depending on context, "non-existent object" may designate either a Meinongian non-existent object, an object that lacks *existence* but is an object nonetheless, or as a placeholder for an object that is non-existent in the serious presentist's sense. These understandings hint at the approaches available to the two theories to respond to the problems of absence and the question of the past.

Before turning to versions of NSP, let us first consider what motivates non-serious actualism. It is useful to outline these motivations so that NSP can avoid the charge of being *ad hoc*. For instance, one might argue that NSP lacks a clear motivation for accepting non-existent objects into its ontology, apart from the fact that it helps sidestep many of the challenges that presentism faces regarding past and future tense truths, as well as the issue of past and future entities having properties and standing in relations to other entities.[25]

Besides Meinong's (1960) caution against adopting a "prejudice in favour of the actual" (pp. 78–81), the overwhelming motivation for admitting non-existent objects into the

[25] I discuss these issues at length in Chapter 3, so I will only briefly mention them here.

ontology—beyond mere intuition (for some)—boils down to their pragmatic and conceptual utility. They allow us to account simply for the referents of naming terms that denote non-actual objects, the truthmakers for statements about non-actuality, and the non-actual objects towards which our thoughts are directed.

For instance, consider the following two claims: a) "Darth Vader is the father of Luke Skywalker," and b) "possibly, the Earth's second moon has water." a) refers to non-actual fictional characters, and is seemingly true. This demonstrates that we can meaningfully refer to and speak truly about non-actual entities. b) is a modal statement. Although the Earth does not have a second moon, the statement is meaningful because we can ascribe properties to that non-actual object and determine the truth value of the statement. An outright denial of non-existent objects risks semantic incoherence as the referents and truth conditions of such statements become unclear.

While there are different ways to account for the referents and truth values of these statements—discussed in Chapters 4 and 5—the approach offering the greatest pragmatic and conceptual utility is to treat them like statements about actual objects, while denying non-actual objects the same ontological status as actual objects.

Likewise, non-existent objects help explain the intentionality of thoughts about non-existent things—what such thoughts direct towards—which I discuss in Chapter 6. Positing non-existent objects promotes ontological parsimony by reducing the need for additional or more complex metaphysical explanations for discourse, thoughts, and truths about fictional, modal, and other non-actual objects and worlds.

The prominent version of NSP I will discuss is Meinongian Presentism ("MP"). We can trace the origins of this view to Alexius Meinong's work. In his "Theory of Objects," Meinong (1960) argued that "there are objects of which it is true there are no such objects" (p.

83). MP appeals to this view to explain the nature of the past. Claiming that *there is* a non-existent past allows Meinongian presentists to explain what the past is because they can say there are past times and objects even though those times and objects do not exist. Moreover, they can explain references and truthbearers about the past by appealing to these non-existent objects.

NSP and SP treat the past (and the future) differently. This is the main feature that distinguishes the two views. On NSP the non-existent past and past objects are part of the ontology, and they have properties and stand in relations to other non-existent and existent objects. By contrast, SP excludes the non-existent past and past objects from the ontology. I appreciate MP's strategy for upholding the thesis that "only present objects exist" while avoiding the challenge SP faces when explaining the past in the absence of the past and past objects. However, denying the substantive existence of the past also seems wrong in light of its fixed and immutable nature.

Finally, I will explain the other critical thesis of presentism, which illuminates the view's place as an A-theory. Presentists have argued that the present is the temporal locus where all objects and events exist, and everything takes place. Two further aspects of this view deserve to be highlighted. First, this does not mean that the present is static, existing in a fixed state, including everything that ever did or will exist. Second, this does not imply that what is now past was not once present, or that what is now future will not one day be present. Times, objects, and events that are now past existed at one time in the present. Times, objects, and events that are now future will at one time exist in the present. This explanation suggests the dynamic thesis of presentism: *what is present changes*, which Kristie Miller has described in the following way,

> [A] presentist world is one that dynamically changes over time: the totality of events that exist changes as time passes, so that a different set of events comes into existence as each new present moment comes into existence, and those events then pass out of existence as that moment ceases to be the present moment. (Miller, 2013, p. 346)

Given the present's dynamical nature, presentists think that genuine temporal passage occurs; objects become present and then cease to be present. Before an object is present, we may think of it as future; after an object has been present, we may think of it as past. The present is where *temporal passage*, or *becoming*, occurs.

"Temporal passage" and "becoming" describe *genuine change*, the process of gaining or losing intrinsic properties, specifically as time passes from one present moment to the next. We contrast this description with a static view, such as eternalism, whereby objects do not genuinely change because they do not gain or lose their intrinsic properties. Accordingly, an object has different properties at different times, and whatever properties an object has at a time, it always has at that time. If time is static, then no genuine change can take place. Any view in which time is static is not presentism and it is not an A-theory.

2.2.3 Presentism and the Question of the Past

Let's turn our attention to how the question of the past impacts on presentism. Despite their view that the past does not exist, presentists must still explain how statements about the past are true and what names that appear in statements about the past refer to.

Consider the problem of truthmaking for statements about the past. According to *the principle of truthmaking*, a truthmaker makes a truthbearer true. *Being true* is a property of a truthbearer when the truthmaking relation is exemplified between it and a truthmaker. A "truthbearer" is a statement, expression, proposition, sentence, assertion, or utterance that can be evaluated as either true or false—for example, "Giza has three primary pyramids."

According to *truthmaker maximalism*, all true propositions have truthmakers—that which "makes" truthbearers true, such as objects, states of affairs, and events.[26]

The truthmaker for the example given may be the presently existent state of affairs involving the pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure in Giza. Hence, the truthbearer has a truthmaker, the statement has a positive truth value, and *being true* is a property of it. If there were no pyramids, or if they did not have the characteristics ascribed in the statement, then the statement would be false. Similarly, if the past does not exist, as presentists have argued, then existent past objects cannot be the truthmakers that make true propositions about the past true.[27]

Because existent past objects cannot be truthmakers, presentists must appeal to non-existent past objects or presently existing objects as the truthmakers for true propositions about the past. Consequently, a truthmaker for a true proposition about the past may be radically different than the object described by the proposition. For example, according to serious presentism the statement, "Winston Churchill was a rotund man" would have to be true in virtue of whatever remains of Churchill in the present. However, because the now decomposing Churchill buried at St Martin's Church, Bardon, is likely very different than the Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War II, the truthmaker is distinct from that which the statement is about. Trenton Merricks has said, "a truthmaker must be that which a truthbearer is about." Call this the *aboutness constraint.* [28] If a purported truthmaker has distinct features and properties from those that a truthbearer is about, then the aboutness constraint has been violated because the truthmaker is distinct from the objects, states of affairs, or events that the truthbearer is about. For example, suppose a true statement is about a rotund man who lived in

[26] See Armstrong (1997, p. 115ff), Alston (1996, p. 52), and Fine (1982a, p. 69). For defences of truthmaker maximalism, see Barrio & Rodriguez-Pereyra (2015), Jago (2020), and Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006). For criticisms of the view, see Bondar (2022), Golosz (2014), and Jago (2013). I will say much more about the principle of truthmaking in the following chapter.
[27] For a recent expression of this problem, see Griffith (2022, pp. 259–260). Chapter 3 expands on this problem.
[28] For an expression of this constraint, see Merricks (2007, pp. 22–34, 136–142). I explicate this principle in more detail in Chapter 4.

the past, yet the truthmaker is a pile of bones that exists in the present. In that case, the truthmaker is not what the statement is *about*. The statement either conveys nothing about the past, or, if it does, we must accept that truthbearers about the past have present truthmakers and seemingly give away the aboutness constraint.

Due to the conjunction of truthmaker maximalism and the aboutness constraint, presentism faces the challenge of justifying the truth of propositions about the past. The theory must explain why we should believe there are truths about the past when the past objects that could make them true do not exist, or when what makes them true is not what they are about.

Next, consider the referents of references to the past. It is similar to the problem of truthmaking because it also generates the challenge of explaining what a reference to the past refers to. However, this problem does not appeal to truthmaking. The problem arises due to the conjunction of presentism and the aboutness constraint. The ontology that presentism accepts cannot include specific existent past objects, states of affairs, and events that appear to be described in statements about the past, highlighting the issue of accounting for the referents of naming terms denoting past objects.

If NSP is correct, then the referents of names that appear in statements about the past may be non-existent objects. If SP is correct, then the referents of names that appear in statements about the past exist in the present. Considering how presentists respond to the issue about the referents and truthmakers of statements of the past provides us with insight about the reality of the past and its nature. Such a consideration provides a productive basis for ruling different ontologies in or out, and for assessing the cogency of these theories. On my account, studying presentism offers one fundamental insight into an investigation of the past, which I will elaborate at length in Chapters 3, 4 and 5: we cannot omit the past from the ontology, but

neither can we treat it as part of the present. I will argue that we must grant to the past a mode of being.

2.2.3.1 Actualism's Influence on Presentism and the Question of the Past

Mark Hinchliff has directly addressed the ontological question of the past as it applies to presentism by considering how actualism has influenced presentist responses regarding the identity of the past. Hinchliff (2010) has considered whether we can derive a tense-analogue from any version of actualism to explain the identity of the past. Hinchliff defends his preferred version of actualism, *world actualism*, but argues that its tense-analogue, which he calls *time presentism*, is invalid when applied to the metaphysics of time because the identity, order, and independence of the past, differs from that of the possible. This discussion highlights the unique challenges actualist presentists face in explaining the past's identity: past objects cannot possess properties or stand in relations; utterances and thoughts cannot be about the past; and truths about the past seem to lack an ontological explanation.

To fully appreciate these challenges, it is helpful to understand why it is tempting to treat the modal and the temporal as analogous.[29] Modal expressions such as "actual" and "possible" function indexically, corresponding closely to the similarly indexical temporal expressions "now" and "then." For instance, the actual seemingly corresponds to the present, and the possible to that which is not present but could be. Furthermore, the logical functions of the modal operators "necessarily" and "possibly" closely parallel those of the tense operators "was" and "will." Like the necessary, what was the case cannot be otherwise, while the possible resembles what will be the case given certain circumstances. These similarities invite us to extend ontological implications from one domain to the other.

[29] For excellent discussions of analogies and disanalogies between modal and temporal discourse see: Markosian (2001, pp. 617–624) and Dyke (1998).

A virtue of modal discourse is its purported ability to account for the truth conditions of modal statements, including those about the non-actual and the impossible, without necessitating ontological commitments beyond the actual. Instead, we may invoke eliminability theses, which allow us to eliminate problematic properties, such as *being* (merely) *possible*, which imply the existence of the object to which the property applies. These properties are replaced with less ontologically committing relations, such as *being true at some possible world*, thereby avoiding ontological commitments to non-actual entities.[30]

Philosophers of time who deny the existence of non-present times, such as presentists, may adopt similar eliminability strategies to explain the truth conditions of statements involving past or future tenses, thereby avoiding ontological commitments to past and future times, objects, properties and relations. However, unlike eliminability in modal cases, the eliminability of tense faces unique challenges that underscore the disanalogies between the modal and temporal.

To address this issue, Hinchliff (2010) examines the argument that leads to this problem, which he calls *the triangle argument* (p. 97):

1. An individual possesses a property if and only if it is in the domain of quantification (premise).
2. An individual is within the domain of quantification if and only if it exists (premise).
3. Therefore, an individual possesses a property if and only if it exists.[31]

[30] For a presentation of both modal and temporal eliminability theses, see Markosian (2001, pp. 617–618).
[31] Hinchliff credits the original version of this argument to Crisp (2005).

Because presentists think that only present objects exist, only present objects are in the domain of quantification. Only objects that are in the domain of quantification can possess properties. Hence, only present objects can possess properties or stand in relations.

Presentists do not want to deny that there are truths about the past, and serious presentists do not wish to deny actualism. So, they must explain the ontological ground for truths about the past in terms of things that presently exist.

Hinchliff (2010) highlights that by adopting Kripke-style possible worlds semantics for modal languages, we can avoid the problems posed by the triangle argument (p. 98). A predicate may be true of an actual individual at a world in which that individual does not exist. For instance, even at a world where Socrates does not exist, the statement "Socrates is a philosopher" is true because there is another possible world where the actual Socrates is a philosopher.

Actualists face a problem explaining which object a predicate applies to when the object of predication does not exist. However, if we deny premise 1 of the triangle argument, nothing stops us from ascribing properties to objects in worlds where those objects do not exist. Consequently, the conclusion given in 3 does not follow. Premise 2 is maintained as the individuals in question are not within the domain of quantification. We must deny the conventional relationship between predication and quantification, but the link between quantification and existence is maintained.

In an actualist setting, truths about non-existents appear to generate a contradiction, as they seem to ascribe properties to individuals outside the domain of quantification. Denying property actualism and adopting Kripke-style possible world semantics for modal languages provides a coherent way to ascribe properties to individuals at worlds in which those individuals do not exist; thereby denying the soundness of the triangle argument.

However, rather than denying actualism, presentists have appealed to presently existing surrogate entities as the ontological ground for truths about the past. These surrogates include Lucretian properties, haecceities or thisnesses, and dependent propositions, which involve past-tense complex properties that supervene on present things.[32] These surrogates could not exist had the past facts they represent not existed.

By employing this approach, presentists can determine the truth value of a statement representing a past fact by analysing the necessity of the conditions given by the fact for the way the world is in the present.[33] Hinchliff (2010) calls the view of those who take this path *property presentism* (p. 96). Property presentists follow the sentiment expressed by John Bigelow (1996): "there could not be a difference in what is true unless there were a difference in what exists" (p. 38).

A cornerstone of property presentism is its denial that non-existent objects, including past objects, can possess any properties or stand in any relations. Hinchliff (2010) calls this view *broad property presentism* (p. 96). In contrast, he calls the view that denies only simple properties of non-existents but permits complex properties *narrow property presentism*.[34]

[32] For examples of these approaches, see Bigelow (1996) on Lucretian properties, Ingram (2016; 2018; 2019) on thisnesses, and Crisp (2005) on dependent propositions.

[33] Note that presentists who choose their words carefully will not speak of past truths, but rather, truths about the past. Under presentism, past truths do not exist, however, present truths about the past do. The notion of aboutness at play here is difficult to grasp because the term usually implies a relation of reference. If the past is non-existent, then it is not obvious what even present truths about the past can refer to. Nevertheless, if aboutness is a relation of reference, a more precise interpretation of presentism is that all truths refer to the present. Truths about the way the world *was* supervene on truths about the present, with the tense operator "was" often described as expressing a primitive notion.

It is also worth highlighting a similar issue regarding talk of "past facts." Under presentism, a reference to a past fact is properly a reference to a present fact about the past. Of course, this brings in a question about whether facts can be about things. Ordinarily, we understand facts as obtaining or not obtaining. For this reason, when presentists mention past facts or facts about the past, they mean presently obtaining facts that ground truths representing past facts.

[34] These views correspond with broad and narrow property actualism, respectively, regarding their denial of properties to non-existents. Few, if any, presentists espouse the narrow view, however, as Hinchliff notes, Theodore Sider (2001), who is not a presentist, has defended the narrow view.

The primary objection to attributing simple properties to non-existents is that this may lead to contingent truths. If non-existents like past objects have simple properties, such as *being snub-nosed*, then singular propositions about them could vary between worlds that are existential duplicates, introducing contingency into truths about the past.[35]

However, permitting non-existents to have complex properties explains necessary truths about non-existents, such as "Pegasus is a mythical winged horse," which hold true in all possible worlds.

Statements predicating simple properties of non-existents, like "Pegasus is a horse," are false because they imply non-existents *actually* possess these properties, which they cannot, as they are non-existent.

In contrast, permitting complex properties explains the truth of negative existential statements about past individuals, like "Plato is non-existent." In the present, the ascription of non-existence to Plato is true, even if it is presently false that "Plato *is* a philosopher." This truth holds at any time when Plato does not exist.

Importantly, under property actualism, the reason for disallowing simple properties of non-existents does not apply to complex properties. Hinchliff (2010) highlights, "the nonexistents do not vary across worlds in the complex properties they have, because the same formulas are true at worlds that are duplicates as far as the behaviour of the existents go" (p. 100). Hence, narrow property presentism avoids at least one challenge that the broad view faces because it provides an explanation for our ascription of complex properties, such as non-existence, to past individuals while the broad view does not.

[35] As a result, the properties a non-existent had at a world would be a brute fact, independent of the existents at that world. The most basic description of brute facts is that they are those kinds of facts that have no explanation. For a detailed discussion of brute facts, see Vintiadis & Mekios (2018).

Both broad and narrow property actualism and property presentism face counterexamples due to their denial of simple properties, particularly sethood, membership, truth, designation, and identity (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 99). For instance, even non-existents are attributed with properties like self-identity.[36] This problematic consequence applies in temporal settings, raising challenges for property presentism as well.

Actualists oppose ascribing simple properties to non-existents because it opens the door to "madness": Meinongian ontology. Property actualism, in its broad form precludes Meinongianism outright. The narrow version allows certain complex properties to be attributed to non-existents but avoids complete madness by prohibiting predicating simple properties over them.

Attributing simple properties to non-existents undermines our ability to explain truths in terms of instantiated properties and relations. Non-existents could have distinct properties at worlds that are existential duplicates, which contravenes the principle that Kit Fine calls *world actualism:* Two possible worlds that agree on the behaviour of the existents cannot differ on the behaviour of the non-existents (Fine 1981, p. 295; Hinchliff, 2010, p. 100).[37]

Hinchliff (2010) emphasises the truth of world actualism, and that it provides support for both narrow and broad property actualism when he says: "Because world actualism is true, broad and narrow property actualism derive support as explanations for its truth" (p. 100). If world actualism is true, Hinchliff (2010) argues that there is no need for either broad or narrow

[36] Hinchliff (2010) lists the other counterexamples as: "A set appears to be necessarily a set, even if it is a set of contingent individuals and does not necessarily exist. [...] An element of a set appears to be necessarily an element of a set, even if the element is a contingent individual. [...] A singular proposition about a certain individual appears to be necessarily about that individual, even if that individual is contingent. [...] The singular proposition that Socrates does not exist appears to be true at worlds in which Socrates and the proposition do not exist. [...] The name 'Socrates' necessarily designates Socrates; even at worlds in which neither it nor Socrates exists, the name designates the man" (p. 99).

[37] World actualism aligns with broad property actualism because neither permit predicating properties of non-existents. World actualism aligns with narrow property actualism as it rules out non-existents having simple properties; and the complex properties ascribed to non-existents will agree between worlds if the properties of the existents agree.

property actualism (p. 100-102).[38] World actualism can account for the simple properties in the counterexamples as necessary properties of non-existents, resolving issues related to sethood, membership, designation, and identity. Hinchliff explains,

> The supervenience of the nonexistent on the existent *would* be a mystery if the nonexistent had simple properties like being golden. But no cases support the nonexistent having simple properties like that. For the most part, the simple properties nonexistents appear to have are properties they necessarily have if at all. (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 101)

These properties are strongly rigid: if they hold among individuals at one world, they hold among those individuals at every world (*cf.* Fine, 1977, p. 131).[39]

Truth is not strongly rigid but we can account for it by appealing to the Tarskian principle: *A* is true if and only if *A*.[40] Given the dependency of non-existents on existents, any true proposition about a non-existent in one world is true in any existential duplicate.

Broad property actualism fails to account for both the complex and simple properties ascribed to non-existents, while narrow property actualism is unnecessary to explain their consistency across worlds that are existential duplicates. World actualism avoids the challenges facing both of these views and explains the ontological ground for truths about non-existents.

Next, consider whether the temporal analogue of world actualism can overcome the challenges facing property presentism. This view replaces the worlds in world actualism with

[38] Hinchliff says the narrow view is better than the broad view because it offers an explanation for supervenient facts, accounting for their complex properties in terms of existents, and the formulas they give rise to, but it still lacks an explanation for the simple properties in the set of counterexamples.
[39] For example, in every possible world, the name "Socrates" rigidly designates the man, Socrates.
[40] For an early presentation of the Tarskian principle, often referred to as "Convention T," see Tarski (1944).

present times, leading to *Time Presentism*: Two times that agree on the behaviour of the existents must agree on the behaviour of the non-existents (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 106).

However, time presentism cannot account for truths about the past for three reasons: the identity, order, and independence of the past. First, whereas the possible is irreducibly general, the past possesses complete identity conditions. In the modal setting, the identity of a possible object, *x*, does not necessitate a specific instance of *x*; any possible *x* satisfies the identity conditions. In the temporal setting, the identity conditions for a past object, *y*, can only be satisfied by a particular *y*.[41] Hinchliff emphasises this point,

> No matter how far back we go, the past has no unsupported general patches in it. The relational structure of the past has a full identificatory structure of particular instances underlying it. (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 104)

We must also consider the transmissibility of properties in the temporal setting: if it was the case that an object, *y*, had the property, *being Q*, then it is now the case that *y* has the property of *having been Q*.[42] As Hinchliff states,

> For every property an individual had in the past, there is a corresponding complex property, which that individual has in the present. (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 105)

This raises a range of counterexamples for the property presentist. Whereas the property actualist had to address questions relating to actual individuals having properties at worlds in

[41] To illustrate, while the identity of a thought about a possible person does not necessitate a particular person, the identity of a thought about a particular person, such as "John F. Kennedy" can only be satisfied by the specific individual who lived in the past. If a duplicate replaces *John F. Kennedy*, the thought's identity becomes distinct. All thoughts about the past share such identity conditions.

[42] While this issue is significant in a tensed setting, it may not apply in a tenseless setting. In a tenseless setting, we can understand the past tense operator "it was the case that *Px*" as indicating that *x* is *P* at some past time. There is no need to explain the present property of *x*'s *having been P* in terms of what presently exists. Hinchliff's consideration of this issue underscores the presentist commitments he is highlighting.

which they do not exist, the property presentist must explain the properties that past individuals have at present times when they do not exist.

First, while the actualist can appeal to irreducibly general worlds to explain the properties that non-existents have, the property presentist cannot make a similar appeal because the past is not irreducibly general. For example, we can attribute the property of *being a fictional detective* to Sherlock Holmes in any possible world that is an existential duplicate of the actual world; however, the property of *having been the 35th President of the United States* applies specifically to John F. Kennedy. In the modal case, existents at a world can explain the property that Holmes has, in virtue of the formulas they give rise to, but this may not hold true in the temporal case. We can imagine a time in the distant future when the existents may not give rise to the formula representing the fact about Kennedy.

Second, the past is ordered whereas worlds are not. Because possible worlds are universally accessible, any worlds that are existential duplicates will have the same properties.[43] However, two times may be existential duplicates yet possess different past tense properties. Between two times, t_1 and t_2, a world could undergo changes yet the existents at these times could be identical. For example, imagine a world with a single object. At t_1, the object is a sphere. Then, the sphere undergoes a change in shape before returning to its spherical form at t_2. Consequently, t_2 would possess a range of past tense properties that t_1 would lack, even though the existents at the two times are identical. Thus, the order of the past influences what is true at a time, which differs from the modal case.

Finally, the past is independent of the present, while the possible depends on the actual. In the modal case, truths about non-existents supervene on the existents. However, this does not carry over to truths about the past. While tenseless worlds with identical existents must

[43] For example, if Sinatra is blue-eyed in one possible world, then he can have the property of possibly being blue-eyed in other possible worlds in which he does not exist.

agree on the non-existents, tensed worlds need not. Two tensed worlds may have identical presents yet distinct pasts. This shows that the past is independent of the present in a presentist setting, which contrasts with the dependence of the possible on the actual in the modal case.

In summary, Hinchliff has shown that introducing Kripke-style possible worlds semantics for modal languages negates the soundness of the triangle argument. Property actualism is not necessary to explain the ontological ground of truths about non-existents. We can explain truths about non-existents via world actualism alone, and the view avoids the challenges facing property actualism, making world actualism the preferred view. Because property presentism derives support from property actualism, denying property actualism diminishes support for property presentism. However, the temporal analogue of world actualism, time presentism, is in even worse shape than world actualism because the identity, order, and independence of the past, differs from that of the possible. Hence, there is no logically consistent analogue of world actualism that carries over to the temporal setting. Overall, explanations for the identity of the past in a presentist setting, which rely on any form of actualism, prove incapable of providing a coherent explanation for the ontological ground of truths about the past. Such explanations fail to explain what the past is. It is worth reflecting on these closing words from Hinchliff:

> the past does not merely replicate the structure of the possible in a temporal setting [...] the past has its own nature, its own identity, which is richly deserving of our study in its own right. (Hinchliff, 2010, p. 107)

Hinchliff's analysis shows that the question of the past presents a unique challenge for serious presentism because the past has a unique ontological status, distinct from the merely possible as well as present existents and the way they are.

There is another option open for presentism to explain what the past is that recognises Hinchliff's conclusion mentioned in the preceding paragraph. However, it does not fit neatly into the category of actualism. Kierland and Monton (2007) stand out from the standard serious responses by appealing not to a surrogate entity *per se*, but instead to an aspect. First, they concede, "It is extremely intuitive that past-tense claims depend for their truth-value on the past, and not at all on present things or the way things presently are" (p. 488). This means that presently instantiated objects and the properties and relations they exemplify are not sufficient to explain the truth of all claims about the past. Instead, Kierland and Monton describe the past as a "brute aspect of reality":

> we don't think we can positively characterize the brute past in a reductive fashion, we can say more about how we generally conceive of it and the role it plays vis-à-vis claims about the past.
>
> The brute past has an intrinsic nature. […] [W]e like to think of this intrinsic nature in terms of the past having a certain 'shape'. This shape does not consist in a structure of things having properties and standing in relations to one another. The past is an aspect of reality, even though no past things are. How can this be? There is no reductive explanatory answer to this question. The crucial feature of brute past presentism is that it postulates a *sui generis* metaphysical category, one independent of things and how they are. (Kierland and Monton, 2007, p. 491)

Kierland and Monton (2007) argue that the past is an irreducible constituent of the present because the brute past occupies a "*sui generis*" metaphysical category. Specifically, the past is an aspect of the world that we experience in the present; it is an inherent feature of the present, even though it is distinct from present things or the way things presently are. When they considered how something with no structure has a shape, Kierland and Monton demur: "There

is no answer to this question (as there is no answer to any question of this kind)" (p. 492). Despite this response to the question of the past, the questions concerning the ontological ground of references to and statements about the past remain unanswered.

2.3 Eternalism

Eternalism is the view that the past, present, and future exist. The idea originated in Parmenides who argued that whatever exists must have always existed. I will first outline four motivations for eternalism before providing an overview of the theory, especially as it pertains to a four-dimensional view. Then, I will address the implications of eternalism for our understanding of the past and discuss two key challenges the theory faces that lead us to question its explanation that the past is ontologically and existentially on a par with the present and future.

2.3.1 Motivating Eternalism

Eternalism's four main motivations are: 1) it is impossible for something that exists not to exist, 2) there is an objective reality independent of our subjective experiences, 3) a present event must have a prior cause and a later effect, and 4) the view is supported by science.

First, eternalism takes seriously the view that it is impossible for something that exists not to exist. Parmenides concluded that, "<*That which is*> *is, and it is impossible for it not to be*" (Cornford, 2014, p. 30). The assumption that supports Parmenides conclusion is the law of bivalence: something either exists or it does not exist. The future cannot come into existence from some non-existent state; if the future is not non-existent, then it exists. Hence, the future exists. Parmenides says of the future, "And how could what is be going to be in the future? And how could it come to be? For if it came into being, it *is* not; nor *is* it, if it is at some time

going to be" (Cornford, 2014, p. 37).[44] Whatever exists could not have just come into being from nothing, says Parmenides; therefore, whatever exists must have always existed.[45]

If something that exists cannot not exist, then it follows that something cannot cease to exist either. For the same reason that the future exists, so too does the past exist. Here, we have the first motivation of eternalism: if things cannot come into or go out of existence, they exist eternally.

A second motivation for eternalism comes from an objective reality that exists independently from our subjective experiences. Kant argued in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1998) that "things in themselves" exist independently from our subjective experiences of them. What appears to us as objects in sense experience are very different from what the objects are in themselves and, according to Kant, we can know nothing other than that appearances are very different from the objective nature of *things-in-themselves*. The foundation of Kantian transcendental idealism motivates the view that mere appearances fail to align with objective reality.

For the eternalist, sense experience does not reflect an objective feature of reality. Consequently, if the appearance of temporal passage is distinct from an objective reality, then time may be static even if representations in sense experience make us believe that the two are indistinguishable. If time is static, then each moment in time must exist. Thus, objectively all times exist equally and eternally, and whether they are past, present, or future is relative to an observer.

A third motivation for eternalism arises from a commonsense view of causation. Causality is a special relation between an event that occurs at an earlier time and an event that

[44] See Plato (1996), and Palmer (2009) for expositions of Parmenides's thought.
[45] For expositions of this argument, see Leibniz (1998), and Lewis (1986).

occurs at a later time, where the earlier event brings about the later event. Only existent events are causally efficacious. Therefore, the earlier and later event in a causal series exists, regardless of whether those events are past, present, or future. Thus, the past, present and future exist.

Finally, eternalism is motivated by Einstein's Special theory of relativity; for example, Hilary Putnam writes,

> the problem of the reality […] of future events is now solved. Moreover, it is solved by physics and not by philosophy. We have learned that we live in a four-dimensional and not a three-dimensional world, and that space and time—or, better, space-like separations and time-like separations—are just two aspects of a single four-dimensional continuum. (Putnam, 1967, p. 247)[46]

Matias Slavov (2020) has given a similar assessment: "Eternalism is the view that all times are equally real. The relativity of simultaneity in special relativity backs this up" (p. 1398).[47] If, like space, time is a dimension, then temporal distance is analogous to spatial distance. Just as spatially distant objects are not less real than nearby ones, temporally distant objects should not be considered any less real than those objects that are less spatially distant. Whilst presentists take the present as the only real frame of reference, eternalists do not discriminate amongst past, present, and future and consider all times equally significant frames of reference—all times being on a par in terms of existence and ontological status. For example, the Māori chiefs who signed the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and the last tree to stand on the

[46] For Einstein's original presentation of the Special theory of relativity, see Einstein (1905). For the full explanation of the argument that led Putnam to this conclusion, see Putnam (1967).

[47] Slavov (2020) explains why Special relativity supports eternalism: "Relativistic physics indicates that the temporal order of two spacelike separated events is relative. Hence there is no absolute present moment. This is evident by contrasting Minkowski spacetime with a classical spacetime. In the supposedly absolute classical spacetime, with an objective unique foliation into simultaneity slices, all and only other events that lie on the same simultaneity slice as the token count as happening 'now.' In relativity, there is no such objective unique foliation. The past, the present, and the future are perspectival in nature. This is good news for eternalism: all temporal locations are equally real" (p. 1398).

Earth in the distant future exist just like any present object. This critical implication of eternalism has been expressed by Sider (2001), a leading proponent of the view, when he said, "past and future objects and times are just as real as currently existing ones," and "dinosaurs, computers, and future human outposts on Mars are all equally real" (p. 11).

The *Relativity of Simultaneity* ("*RS*"), a consequence of Einstein's *theory of Special Relativity*,[48] is consistent with eternalism. According to *RS*, the temporal ordering of two spatially separated events depends on an observer's frame of reference, and there is no privileged frame of reference. The speed and direction in which an observer travels determines the temporal ordering of how events appear to them. Thus, two observers located side by side will observe events in a different order from one another if their speed and direction of travel is sufficiently different. For example, an observer in one frame of reference may view two events as ordered *A* then *B*, while another observer with a different frame of reference may view the same two events as ordered *B* then *A*. On this account an event's being past, present, or future is not objective because they are relative to a given frame of reference. Therefore, all events are equally existent. For this reason, eternalism appears to be the view of time most congruent with science.

2.3.2 The Theory of Eternalism

The picture that emerges from eternalism is of an objectively static universe where nothing comes into or goes out of existence; everything exists at a given temporal location and always exists at that location. No point in time is privileged. If no point in time is privileged over any other, then the past, present, and future are all ontologically on a par. If all times are ontologically on a par, then time does not pass. In addition to simultaneity being relative to a frame of reference, no frame of reference is privileged over any other. The appropriate view of

[48] For a translation of Einstein's original presentation of these theories, see Einstein (1905); for a more recent presentation, see Reichenbach (2017).

time is tenseless. This is a B-theoretic view of time, where past, present, and future times are not objective features of the world but space-time points, which are earlier, later than, or simultaneous with one another.

There are two ways for B-theorists to deny the static characterisation of time. First, for example, Mozersky (2015) has said: "Now, I take myself to be a B-theorist but I think that the denial of passage is very much a mistake" (p. 166). Mozersky rejects the denial of the passage of time because he contends that an object "starts" and "ceases" to exist (p. 168ff).

Consider an object, *O*, that exists for a period of time, from t_1 to t_3. *O* does not exist at a time earlier than t_1, at t_{1-n}, and it does not exist at a time later than t_3, t_{3+n}. *O* starts to exist at t_1 and ceases to exist at t_4. In this context, the world changes from not instantiating *O* at a time earlier than t_1 to instantiating *O* from t_1 to t_3 and then *O* is not instantiated at a time later than t_3. Because of this, B-theorists like Mozersky ultimately reject that time is static.

Second, B-theorists may relativise the truth of a proposition to a frame of reference. Consequently, a different proposition will be true relative to a different frame of reference. That two different propositions may be true relative to different frames of reference, entails that a change in events has occurred. Thus, the world is not static.

The issue alluded to in the preceding two arguments involves one's understanding of change. If one considers a difference in an object's relative or *extrinsic* properties sufficient for change, one may characterise a B-theoretic world as changing. J. J. C. Smart (1980) has described this kind of change: "In our ordinary theory of space-time, change is a matter of one time slice or temporal stage of the space-time universe being different from an earlier time slice" (p. 8). However, if one supposes that extrinsic property change does not imply *genuine*

change, and only a difference in an object's intrinsic properties can, then there is no genuine change in a B-theoretic world.[49]

Eternalism is typically presented as a four-dimensional view of time.[50] Michael Rea (2010) has described four-dimensionalists as those who believe that "[…] there are past or future objects (or both); and in saying this, they mean to put such things ontologically on a par with present objects" (p. 246) … "Eternalists believe that all past and future objects exist (i.e. there are some past objects, there are some future objects, and there neither were nor will be objects that do not exist)" (p. 247).

Four-dimensionalists have been said to align with perdurantism, the view that whole objects are constituted by temporal parts. Perdurantism is different than three-dimensionalism or endurantism, the view that denies temporal parts and asserts that objects are wholly present at each time they exist.[51]

A further competing view, which is a version of four-dimensionalism, is "stage-theory." It holds that objects exist as "instantaneous temporal stages that can be mereologically tied together by counterpart relations" (Mozersky, 2015, p. 175). On this view, an object perdures throughout time due to its counterpart relations with its other stages. Nevertheless, each stage is temporally discrete. Hence, we can differentiate the stage view from "standard" perdurantism—the worm view, in that stage theorists think a reference to an object refers to a discrete stage, whereas worm theorists think it refers to an entire spatiotemporally extended object.[52]

[49] I examine these different notions of change in Chapter 7.
[50] Some have argued that four-dimensionalism presupposes eternalism, for example Merricks (1995), while others, such as Sider (2001), have argued it does not. I will not address this argument here.
[51] For informative discussions of perdurantism and endurantism, see Benovsky (2011); McCall & Lowe (2003); and Merricks (1995), amongst others. For a book-length analysis of the topic, see Hawley (2004).
[52] Hawley (2004), and Sider (1996; 2001, pp. 188–208) defend versions of the stage view.

Endurantism has been associated with presentism; however, eternalism does not necessarily rule out the view. For example, Mellor (1998) and Mozersky (2015) defend endurantist versions of the B-theory. Imagine a four-dimensional worm extended across space-time. Just as different parts of the worm occupy different spatial regions, so too do different parts occupy different temporal regions. Therefore, four-dimensional objects *perdure* through time.

By contrast, endurantists assume that whether an object may exist at earlier or later times, it exists as a complete object at every time it exists. Accordingly, objects are three-dimensional; thus, they *endure* in time. Neither perdurantism nor endurantism outright deny the existence of the past. Some have argued that the debate between perdurantists and endurantists is a merely verbal dispute.[53] Even if we accept this charge, Benovsky (2011) may be correct when he says, "… there does remain room for substantive disagreement" (p. 160). When I refer to B-theory or eternalism, I imply perdurantism. When I refer to presentism, I imply endurantism.

This is a "block universe" model because everything exists in a four-dimensional spatiotemporal manifold.[54] By "spatiotemporal manifold," I mean the amalgamation of three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension into a unified inseparable four-dimensional whole.[55]

Every time-point within the four-dimensional manifold, except the very first and very last, is past, present, or future relative to some other point. Furthermore, every time-point in

[53] For instance, see Hirsch (2009), McCall & Lowe (2003), and Miller (2005).
[54] For presentations of the block universe model, see Horwich (2005), and Russell (1927) amongst others.
[55] For presentations of this idea, see Einstein (1952), Minkowski (1952), and Hawking & Penrose (2015). Some authors use the term "continuum" interchangeably with "manifold".

the block exists eternally. Even though an object may have a beginning and an end point at a time, an object does not come into or pass out of existence.

2.3.3 Eternalism and the Question of the Past

If eternalism is correct, then the past is not an objective feature of reality. On this view, we experience a time or object as being past when it is earlier than the frame of reference of our subjective experience. Therefore, as far as its ontological status is concerned, the past is the same as the present and it is the same as the future. However, there is something very curious about the universe existing as static four-dimensional object.[56] Commonsense tells us that present things and past things do not similarly exist.[57] If the past and present both exist, then there is no means for us to distinguish the past from the present or future. All times exist and that's that. Whilst eternalism has answered the question of the past, it comes at the expense of accepting that the past, present and future are ontologically equivalent. That cannot be the correct view given the dynamicity of the present and the stability of the past. Because these two characteristics differ, we have reason to believe that eternalism gives rise to a different problem of the past than presentism must face.

This brings us to the *problem of ontological parity* between the past, present, and future, which eternalism must accept. On eternalism, the past, present, and future have equal

[56] Against the notion that eternalism is a static view, explanations for the experience of temporal passage in a B-theoretic framework come in two main varieties. First is veridicalism, which denies that we have genuine experiences of temporal passage, where passage implies an objective present or that the present has a special ontological status. This view suggests that we misinterpret our subjective experiences when we assume they imply the existence of a temporal flow. Advocates of veridicalism include Braddon-Mitchell (2013), Deng (2017), and Hoerl (2014). Additionally, philosophers such as Deng (2013) claim that "([…] if by 'dynamicity' we just mean the continuous happening of things, one after the other), then in this sense, […] we truly experience dynamicity on the B-theory" (p. 721). Notably, this understanding of dynamicity differs from the A-theorist's understanding. Second is illusionism, which acknowledges that we have such experiences but denies that they represent an objective feature of reality. Instead, these experiences present an illusion. Advocates of illusionism include Lee (2014), Paul (2010), and Prosser (2007, 2012, 2013).

[57] In this context, I am appealing to a common-sense understanding of time, where people typically intuit the past to be something less real than the present. Whether this idea is counterintuitive to people whose reasoning is somewhat informed by philosophy or science is up for debate. For instance, if we treat time like a spatial dimension, an object's being temporally distant need not imply a different ontological status any more than an object's being spatially distant does. Nonetheless, our *prima facie* subjective experience suggests an ontological difference between the past and the present. This intuition is, after all, a primary motivation for presentism.

ontological status. However, if the past, present, and future are ontologically on a par, and our experience mirrors the underlying reality of time, then they should be experientially indistinguishable. The past, present, and future are experienced differently. We experience the past as fixed, recalling it as a memory; the present as changing, perceiving it directly; and the future as open, anticipating it as a possibility. Thus, the ontological parity of the past, present, and future does not correspond to our experience.

If the temporal structure of our experience (fixed past, dynamic present, open future) were purely subjective, we would expect significant variability in how we experience time. Since our temporal experience is consistently structured, it indicates an objective feature of reality.[58]

Notwithstanding the question of the referents of thoughts, all thoughts are mental constructs—so mental constructs mediate knowledge of objective reality; therefore, as Kant alluded to, it is possible that thoughts about the past, present, or future do not represent objective reality.[59] We should not fool ourselves into thinking that a thought about the present necessarily represents something any more or less objectively real than a thought about the past or future. This concern is echoed by Heather Dyke who reminds us that "… just because we are unable to perceive events that are happening at other times does not mean they are not happening at those times" (Dyke, 2011). In all these cases, there is the possibility of error. The issue I am shining a light on here is not *how* we can know if our thoughts about the past, present, and future represent objective reality. Instead, the issue is why we do not experience thoughts of the past, present, and future the same way if the referents of such thoughts are on a par in

[58] For a more detailed discussion of this argument, see Sections 7.2 and 7.3.
[59] McTaggart (1908) makes this argument when he says, "It may be the case that the distinction introduced among positions in time by the A series—the distinction of past, present and future—is simply a constant illusion of our mind" (p. 458).

terms of ontological status. Of course, the question of *how* we can know is also important but that is a matter for later.[60]

It is important to differentiate the problem of ontological parity from the related problem of temporal passage, which Dyke has summarised:

> B-theorists need to reconcile their claim that temporal reality is not tensed with our undeniable experience that the present moment is somehow privileged, and that time flows. (Dyke, 2013, p. 342)

The problem of temporal passage is about our subjective experience of time passing or flowing whereas the problem of ontological parity has to do with the ontological status of the past, the present, and the future. As we have discussed, if different times have the same ontological status, then there should not be a reason to experience them differently. Though, experience of the past, present and future are different.

The problem of temporal passage facing eternalists arises because they adhere to a view of time as a static four-dimensional block. If the world is a static structure and the past, present, and future are ontologically on a par, then the experience of temporal passage should be absent.[61] Experience of temporal passage is commonsense. So, eternalism is wrong.

Consider an experience of a river flowing or a tree falling. Such an experience suggests that the world has a dynamic aspect and that objects undergo genuine change where they gain

[60] I address this question in Chapter 6.

[61] It is important to distinguish two possibilities for the experience of temporal passage. First, it may be a merely subjective experience that does not represent objective reality. Second, the subjective experience may represent objective reality. In the first case, we may explain the cause of the experience through psychological or neuroscientific processes as Smart (1980) did when he said, "So if we say that we feel that time passes perhaps we misdescribe our feeling. Perhaps our feeling is that our *experience* changes. It is not that at [a later time] t_2 there is more of the *world* [or more times that have been objectively present] than there is at [an earlier time] t_1. It is that at t_2 there is more of our experience recorded in our memories than there is at t_1. In other words the stock of our memories is continually increasing" (p. 12). In contrast, the second case requires an ontological account of an objective temporal "flow" or process that involves time passing. I am concerned with whether the subjective experience represents an objective feature of the world, so I will not consider the possible psychological or neuroscientific processes involved if it does not.

or lose properties. However, according to eternalism, the world exists eternally as an unchanging four-dimensional manifold, so there can be no genuine change in the river or tree. Our subjective experience is of genuine change and temporal passage. For this reason, eternalism faces the challenge of explaining away the objective reality of genuine change and temporal passage. Eternalists must explain why we experience things passing from future to present to past, and with it from non-existent to existent to non-existent if they always remain the same.

2.4 The Growing Block

The growing block view of time ("GB") was introduced by C. D. Broad (2014, pp. 53–84) and developed by J.J.C. Smart (1949). According to GB, the past and present exist, but the future does not. Motivating GB is the intuition that the past and present are actual, while the future is merely possible. GB is built to overcome the temporally solipsistic ontology of presentism and the static world of eternalism. The view faces its own unique criticisms, including explaining what differentiates the present from the past given their existential and ontological similarities, what the *cutting edge* of the present is that divides the existent past from non-existent future, and how we can distinguish the present time from past times given that objects at these times equally well exist.

2.4.1 Motivating the Growing Block View

Commonsense would have us believe that the past and present are real in a way that the future is not. Indeed, Steven Savitt (2000) has said, "This view may well be the metaphysics of untutored common sense" (p. S564). This motivation is similar to the presentist's motivation from intuition. It just *seems like* the past and present are real, but the future is not, and that the past is fixed, the present changing, and the future open.

Additionally, GB may be motivated by a desire to explain the prior causes of present events. Present events are the effects of prior causes. If an earlier event must exist to be the cause of a later effect, and present effects exist, then their prior causes must exist too. The past must exist.

Like presentism, GB appeals to the intuition that the present genuinely changes, however unlike presentism, it posits an existent past in addition to an existent present. This enables the view to reconcile a range of the challenges facing presentism due to its denial of an existent past.

2.4.2 The Growing Block Theory

According to GB, the past is everlasting and exists sempiternally while the future does not exist. To be "sempiternal" means that something comes into existence and never goes out of existence.[62] To be "eternal" means that something neither comes into nor goes out of existence; it exists permanently at the times it exists. It is not true that something sempiternal "exists *simpliciter*," while it is true that something eternal does. The present is the *cutting edge* of the growing four-dimensional *block*, where the merely possible future is actualised, becoming part of the existent block, remaining fixed from that moment as part of the past. The present is not existentially privileged over the past, but the present is the point at which actualisation occurs.

[62] It is important to highlight that there are various understandings of "sempiternal." In theology, it is common to refer to God's sempiternality, which refers to God's everlasting existence *in time*. According to this understanding, God exists throughout all time, and there is no future time when he will not exist, but there may have been a beginning to his existence, that is, if time itself had a beginning. This contrasts with atemporal or timeless existence, whereby God transcends temporal limitations and exists beyond the confines of time. Neither of these understandings directly aligns with my usage of the term. I use the term to differentiate something that comes into existence *simpliciter* but does not go out of existence *simpliciter* from something eternal, which exists *simpliciter* without coming into or going out of existence. To avoid confusion, I do not mean to imply that something sempiternal necessarily has ongoing existence at all future times, nor do I suggest that something eternal necessarily exists at all times or atemporally. For instance, consider an object, x, whose lifetime spans a period of time, t_2, and x does not exist at times earlier or later than t_2. If x is sempiternal, then x does not exist *simpliciter* prior to x*'s* instantiation at t_2. However, once x instantiates at t_2, x will continue to exist at t_2 permanently, even though x does not exist at t_3 or any later times. Thus, at times earlier than t_2, the statement, "x does not exist *simpliciter*," was true. From t_2 onwards, this statement will be false. Now consider an eternal object, y. If y exists at t_2, then y permanently exists at t_2, and the statement, "y does not exist *simpliciter*," is never true. *Pace* Routley/Sylvan (1980, p.367).

Various authors have described GB. Broad says of GB that it

> accepts the reality of the present and the past, but holds that the future is simply nothing at all. Nothing has happened to the present by becoming past except that fresh slices of existence have been added to the total history of the world. The past is thus as real as the present. (Broad, 2014, p. 66)

Michael Tooley (1997) has said of GB that, "although both the past and the present are real, the future is not" (p. 12). And Braddon-Mitchell has said,

> The future is unreal: it does not exist. The past however does exist - it is a space-time volume of the kind that orthodox four dimensionalists think that the universe is as a Parmenidean whole. The present is a kind of hyperplane that borders reality; it is the edge of Being. As time goes on, the volume of the universe increases. (Braddon-Mitchell, 2004, p. 199)

Finally, Forbes (2016) has said that GB is the "view of time … that past and present events exist and future events do not" (p. 1).

GB does better than presentism at explaining the referents of terms naming past objects and truthmakers for statements about the past, and thereby what the past is. It does better than eternalism at explaining our experience of temporal passage and why we experience the past and present differently from the future. However, like eternalism, the standard understanding of GB, perfectly captured by Broad's statement, conflates the ontological status of the past and the present. This has led some philosophers to suggest an alternate version of the view in order to reconcile our different experiences of these times.

Another version of GB distinguishes the past from the present by assigning a "ghostly" status to the past. Barry Dainton (2011) has called this view "Growing Block + Glowing Edge"

or "Grow-Glow" (p. 406). Zimmerman (2011) has called it "a ghostly growing block metaphysics" because the past is "strangely intangible" (p. 170).[63] I will call it the "Ghostly Growing Block," GGB. According to GGB, the past lacks certain features that the present possesses, such that the past continues to exist even though past events no longer occur; only present events occur. We ascribe this ghostly status to the past because past events no longer have spatial location, according to Zimmerman (2011). Forrest (2004) has attributed the ghostly status to the past because while the present contains consciousness, he argues the past does not. Zimmerman (2011) adds that "a ghostly growing blocker must say that a [past] horse can exist although it is not actually alive or even spatially located" (p. 170).

The picture of the world that GGB gives rise to raises a question about the ontological status of the past. On one reading of GGB, the past is ontologically distinct from the present. Take consciousness. If a non-conscious horse is ontologically distinct from one that is conscious, then the past is ontologically distinct from the present. However, on another reading of GGB, the past and present are ontologically on a par. If we think a non-conscious horse is ontologically the same as a conscious horse, then the past and the present are ontologically the same. Comparing the ontological status of the conscious and the non-conscious horses is not without precedent. We can similarly compare living people and corpses. If a corpse and a living person have the same ontological status even though the corpse clearly lacks consciousness, then past people who, like the corpses, lack consciousness have the same ontological status as that of a presently living person.

GB and GGB, like presentism, offer a dynamic picture of time. GB and GGB agree with eternalists that the past and present exist, but GB and GGB part ways from eternalism on the ontological status of the future and the dynamism of the present. Considering the dynamic

[63] According to Zimmerman (2011, p. 170fn. 22), this view is espoused by Adams (1986).

view of reality that GBers accept, one can frame their disagreement with eternalism in terms of A-theory versus B-theory, the former being a dynamic view and the latter a static view. GBers adopt a dynamic view because they take tense seriously; they believe that *pastness* and *presentness* are objectively real properties, even if there is nothing to predicate *being future* of. Although GBers view the past in B-theoretic terms, the genuine dynamicity of GB is more like presentism than it is like eternalism. GB differs from presentism because only the present exists for presentism and on GB both the past and present are existent.

2.4.3 The Growing Block and the Question of the Past

GBers claim to have resolved the problems of absence. They have resolved the problems by accepting an existent past, much as eternalists do. However, whereas eternalists believe there is no objective ontological distinction between the past, present, and future, GBers distinguish the ontological status of the past and present from that of the non-existent future. On GB, the past is ontologically on a par with the present.

Ontologically distinguishing the past from the future allows GB to overcome presentism's problem of not being able to explain the asymmetry between the fixed past and the open future, which Joseph Diekemper has explained:

> events *become* real in the present and remain real thereafter. This conception of temporal becoming […] provides us with the immediate ground for the asymmetry of fixity: the past is different from the future because the past exists and the future does not. So, *contra* the presentist, the difference between past and future *is* an ontological one. (Diekemper, 2014, p. 1086)

However, the equal ontological status of the past and present raises a challenge for GB due to what Diekemper has called the "Incoherence objection," which he describes:

> At the root of the Incoherence objection is the thought that one cannot wed objective temporal becoming with the existence of a tenseless past—which is apparently what the growing universe theorist does. To do so is to attribute both dynamic and static aspects to time, and, given the mutual exclusivity of these two aspects—so the thought goes—incoherence results. (Diekemper, 2014, p. 1086)[64]

The Incoherence objection arises due to the opposing natures of a tenseless or fixed past and a tensed or dynamic present. Apparently, incoherence follows from attributing these mutually exclusive features to time. For example, Diekemper (2014), tells us to imagine Nero at a past time, AD 60, thinking "I am sitting here at the present time."[65] If Nero exists and he is having this thought, then it must be true. However, since AD 60 is in the past, it is false that Nero is *presently* having this thought, resulting in incoherence because "the *truthmaker* for Nero's belief, i.e. Nero's *presently* sitting, is *no longer* present" (p. 1086). In light of this problem, the challenge for GBers is to explain why past events are not intrinsically present.

Diekemper (2014) presents the Incoherence objection as a starting point for his defence of a version of GB, which he calls the "growing universe theory" (p. 1085).[66] On Diekemper's view, time passes as events occur and these events are determinate and complete. He introduces the "argument from ontic determinacy," contending that all events are past because they have fully occurred (p. 1096). Events are temporally extended, not instantaneous; the present lacks temporal extension, so non-instantaneous present events do not exist.[67] No events (or their

[64] This objection was introduced by Merricks (2006, p.104).
[65] This example was first introduced by Merricks (2006, p. 104). This thesis uses BCE/CE throughout, except where AD is retained to reflect Diekemper's original terminology.
[66] Diekemper (2014) prefers this label to the "growing block" because "the latter implies a four dimensionalist theory of time and persistence, and I wish to avoid this implication" (p. 1086, fn. 2).
[67] If events are determinate, complete and temporally extended, then each progressive moment instantiates a new event. Events involve distinct features at different times, which we can describe as "change," and change occurs over time such that each change amounts to a new event; hence, an event we would normally consider unfolding is *really* a series of new events. For example, Diekemper (2014) says, "take the event of my typing this sentence: this event exists, it is just that the referent of that existential claim is an entity that does not have as one of its constituents the typing of a full stop. (If I were to refer to the same event *now*, of course, it would!). So the

parts) are permitted to be future because according to GB it does not exist, and the possibility of non-existent entities is not entertained.

The existence of past events and the non-existence of present and future events leads Diekemper (2014) to conclude that only the past exists: "On the pastist view, if we think of experiences as events, then all experience is past, since all events are past" (p. 1101). The parts of events that we perceive as present are, in fact, the nearest temporal points of the past. Diekemper describes the present:

> if time is like a line growing in length from one end, then the present is like the point located at the growing end of the line. On this account, then, the fundamental mode of temporal existence is captured not by 'is' or 'is becoming', but by 'has become' or 'has occurred'. (Diekemper, 2014, p. 1099)

Diekemper's strategy overcomes the Incoherence objection which arises due to the equal ontological status of the past and the present. His argument illuminates the need to ontologically distinguish between the past and present to reconcile the past's fixity with the present's dynamism.

While I agree with Diekemper's conclusion that only the past exists, and his assessment that the existent events we perceive as objectively real and present are really past, I disagree with his explanation of the past, which relies heavily on the idea of thisnesses. A thisnesses is a unique property possessed by an individual *x*, namely, *being-identical-to-x.*[68] According to

truthmaker for the existential claim that occurs half way through the previous sentence is an event that only includes the typing of half of a sentence, and that event became past at the moment the reference was made" (p. 1099). Additionally, to say that an event is occurring in the present implies that it is incomplete, suggesting it has past parts that are fully determinate and future parts that are indeterminate. Moreover, the present parts of the event would be neither fully determinate nor fully indeterminate because the present has no duration (it is instantaneous), yet it is the time when indeterminate future events become determinate past events. Diekemper thinks an event cannot have indeterminate parts; hence, only past events exist.

[68] I address thisnesses more comprehensively in Chapter 4 when I introduce thisness presentism, so I will not go into great detail about them here.

Diekemper (2014), an event is identified with its thisness, and this thisness is instantiated by a unique concrete particular he calls a "thisness trope" (p. 1102), which, in turn, is a concrete instantiation of the abstract thisness.[69]

On Diekemper's view, all events have occurred and exist *simpliciter*. While event thisnesses come into existence through the instantiation of their corresponding thisness tropes, it is critical to appreciate that thisness tropes and their thisnesses are separate objects. By distinguishing between an event's occurrence, i.e., the instantiation of a thisness property by its thisness trope, and its existence—the existence of its abstract thisness property—Diekemper can argue that events come into existence because they have occurred at a particular time (the tensed aspect). However, subsequently, these events exist *simpliciter* and tenselessly, thereby overcoming the Incoherence objection.

One problem with Diekemper's view is that it adds unnecessary complications and ontological commitments. I remain sceptical about thisnesses as the foundation for past events' existence.[70] If the concrete event exists, positing it's thisness over and above the event seems superfluous. Given a thisness's unique correspondence with a particular individual, positing the existence of independent thisnesses over and above the individuals that instantiate them is onerous, and the idea that each moment in an event gives rise to a distinct thisness bloats the ontology. I argue that a similarly effective resolution to the Incoherence objection is available by simply distinguishing between the existence of the past and the non-existence of the present. If the past exists in a fixed state and the present is non-existent and changing, then there is no need to reconcile the opposing natures of a tenseless or fixed past and a tensed or dynamic

[69] We must appreciate Diekemper's unique understanding of "tropes," which he explains: "We have to bear in mind that a 'thisness trope' is not what is standardly called a trope; i.e. it is neither accidental nor qualitative. Still, inasmuch as the thisness trope is a necessarily unique, concrete entity which is instantiated in space and time, it is trope-like" (Diekemper, 2014, p. 1102).

[70] I expand on my critique of thisnesses in Chapter 4 where I discuss thisness presentism.

present because the past and present occupy distinct modes of being. It is highly intuitive that distinct modes of being will involve distinct temporal properties.[71]

One might wonder how the present can be non-existent yet also changing. However, this concern merely reflects what Meinong (1960) called "the prejudice in favour of the actual" (p. 78). The concern arises only if one denies that non-existent objects can have properties—for, without properties, there would be nothing to change. Yet if we accept that non-existent objects may possess properties, then a change in those properties is possible.

Moreover, the least controversial view of existence holds that an object exists if and only if its properties are spatiotemporally instantiated in external reality. Any object that exists must possess the properties necessary for instantiation in external reality, and only completely determined objects can exist in this way; objects with incomplete properties cannot exist. Once an object in external reality is completely determined, it cannot change, as any change would result in contradictory properties or a state of indeterminacy, precluding the possibility of spatiotemporal instantiation.[72]

All of this suggests that non-existence itself is a necessary condition for the properties of the present (and the future) to change. Indeed, existence would seem to preclude change.

But, what of Nero? At any given moment in AD 60 Nero is present *relative to* that time, which is fixed. However, he is not in *the present* because the present is dynamic and constantly changing. Let's consider the truth value of Nero's thought "I am sitting here at the present

[71] For example, *abstracta* such as numbers exist (in a broad ontological sense) tenselessly, while concrete instantiations of sets of things in the present are tensed.

[72] This issue, reminiscent of Zeno's Arrow Paradox, raises a problem for completely determined states transitioning between discrete conditions, such as 'off' and 'on.' Zeno questioned how an object could move or change states if, at each instant, it remains static and determinate. His paradox highlights doubts about how discrete states can shift without an intermediary, as any instant of change requires either contradictory or indeterminate properties. For example, for a light to go from 'off' to 'on,' there must seemingly be a point at which it is either both off and on, or neither. This reinforces the idea that a completely determined object cannot undergo change without resulting in contradiction or indeterminacy.

time." When Nero was *having* this thought, its truth value was indeterminate until he completed it; for instance, he could have stood up part-way through the thought making it false upon completion. This demonstrates the contingent nature of *truths* about the present; they are dependent on the actual course of events that is dynamically unfolding.[73] Only when Nero's thought was completed did its truth value become determined and fixed, and at that time, the truthmaker for this thought is a past state of affairs. In any event, a complete truthbearer, such as Nero's completed thought must refer to a past moment because only a past moment is fully determinate, ensuring the fixity of truthbearers' truth values. Consequently, truthbearers about concrete states of affairs, whose truth values are not subject to change, are always about the past.[74]

A further issue with event thisnesses as truthmakers is that truthbearers about the past are not *about* abstract properties. They are about actual events. A truthmaker must be that which a truthbearer is about, so thisnesses are not apt to serve as truthmakers for statements about the past.[75]

A final issue with Diekemper's view I will mention is that it becomes unclear how we should understand the non-existence of the present and future. Diekemper (2014) argues that the idea of present events is incoherent because, in his view, if the past is real while the future is not, then a present event would possess both concrete and non-concrete parts. I disagree because many events consist of both concrete and non-concrete parts. Take, for example, the event of "New Zealand beating Argentina by 38 points in the 2023 Rugby World Cup." In this

[73] I draw attention to the term "*truths*" to highlight the possibly indeterminate truth values involved here. If a truth is necessarily true, then an object with an indeterminate truth value is not a genuine truth.

[74] This may raise an objection regarding complete truthbearers, such as a written statement "the table is presently brown." However, I contend that the truthmaker for this statement is also a past state of affairs. That is because if we permit it to be a present state of affairs, then we introduce the possibility that the colour of the table may change, leading to an indeterminate truth value. If truthbearers have fixed truth values, then we cannot allow the possibility that their truth values may change.

[75] The issue of *aboutness* is discussed at length in Chapter 4, and further exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this section so I will not discuss it further here. I raise it only to highlight the challenge it poses for Diekemper's view.

event the concrete parts involve the players, the physical field of play etc., while the non-concrete parts include the numbers *38* and *2023.* Hence, the idea of events involving concrete and non-concrete parts is not inherently incoherent.[76]

Turning back to the broader theory of GB, some GBers, like GGBers, however, distinguish the past from the present since the past lacks many of the properties that the present possesses. This means that the past is distinct from the present in important respects, which may make it difficult for GGBers to account for references to and truths about the past. For example, a statement about Winston Churchill is about a conscious, spatially extended person who lived in the past. However, under GGB, the referent of this statement lacks a range of features and properties that we associate with Churchill, such as consciousness and spatial extension. As a result, GGB may fail to provide a complete and coherent explanation of the past. Many of the predicates we use to characterise the past when we refer to it or speak truly of it would lack an ontological explanation.

Whilst standard GB offers an explanation for the complete past, it treats the ontological status of the past and present equally. Notwithstanding GBers characterisation of the present as the *cutting edge*—whatever difference this amounts to, if the past and present are ontologically on a par, then our experiences of them should be similar. We, however, experience the past and present differently. Maybe, then, GB is not a sound foundation for resolving the question of the past.

[76] Indeed, Diekemper himself distinguishes between a concrete individual and its abstract thisness property that instantiates it when he states that the thisness "exists *simpliciter* from [the time] *t,* even though the individual *x* ceases to exist at some time $t + n$" (p. 1102). Consequently, the thisness must be separate from the individual. If we consider both of them as constitutive parts of an event, then that event must consist of both concrete and non-concrete parts. One might argue that the individual is merely the concrete instantiation of the thisness. However, if one can exist without the other, they must be distinct.

2.5 The Moving Spotlight

The final view of time I introduce is the Moving Spotlight ("MSV") so named because of C.D. Broad (2014, pp. 59–60). On MSV, the past, present, and future exist but there are objective differences between them. Whilst there are several versions of MSV, I sketch a basic summary of the view, which has been discussed by Sider (2001, pp. 17–21) and briefly mention one alternative that employs a "ghostly" strategy similar to GGB.

The *moving spotlight* metaphor intends to represent the progression of the preeminent present as it moves across a fixed four-dimensional spatiotemporal manifold. MSV addresses presentism's problems of truthmaking and the referents of terms involving the past whilst at the same time privileging the present. Additionally, MSV allows for eternalism to reconcile the subjective experience of temporal passage with an eternally existent past, present, and future. MSV may be differentiated from GB because the future exists and the view claims to distinguish the nature of the present from that of the past. In this way, MSV purports to avoid the *cutting edge* or ontological parity challenge that GB faces about differentiating the past from the present. However, it is not clear that MSV does successfully avoid this problem. The view fails to capture the fundamental ontological difference between the past, present, and future. MSV asserts that the difference can be reduced to the A-properties—*pastness*, *presentness*, and *futurity*. Yet, I argue that even if different times have different temporal properties, this explanation is not sufficient to reconcile the otherwise ontologically on a par status of the past, present and future with our subjective experience, which suggests a more substantive difference.

2.5.1 Motivating the Moving Spotlight View

MSV appeals to the intuition that the present *moves* across a framework constituted by all events in time. Broad (1938) motivates MSV in spite of the fact that he ultimately dismissed it as a "howler" (pp. 309–317):

> We are naturally tempted to regard the history of the world as existing eternally in a certain order of events. Along this, and in a fixed direction, we imagine the characteristic of presentness as moving, somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman's bull's-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street. What is illuminated is the present, what has been illuminated is the past, and what has not yet been illuminated is the future. (Broad, 2014, p. 59)

The subjective sense is that all times, past, present, and future exist, but the present *stands out* as ontologically privileged. Thus, MSV explains how subjective experience and the objective reality of temporal passage align.

2.5.2 The Moving Spotlight Theory

According to MSV, the past, present, and future exist, but the present possesses a feature that privileges it. The present moves along a fixed, four-dimensional structure, such that any perceived change amounts to future things becoming present and then passing out of being present. Sider has explained this view:

> reality consists of the four-dimensional manifold accepted by the B-theorist, with an equally real past, present, and future. But one slice of the manifold enjoys a special metaphysical privilege: it is the present. Which slice is present of course varies over time […] highlighting different portions of reality. (Sider, 2001, p. 17)

On Sider's account, MSV involves a concrete past, present, and future, and the only distinguishing feature in the manifold is that of *presentness*, which moves across the manifold as time progresses.[77] However, this is not the only way to conceive of MSV.

[77] Not everyone agrees with this description of MSV. For example, Deasy (2015) has argued that such descriptions are "persistently misconceived" and make MSV "look like an unattractive half-way house between four-dimensionalism and non-permanentist A-theories such as presentism" (p. 2075).

Zimmerman (2011) offers a version of MSV that adopts the ghostly strategy ("GMSV") like the one employed by ghostly GBers (pp. 171–172). All times exist but the present stands out as the privileged locus where events occur. The past and future are "strangely intangible" traces of all the things that were or that will be present. The present is differentiated from the past and future because it possesses certain features that the past and future lack. For example, present things have spatial location, whilst past and future things do not.

A motivation for preferring GMSV to MSV is like that of preferring GGB to GB: to overcome the challenge of distinguishing the present from the past and future and to explain how we can distinguish the present if all times exist equally. In this regard, Zimmerman (2011) has urged MSVers to "deny that merely future and merely past events are really happening; and strip merely future and merely past individuals of all their interesting, manifest properties" (p. 172).

2.5.3 The Moving Spotlight View and the Question of the Past

MSV and GMSV provide an account of what the past is, but they still have to explain the nature of the past given that it exists like the present but lacks some of the properties that the present possesses. The distinction between the past, present, and future in MSV is obscure as it comes down to the privileged status of the present, of which the ontological significance is difficult to grasp. To properly understand what the past is according to MSV, MSVers must clearly articulate what the difference between *pastness, presentness* and *futurity* entails. So far, they have not provided a coherent account. While many existent things exhibit variations in the same *kinds* of properties, this does not lead us to experience them as differently as we do the past, present, and future. For this reason, the view does not provide an account of the past that aligns with our experiences, which suggests that the difference between the past, present, and future is significant, not obscure. MSV will need to reconcile the subjective experience of the past, present, and future with the view that they are ontologically on a par.

Like GGB, GMSV leaves a range of properties of the past unexplained, hindering its ability to provide an adequate response to the problems of truthmaking and the referents of terms associated with the past, and hence to the question of the past. Despite the two problems, on MSV and GMSV, the past exists, allowing them to at least partially address the problems of absence.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced two broad classifications for theories of time, the A-series and the B-series, and presented three A-theoretic views: presentism, GB, and MSV, and one B-theoretic view: eternalism. According to the A-theories, this is a dynamic world, and the A-properties of past, present, and future are objective and real features of reality. In contrast, the promise of eternalism offers an unchanging world where times and objects stand in fixed B-relations of *earlier than, later than,* and *simultaneous with*. These different views of time lead to different ontological commitments about the past. According to presentism, the past does not exist *full stop*. While it is possible to say that the past exists according to eternalism, it cannot account for the experiential differences had between each of the past, present, and future. On GB, the past and present are ontologically on a par, but this still leaves us in the dark about how to distinguish the past from the present in the way that eternalism does. According to MSV the past, present and future all exist but the present is special, which means, per Sider's analysis, the present stands out from the past and future by the properties of presentness and, according to Zimmerman's version of GMSV, concreteness. On GGB, the past and present exist, while on GMSV, the past exists as well as the present and future; however, due to an abundance of properties that the present possesses and the past and future lack, the past differs significantly from the present. Because these differences involve stripping the past of many of the properties we associate with it, this is a weakness rather than a strength. Considering these theories and their ontological commitments illuminates the challenges they face in offering an

account of the past and sheds valuable insight into what is required for a cogent ontology of time.

I have introduced a range of problems that the different theories face to indicate why we need to reconsider them and explore the question of the past more deeply. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on problems concerning the past, truth, and reference, focusing primarily on the problem of truthmaking for presentism. This discussion allows for a critical analysis of the ontological implications that must be acknowledged if truths about reality have truthmakers.

Chapter 3: Problems of Absence: Reference, Truthmaking, and the Question of the Past

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss a cluster of related problems that affect how we understand what the past is. Most prominent are the problems of reference and truthmaking. The problem of reference concerns how to explain the referent of a term that names an object that does not exist. The truthmaking problem involves explaining what the truthmakers for truthbearers about the past are if the past does not exist. I call these the *problems of absence* because they concern the absence of something from the ontology that a theory of time accepts. They emphasise that theories of time must consider the question of the past in order to ensure their explanations align with other closely held metaphysical principles. Theories that fail to adequately respond to the question will also run afoul of these principles. The chapter will proceed by first outlining the problem of reference and introducing Kripke's theory of rigid designation which leads to the problem. Next, the chapter explains the problem of truthmaking, focusing on the most restrictive truthmaking principle that gives rise to the truthmaking problem: truthmaker maximalism. The *principle of relations* is introduced as foundational to the problems of absence, serving as both a source and a means of resolving them. Then, I turn to the problem of negative existentials, and the problem of fictional entities, which illuminate a discussion of how theorists may respond to the question of the past if it does not exist. Next, I examine what would happen to theories of time and their take on what the past is if they adopted a less restrictive version of truthmaking, namely the supervenience principle: truth supervenes on being. This principle allows for a broader range of responses to the truthmaking problem and suggests a solution to the problem of reference. Finally, I outline how the problems of absence impact on the different theories of time. This chapter sets up the discussion

for Chapters 4 and 5, where I outline a range of available responses to the problems of absence which directly impact what the past is.

3.1 The Problem of Reference and Rigid Designation

Consider the statement, "Theodore Sider wrote *Four Dimensionalism*." In this statement, the name "Theodore Sider" refers to the living philosopher *Theodore Sider*. Since Theodore Sider exists presently, the name "Theodore Sider" refers to that person. Next, consider the statement, "Plato wrote *the Republic*." In this statement, the name "Plato" does not refer to a living philosopher but one that has been long dead. So, *how* is it possible for the proper name, Plato, to refer to an object that no longer exists? Another question that follows closely to this question, which I focus on, is the ontological question: *What* does a proper name of a person who no longer exists refer to? For example, does the proper name "Plato" refer to the non-existent past person, *Plato*? Does it refer to something other than the non-existent *Plato*? Does it not refer to anything at all?

If a proper name refers to something, then there must be something to which it refers. Call this *the referential dependency of proper names.* Any theory of time that allows for reference to past objects has a straightforward response to the question of reference: a name of an object that no longer exists refers to a past object.[78] However, this leaves open what exactly a past object is.

Let us delve into the question of how naming terms may refer. Many linguistic expressions refer to something. Kripke (2011) has distinguished proper names as terms of direct reference: "It would […] seem that the function of names is *simply* to refer, and not to

[78] When I use the term "past object," I refer to an object that no longer exists in the present. It is important to distinguish this from an object that has existed in the past and continues to exist in the present. For example, "Caesar" refers to a past object because Caesar no longer exists in the present. On the other hand, "Jacinda Ardern" does not refer to a past object because she continues to exist in the present, even though most of her life has occurred in the past. While I use the term "past object," others have used "wholly past object," for example, see Ingram (2019).

describe the objects so named" (p. 5).[79] For example, compare the following expressions: (1) "the house with three windows"; (2) "that black cat on the mat"; (3) "the winner of tomorrow's race"; and (4) "Theodore Sider." The first three referring expressions are non-rigid; their referents may change in different circumstances. For instance, (1) may refer to any house with three windows, (2) refers to a designated black cat but could refer to any designated black cat on any mat, and (3) may refer to any number of people competing in the race. (4) is not like these expressions because (4) rigidly refers to an individual, *Theodore Sider,* and cannot be used to refer to anything other than that individual. I wish to focus on *proper names* like (4) and the objects to which they purportedly refer because only a name necessitates a reference to an individual.[80]

As I have just explained, some expressions involve a description that may or may not refer to a singular individual, and others suggest a direct reference to an individual. There are several distinct kinds of theories of reference or *models of linguistic reference* other than Kripke's to handle reference for these different expressions. These include descriptivist, causal, character, and intentionalist accounts.[81] In Chapter 4, I will consider descriptivist theories, such as that espoused by Russell (1905/2005), and Frege (1948). In Chapter 6, I discuss intentionalist accounts, as endorsed by Brentano (1874/2015). Considering these different approaches allows

[79] Kripke introduces this argument in Kripke (2011). The most well-known presentation of the argument that names refer can be found in Kripke (1980).

[80] Notably, Russell (1905/2005, 1903/2020) distinguished between ordinary and logically proper names: an ordinary proper name is a disguised definite description; a logically proper name refers to an individual, without involving descriptive content. According to Russell, there are a limited number of kinds of ordinary proper names since they can refer only to objects of immediate experience. Thus, on Russell's account, most proper names are ordinary. In the current context, I am appealing to names that refer to individuals, which corresponds, more or less, with Russell's notion of logically proper names. However, I do not imply that the referents of such names are necessarily objects of immediate experience.

[81] The character account of linguistic reference, which I do not discuss, appeals to something like a rule of use for names. A "rule of use" in this context means a linguistic rule that determines how a term should be used in a given context. For example, the rule for the pronoun "I" is that it refers to the speaker. However, the specific reference is determined by the context in which it is used. See Kaplan (1989). The causal account, which I also do not discuss, involves a historical chain of usage. I.e., the meaning of a term is not determined by its fixed connection to a specific object, but rather according to the history of how it has been used, which is passed on from one community of users to the next. See Kripke (1972).

us to consider a range of possible ways of responding to the problem of reference. This sheds light on the question of the past because these ways of responding to the problem will reveal *what* the referent of the name of a past object is. Before presenting these models, I elaborate on the problem that arises due to a theory of direct reference, such as has been presented by Kripke (1972, 1980, 2011).

Suppose, as Kripke (2011) did, that a name is a *rigid designator*. It "designates the same object in all possible worlds," which means it has a one-to-one correspondence with an individual entity that instantiates a unique set of properties (pp. 9–10). For example, "Theodore Sider" has a one-to-one correspondence with the living person, *Theodore Sider*, an individual who instantiates a unique set of properties; this provides an explanation for *what* the referent of a name is.

Now, consider reference as rigid designation in the face of presentism. Presentists face a problem explaining what the referent of the name of a past object is because past objects do not exist. Let's return to the statement, "Plato wrote *the Republic*." The object that the name "Plato" rigidly designates is absent from the ontology, so the name cannot refer to *Plato*.

Presentism and the referential dependence of names are at odds. Either abandon presentism or referential dependence. No presentist will abandon the view that only present things exist. Referential dependence, then, should be abandoned.

Presentists spell out their argument in the following way:

1. A proper name of a present object refers to an individual instance of some object. (premise)
2. Rigid designators pick out the same thing in all possible worlds. (premise)
3. A proper name of a present object rigidly designates an individual. (1, 2)

4. Past objects have proper names. (premise)

5. Therefore, the proper names of past objects rigidly designate individuals. (3,4)

6. On presentism, past objects do not exist. (premise)

7. If the presentist accepts rigid designation, then the rigid designation of non-existent objects is not possible. (premise)

8. Therefore, according to presentism, the proper name of a past object does not rigidly designate a past object. (6,7)

If a proper name rigidly designates an object, then the proper name of a past object must rigidly designate the past object to which it refers. According to presentism, past objects do not exist. Rigid designation, then, would only work for existent objects. Therefore, the proper name of a past object cannot rigidly designate a past object.

Presentists acceptance of the rigid designation of reference leads to an unpalatable consequence. Either presentism is false and the proper name of a past object rigidly designates a past object, or presentism is true and one must reject reference as rigid designation.

If the proper name of a past object does not refer to a past object, then another explanation of the referent of a proper name for a past object must be offered. On the face of it, presentists seem forced to deny that the proper names of past objects rigidly designate because what they would rigidly designate do not exist. We will get to how presentists have responded to this challenge.[82] Nevertheless, as I have presented the issue so far, presentism seems to leave us in the dark about *what* the names of past objects refer to.

The next problem to consider that is related to the problem of reference, is the truthmaking problem. Whereas the problem just discussed asks what the referents of names for

[82] These responses are considered in Chapters 4 and 5.

past objects are, the next problem asks what the truthmakers for truthbearers about the past are. Although distinct, both problems underscore the challenge of identifying the *relata* of terms or statements involving the past. A theory that cannot identify these *relata* also cannot explain *what* the past is.

3.2 The Truthmaking Problem

According to truthmaking theory, a true statement is true because there is something in the world that "makes" it true.[83] For example, what makes the statement, "The Sky tower is in Auckland," true is the Sky Tower being in Auckland. Truthmaking theory describes the necessary connection between truths and their ontological grounds. As Merricks (2007) explains, the truthmaker thesis is "one attempt to articulate truth's dependence on being" (p. xiii). While this works well for statements that include presently existing objects, what about a statement about the past: "Edmund Hillary climbed Everest"? The past does not exist, so the state of affairs involving Edmund Hillary climbing Everest does not exist. Consequently, the state of affairs that would make the statement true does not exist, so nothing could make the statement true. Yet, of course, the statement is true.

As Merricks (2007) observes, many philosophers find the need for a theory of truthmaking intuitive or obvious, yet he notes a general absence of arguments supporting this view (p. 2). He states: "Truthmaker's main support comes from something like the brute intuition that what is true depends in a non-trivial way on what there is or the world or things or being (p. 2). Similarly, the assumption that truths about the past require truthmakers may seem intuitive, but without an explanation of what in reality grounds their truth, such truths risk being unexplained or arbitrary. Hence, truths about the past require truthmakers as much as any other truths. If truths about the past do not require truthmakers, then there is no

[83] Philosophers who have endorsed the view that a true statement is made true by something in the world include Alston (1996), Armstrong (1997), Austin (1979), Fine (1982a), Lowe (1998), and Russell (1918/2010).

explanation for why such truthbearers are true, rather than false or meaningless. Consequently, if we accept that true propositions depend on an ontological ground for their truth, then truths about the past also require truthmakers.

While alternative accounts of truth, such as deflationary theories, may offer an explanation of the connection between propositions and truth, they sidestep the need for a substantive metaphysical explanation or deep ontological commitments, focusing instead on the linguistic or logical function of truth. Such approaches, therefore, do not satisfy the requirement for a substantive explanation of the connection between truth and ontology that truthmaker theorists consider not only intuitive but essential.

The conflict between the thought that something makes a statement about the past true and a non-existent past gives rise to the truthmaking problem for statements about the past. The problem has received significant attention in the philosophy of time literature. For example, Armstrong has summed up the argument,

> What truthmaker can be provided for the truth <Caesar existed>? The obvious truthmaker, at least, is Caesar himself. But to allow Caesar as a truthmaker seems to allow reality to the past, contrary to the [presentist] hypothesis. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 146)

And Tallant has said,

> So we've identified three intuitions: the intuition that everything that exists, exists now; the intuition that there are truths about the past and future; and the intuition that that [*sic*] a proposition about some entity or other is true because of that entity. Since past and future entities don't exist, there's nothing for (e.g.) past tensed propositions to be true 'because of'. According to TM [truth-maker maximalism], then, tensed propositions about the past and future aren't true. (Tallant, 2009, p. 408)

Finally, Ingram has explained the problem,

> the obvious truth-maker for <Caesar crossed the Rubicon > is a state of affairs involving Caesar. However, presentists deny that such states of affairs exist. Thus, presentists must either deny (implausibly) that propositions about the past can be made true, or else provide an alternative account of their truth-makers. (Ingram, 2018, pp. 6–7)

The truthmaking problem may be summarised in the following way:

1. If there are true statements about the past, then the past exists to make statements about the past true. (premise)
2. The past does not exist to make statements about the past true. (premise)
3. Therefore, there are no true statements about the past. (from 1 & 2)[84]

Notwithstanding the objection I will mention shortly, this modus tollens is logically valid, so one of the premises must be false. If premise 1 is false, then either:

(a) There are no true statements about the past.

(b) Nothing makes true statements about the past true.

(c) There are true statements about the past, but the existent past is not what makes them true.

Option (a) is a non-starter if, for example, our moral obligations to past, present, and future people depend in some way on our making true statements about the past.

[84] For the truthmaking problem in the philosophy of time, see Baron (2013a), Cameron (2011), Caplan & Sanson (2011), Griffith (2022), Ingram (2018), Keller (2004), Kierland & Monton (2007), Tallant (2009, 2014b), and Tallant & Ingram (2015, 2020) amongst many others.

Option (b) should be rejected because, as Asay and Baron (2014) have explained, the truth of statements about the past depends on what our ontology tells us exists. Anyone who denies this connection heads down "a road to nowhere" (p. 331).[85]

Only (c) remains. According to (c), there are true statements about the past even though the existent past does not make them true. If statements about the past are made true by something other than the existent past, then there is a range of ways to explain the relation between the truthbearer and its truthmaker. However, many things that one might propose can make a statement true are not sufficient for the role. My saying that "It is true that Edmund Hillary climbed Everest" does not make the statement true. The statement's truth does not *depend* on my assertion. It should be true regardless of my having said that it is true. Books and documentaries have reported that Hillary climbed Everest, but the truth of the statement does not *depend* on what the books and documentaries reported. Thus, there must be something substantive that makes the statement true such that it could not be false if that truthmaker exists.

One objection available to presentists is that the stated truthmaking argument is invalid if, for example, they unpack a temporal notion of "exists" such that (1) is read as: "If there are [now] true statements about the past, then the past exists [has existed, exists now, or will exist] to make statements about the past true." This reading would also impact option (c) as true statements about the past would be true because the past *did* exist.

However, this objection provides merely a linguistic explanation where an ontological one is demanded. "Did exist" means "does not [now] exist," so even with this reading of "exists," the point remains that statements about the past lack an ontological grounding in the present. The premise assumes that statements about the past are ontologically grounded by the

[85] More will be said about (b) in Chapter 4.

past itself. Consequently, the objection sidesteps the core issue, failing to provide a substantive basis for the truth of past-directed statements.

3.3 Foundational Issues: The Principle of Relations and Truthmaker Maximalism

Presentists have appealed to the *principle of relations* to resolve the problem of truthmaking.[86] John Bigelow (1996) has stated the principle of relations, "in order for a relation to hold between two things, both of those two things will have to exist" (p. 37). Put another way, a relation holds between an object, *x*, and an object, *y*, if and only if both *x* and *y* exist. No problem arises for a relation between two presently existent objects. For example, "President Joe Biden is angry at Vladimir Putin" is an example of a relation that holds between two people. However, relations that involve at least one past object present a problem for presentists. For instance, take the statement, "Lincoln is taller than Obama." The relation, *is taller than*, exemplifies a relation between Lincoln, a past object, and Obama, a presently existing object. Yet, given that Lincoln has been dead for over 150 years, he cannot serve as one of the *relata* in the truthmaking relation. According to the presentist, only presently existing things exist. Since Lincoln no longer exists, he cannot serve as a truthmaker for the statement.

Let's begin by considering the terminology that I will employ to talk about the truthmaking relation. A proposition is a paradigmatic example of a truthbearer. I take propositions to be abstract objects which are the primary bearers of truth and falsity.[87] The abstract nature of propositions is controversial, so I use "statements" throughout this thesis to avoid the controversy over its abstract characteristics.[88] A statement is a declarative sentence, and an essential difference between a proposition and a statement is that a statement may be a spoken utterance or written words. A proposition is the meaning expressed by a statement that

[86] One of the earliest presentations of this idea can be found in Plato's dialogue, *Parmenides*; see Plato (1996).
[87] Philosophers who have described propositions in this way include Frege (1884/1953), Russell (1903/2020, 2001), and Wittgenstein (2021).
[88] For examples of the dispute about the nature of propositions, see Quine (2013; 1951), who argues that we should dispense with the notion of propositions altogether.

transcends the boundaries of language and grammar; a range of statements, and other communication devices, can express the same proposition. When I use the term "statement," I have the meaning expressed by the statement in mind without at the same time making any claims over its abstractness.

Given the truthmaking relation, if there is no truthmaker for a statement, then that statement is false. Consider the statement, "Brown Bar-ba-loots wear bar-ba-loot suits." Bar-ba-loots do not exist. Hence, no truthmaker makes the statement true, and the truthmaking relation is not instantiated. Therefore, the statement is false: "Brown-bar-ba-loots wear bar-ba-loot suits" is not made true by bar-ba-loots.[89] Similarly, if the past does not exist, then no truthmaker makes a statement about the past true. Statements about the past, then, strictly speaking are false because no relation exists between the truthbearer and its truthmakers.

Now that I have outlined some important terminology and shown how the principle of relations gives rise to a challenge for presentists I turn to reasons why we should believe there is such a relation as truthmaking between truthbearers and truthmakers.

The truthmaking problem arises only if truthbearers need truthmakers. Here, I provide a detailed account of truthmaker maximalism to show how the theory may lead to the truthmaking problem.

The two primary motivations for truthmaker maximalism are that there must be something in the world that grounds the truth of a true statement and that all true statements are grounded in this way. For instance, Armstrong has said,

[89] Philosophers who have presented this kind of argument include Armstrong (1983, 2004), Chisholm (1989), and Lewis (1978); also see Brock (2002), and van Inwagen (2003, pp. 131–135) for discussions of the lack of ontological commitment entailed by statements about fiction.
Another response is that the statement is true despite having no truthmaker. I will discuss this kind of response and dismiss it as generally incoherent in Chapter 4.

> our statements and propositions do correspond or fail to correspond to reality. Their correspondent is the truthmaker, the ontological ground, for that statement or proposition […] I now think that there must be a truthmaker for every truth, even necessary truths. (Armstrong, 1993, p. 435)

Armstrong's observation draws attention to a special form of correspondence between a truthbearer and what makes it true.[90] If the special truthmaking relation exists between a truthbearer and what makes it true, then what makes the truthbearer true grounds the truth of the statement.

On the face of it, truthmaker maximalism does not cause any problems for truths about presently existent objects. We can more or less straight-forwardly identify the truthmakers for these kinds of statements. However, many truths appear to involve truthmakers that do not exist, which brings us to the next issue.

3.4 Nearby Problems: Negative Existentials and Fictional Entities

The other point that Armstrong has drawn our attention to is the maximalist claim, that *every* truthbearer has a truthmaker. A less controversial view may be that some truthbearers have truthmakers, e.g., statements about concrete facts, whilst others, such as negative existential statements, do not.[91] For example, the statement "there are no unicorns" entails that unicorns

[90] I note that correspondence and truthmaking are not necessarily the same theories. Truthmaking is a version of correspondence, but this is not surprising because most theories of truth agree that truth involves some kind of correspondence. For instance, consider Aristotle's assertion, which has been paraphrased well by Patterson (2003) that "To say (by means of a declarative sentence) of what is so that it is so or of what is not so that it is not so, is true, while to say (by means of a declarative sentence) of what is so that it is not so, or of what is not so that it is so, is false" (Aristotle, 1998, 1011b25; Patterson, p. 422). If one accepts this statement, one implicitly accepts some kind of correspondence. Nevertheless, there are different understandings of what correspondence precisely amounts to. For example, for a so-called correspondence theory of truth, where correspondence is said to be between a proposition and reality, see Alston (1996); for the view that correspondence amounts to the *congruence* between parts of beliefs and parts of facts, see Russell (1912/2001); for Austin's theory that correspondence is a *correlation* between whole statements and whole facts, see Austin (1979). Lastly, for a defence of the view that truthmaking is a version of correspondence, see Smith (1999). This sample of views is by no means an exhaustive list of the different understandings of correspondence. For a comprehensive survey of these views which places them amongst the other prominent theories of truth, see Lynch (2001).

[91] This is effectively the argument presented by proponents of the supervenience principle, which I discuss later in the chapter.

are non-existent. There is no truthmaker that makes the negative existential true. If there is no truthmaker, then not every truthbearer has a truthmaker.

This analysis gives rise to *the problem of negative existentials* for truthmaker maximalism: how can a negative existential statement be true if the subject of the statement does not exist? Quine discussed the problem of negative existentials in his work "On What There Is".

> If Pegasus were not, McX argues, we should not be talking about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not. (Quine, 1948, p. 22)

According to Quine, since Pegasus does not exist, the term "Pegasus" fails to refer. If "Pegasus" fails to refer, then it is nonsense to ascribe features to that non-thing, including being non-existent. For Quine who thinks that the existential quantifier ranges over bound variables, that *there is* something that bears the feature of being non-existent is contradictory.

This problem carries over to the philosophy of time when we consider statements about the past in a presentist world. Consider again "Edmund Hillary does not exist." From the point of view of a truthmaker maximalist, if Hillary does not exist, then the statement must be vacuously true. If Hillary does exist, then the statement is false. However, the statement is meaningful and true, so presentists must explain what makes the statement true. Call this *the problem of negative existentials and the past.*

The *problem of fictional entities*[92] is worth mentioning because considering it may reveal a means of speaking truly of things that do not exist. Many philosophers have argued

[92] For presentations of this problem, see Meinong (1910/1983, 1960), where the problem is a recurring theme.

that a statement involving fictional entities may be true.[93] If a statement about a fictional entity is true, then does it have a truthmaker? For example, "Sherlock Holmes is a pipe-smoking detective" is true but what its truthmaker is will not be an existent state of affairs. If this truthbearer is true, then it has a truthmaker. If there is no truthmaker for the truthbearer, then in virtue of the principle of truthmaker maximalism, the statement cannot be true. Unlike the name "Jacinda Ardern," which corresponds to an actual person, *Jacinda Ardern*, there is no actual object *Sherlock Holmes* to make a statement about fictional Sherlock Holmes true. Just as presentists face challenges with negative existentials and the past, determining what makes a statement involving fictional entities true requires considering something other than what presently exists.

Several strategies are available to resolve the problem of fictional entities that are worth mentioning because they propose solutions that may be relevant to resolving the problem of the past. I will mention two.

First, one may argue that non-existent truthmakers may satisfy the truthmaker maximalist requirement that for all truthbearers, there exists a truthmaker.[94] However, to adopt this strategy would be for one to pick up a line from Alexius Meinong. Alexius Meinong, as well as Meinongians broadly speaking, believe that there are non-existent objects.[95] This permits them to appeal to those objects as truthmakers for statements about fiction. For example, a Meinongian will say that the truthbearer, "Sherlock Holmes is a pipe-smoking

[93] For example, David Lewis (1978) and Fred Kroon (1994a, 1994b), whose views I discuss below. As a further example, Quine (1969) argues that the truth of a statement, whether about fiction or reality, is dependent on its context which may be derived by analysing the larger system of language and meaning it is part of; if the statement's being true is consistent with the truth of other statements in the system it is related to, then it can be determined true.

[94] Note that this approach requires a different reading of the phrase "there exists." It suggests that we read the principle: "for every truthbearer *there is* a truthmaker." I will discuss this distinction in Chapter 5.

[95] For the preeminent discussion of non-existent objects and how the strategy may address the problem of fictional entities, see Meinong (1960).

detective" is made true by a non-existent individual named "Sherlock Holmes," he smokes a pipe, and he is a detective.

Second, David Lewis (1978) introduced a strategy of prefixing sentences with a qualifier to allow for a statement about fiction to be true. For instance, for "Sherlock Holmes lives in Baker Street," Lewis (1978) proposes the prefix, "In the Sherlock Holmes stories…" (p. 38). Thus, if one adds this prefix to the statement, then it is true. To paraphrase Lewis (1978): the statement is false if it is taken as unprefixed because Holmes did not actually exist, or true if taken as an abbreviation for the prefixed sentence (p. 38). That is because it is true in the Sherlock Holmes stories that Holmes lives in Baker Street.

Later, Lewis (1986) fully developed a theory of modal realism in which he thoroughly explains the nature of the fictional worlds he has in mind. In Lewis's (1979, 1986) view, possible worlds exist–they differ from the actual world "not in kind but only in what goes on at them" (1979, p. 184).

Fred Kroon (1994a, 1994b) has argued that one may appeal to *pretense*, or "make-believe" to explain the truth of statements about fiction. Although no existent things make statements about fictional entities true, one may participate in a game of make-believe about the fictional world of Sherlock Holmes. If the statement's truth is consistent with the rules and conventions of the game, that is, the fictional world of Sherlock Holmes, then one may determine the statement as true. Kroon has said,

> an appeal to make-believe or pretense allows us to make room for the truth of sentences containing fictional terms without thereby buying into a realm of entities to serve as the referents of those terms, a realm of reified fictions. (Kroon, 1994a, p. 207)

This strategy is similar to Lewis' view, which Kroon (1994a) notes, "on its own terms provides a natural solution to the problem [of fictional entities]" (p. 207). However, the views are fundamentally different because, whereas Lewis contends that fictional or modal worlds exist, Kroon argues that fictions do not exist beyond the imagination.[96] Both views purport to explain the truth of statements about fiction by explaining what makes them true. For Kroon, a statement about fiction is true insofar as it is part of a game of make-believe. For Lewis, the fictional statements are true *in the fiction*.

The strategies outlined above show that the problem of fictional entities is not insurmountable. But the strategies used to resolve the problem of fictional entities may not apply to past objects and the past. Fictional entities have never existed, whilst past objects did exist at one time. Although the strategies that one may take to resolve the problem of fictional entities may be productive in overcoming that challenge, none of the strategies will work to resolve the problem of negative existentials and the past or the truthmaking problem because of the ontological differences between past objects and fictional entities.[97]

3.5 Reconsidering Truthmaking: The Supervenience Principle

Considering the problems that negative existential statements and statements about fiction cause for truthmaker maximalism, some philosophers have proposed a less restrictive version of truthmaking, known as the *supervenience principle*, or the principle that *truth supervenes on being*. David Lewis (2001) has called the supervenience principle "a weakened version of the truth-maker principle" (p. 610). This weakened version of truthmaking purports to avoid

[96] Lewis has an idiosyncratic view of existence, which has been termed *modal realism*. In his book, Lewis (1986) argues that all possible worlds and the actual world exist; however, all possible worlds and the actual world are isolated from one another (pp. 1–3). An individual exists at the world in which they are located. You and I exist at the actual world, and Sherlock Holmes exists at the possible world in which Sherlock Holmes exists. Hence, a statement about you or I may be true of the actual world because we exist in the actual world, but a statement about Sherlock Holmes cannot be true of the actual world because he does not exist in the actual world. Therefore, the statement "Sherlock Holmes exists" is true in relation to the world of Sherlock Holmes but false in relation to the actual world. In this sense, on Lewis's account, it is true in the fictional world that Sherlock Holmes exists.

[97] The ontological distinction between the merely possible and the past was highlighted in my discussion of Mark Hinchliff's consideration of the identity of the past in Chapter 2.

the problem of lacking a truthmaker because it offers an ontological explanation for the truth of problem statements. The less demanding criteria for what may count as a truthmaker allows proponents of the view to appeal to negative states of affairs, which lack the positive truthmakers demanded by truthmaker maximalism to make their statements true. Consider the statement, "chimeras do not exist." There are no truthmakers for this statement because there are no chimeras. For the statement to be true according to truthmaker maximalism, chimeras must make the truthbearer true. Therefore, the truthmaker maximalist must say that the statement is false. However, that chimeras do not exist is why the statement is true. Rather than viewing the absence of chimeras to serve as truthmakers as a problem, the absence of this referent motivates supervenience theorists. Their weaker version of truthmaking only requires truth to be related to the world through supervenience, which means that a statement is true if its truth value is determined by the way the world is. Bigelow (1996) has explained the principle, "truth supervenes on being-there could not be a difference in what is true unless there were a difference in what exists" (p. 38). Furthermore, Sider has said,

> *truth is supervenient on being*: what is true supervenes on what objects exist, what properties those objects have, and what relations they stand in. [...] The supervenience principle does not require the existence of a fact that there are no unicorns; it merely requires that since 'there are no unicorns' is true in the actual world, it must also be true in any world in which the same objects exist, those objects instantiate the same properties, and those objects stand in the same relations as they do in the actual world'. (Sider, 2001, p. 36)

This explanation shows that a worldly state-of-affairs may serve as a truthmaker so long as the same truthbearer exists in every possible world with the same objects, properties, and relations. For instance, supervenience does not require there to be chimeras. Moreover, if there were chimeras, this would contradict the statement that "chimeras do not exist." Any existent

chimera would make the statement false. Supervenience only requires that what is true supervenes on what exists, namely the objects in the world, including the world itself, and the properties and relations they exemplify. According to this understanding, that the world's existent objects, properties, and relations do not include chimeras is sufficient to make the statement true.

Supervenience is a relation between two entities. For example, if one says that *x* supervenes on *y,* one is making a claim about the relation between *x* and *y.* Specifically, that *x* is dependent on *y* such that *x* could not exist unless *y* exists. Contrarily, without *y,* there would be no *x.* As such, one can claim that a truthbearer, *x,* is true in virtue of some entity, *y*; or alternatively, *y* gives rise to the truth of *x*. Consequently, any change in *y* will result in a change in *x.* On this account, the truth that *there are no chimeras* supervenes on the world because the world contains no instantiations of chimeras.

Despite the effectiveness of this strategy for statements about fiction and typical negative existential statements, it is not immediately apparent that the approach solves the truthmaking problem for truthbearers about the past. One might think that the way the world is now does not necessitate the truth of every past tense statement. For instance, a truthbearer about fiction depends on the objects, properties and relations that exist within a fictional world, and the truth of a negative existential statement depends on the objects, properties and relations that exist in the actual world. However, a truthbearer about the past does not seem to depend on what exists in the present. Simon Keller has made this point when he has observed,

> Most would agree […] that there is nothing about the present world, considered in itself, that rules out the possibility that the world sprung into existence five minutes ago, or that someone combed his hair with his left hand rather than his right hand on a particular morning last century. (Keller, 2004, p. 88)

Any number of possible events may have occurred in the past, yet the way the world is now may not depend on which of those events was actual. Therefore, the way the world is now may say nothing about the truth of the past. This problem leaves open a requirement for presentists who subscribe to the supervenience principle to explain how the present and present things entail the truth of each and every truthbearer about the past. Presentists who fail to explain the truthmakers for each and every truthbearer about the past fail to provide a complete account of the past, suggesting that aspects of the past are either *missing in action* or somehow open or undecided.

Whether one adopts truthmaker maximalism or supervenience, both views imply that truthbearers have truthmakers. Maximalists understand a truthmaker as a positive state of affairs—a particular individual or state of affairs must exist to be a truthmaker for a given truthbearer. Supervenience theorists do not require the existence of the subject of predication to make a statement true. However, they require that a given set of objects, properties and relations exist to make a statement true. Often this summation is explained by saying that not every truth has a truthmaker, which I think is disingenuous. If the truth of a statement depends on the existence of a particular set of objects, properties and relations, then that set is the truthmaker. For this reason, when I speak of the need for all truths to have truthmakers, I leave open the possibility that a set of objects, properties and relations other than what the subject of predication suggests may be a truthmaker.

3.6 Implications for Theories of Time

The problems introduced in this chapter all raise a serious concern for theorists of time. To summarise, we have *the problem of reference,* what the name of a past object refers to, and *the problem of rigid designation,* what the name of a past object rigidly designates. Next is *the truthmaking problem,* what the truthmaker for a truthbearer about the past is. Then *the problem of relations,* what the *relata* of a relation involving the past is if the past does not exist. *The*

problem of negative existentials, how a negative existential statement can be true if the subject of the statement does not exist, raises similar concerns in a temporal setting, leading to *the problem of negative existentials and the past*, how a statement about the past can be true if the past does not exist. Finally, *the problem of fictional entities*, how a statement about a fictional entity can be true if fictional entities do not exist, motivates a concern about treating statements about the past similarly to statements about fiction. These issues are linguistic instances of the *problems of absence*, how to explain linguistic and cognitive expressions when the ontology cannot account for their ontological ground.

Let's focus on the problems of reference and truthmaking and start with how these problems impact presentism. If the past does not exist, then past objects are not available to serve as the referents of names that purport to refer to them. Names refer. So, the name of an object that no longer exists must refer to either a non-existent past object or something that exists in the present other than that which the name purportedly refers to.

Next, truthbearers depend on truthmakers. There are truthbearers about the past. Presentists cannot deny the ontological implications of the principle of relations because that would imply that truths about the past are not anchored in reality or, as Sider would say, "float free from the world." Presentists want true statements about the past to be anchored in reality as much as others want true statements about the past to be anchored in reality. To overcome this concern, presentists must provide an explanation for what makes statements about the past true even though the past does not exist. Therefore, presentists must either identify the truthmakers for statements about the past in the present or admit that the referents and truthmakers are real yet non-existent past objects. Taken together, these two issues imply that the past is either non-existent or that it is tied up in present things.

Say that the referents and truthmakers are real, yet non-existent, that they are objects that occupy a mode of *non-existence* (or they are *being-less*); this is the Meinongian view, which I present in Chapter 5.[98] This mode applies to the subjects of statements that assert or imply *there is* an object that does not exist. One question is: should a name or statement about a non-existent fictional character and a name or statement about a non-existent past object be treated the same because they are about non-existent things? Moreover, following this, do names and statements about fictional characters, and past objects involve the same ontological implications? Suppose we treat the two kinds of names and statements similarly, and the same implications are involved. In that case, there is a good reason to suppose that the ontological commitments that a name or statement about Edmund Hillary implicates are equivalent to those that a name or statement about Sherlock Holmes implicates. However, it seems wrong to claim that Sherlock Holmes and Edmund Hillary, whatever the denotations are or are not, are ontologically equivalent. After all, part of what it is to be Sherlock Holmes involves never being physically instantiated, whereas being physically instantiated is a fundamental aspect of what it is or was to be Edmund Hillary.

This issue generates questions about *modes of being*. For example, can names refer only to existent things or are there non-existent things they can refer to as well? Does truth only arise from statements about objects occupying concrete modes of being, or does truth arise from statements about objects occupying concrete, abstract, and possibly, non-existent modes of being as well?[99] To thoroughly resolve these problems of absence and thereby provide a

[98] The aim of Chapter 5 is to discuss the Meinongian view. For a comprehensive analysis of Meinongian theory, see Perszyk (1993), where he demonstrates its contemporary relevance in philosophy. Perszyk argues that philosophers have largely misunderstood the theory. However, it has important implications for metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language, and so it is a valuable resource for resolving longstanding problems in these areas. This assessment supports the relevance of considering Meinongian theory in an analysis of theories of time.

[99] To capture the broad range of Meinongian views without misrepresenting some of them, when I refer to "non-existent modes of being," I mean to include objects that simply lack existence (i.e., are *being-less*), which strictly speaking do not occupy a mode of being.

complete and coherent explanation for the past, presentists must address this and other related questions.

On the other hand, say that the referents of names involving past objects and the truthmakers for statements about the past are presently existent objects. Then presentists must explain what present things they conceive of as sufficient to stand in place of past objects and truthmakers, whilst ensuring their posits do not lead to undesirable consequences.

Consider how the broader consequences that follow from the position that one adopts on truthmaking and supervenience will impact the positions that one may take in determining the ontology and nature of the past. Let me briefly describe the ontological consequences of the aforementioned two positions.

The truthmaker maximalist requires an existent object, what I have called a positive state of affairs, to make a statement true. Therefore, if the past does not exist, then a statement about the past must be false, or meaningless, at least—because there is nothing in the world to make a statement about the past true. As such, truthmaker maximalists have a hard time defending the conjunction of presentism and the existence of truthbearers about the past. Presentists who subscribe to truthmaking maximalism can only avoid this consequence by amending the truthmaking principle such that "for every truthbearer *there is* a truthmaker" and saying that *there are* non-existent past objects and they are the truthmakers.

In contrast, the supervenience theorist thinks a set of objects, properties, and relations other than what the subject of predication suggests suffices for a truthmaker. Therefore, they may appeal to something that exists in the present as the base of the supervenience relation to explain the truth of a statement about the past. Nevertheless, it is not clear that the ontology of the present provides a sufficient base to account for the truth of every statement about the past. To defend the conjunction of presentism and the truth of statements about the past,

supervenience theorists must explain which present objects, properties and relations are the truthmakers. The following two chapters turn to a discussion of both of these types of explanations that presentists have provided to resolve the problems of absence.

Lastly, I will reinforce the ontological implications that the problem of negative existentials has for presentism. To resolve this under the principle of truthmaker maximalism, the only path available is the Meinongian path. Accordingly, the subject of predication in the statement "Caesar does not exist" is Caesar, and the predicate "does not exist" is attributed to him. "Caesar" refers to the non-existent Caesar, and he lacks the property of existence. This understanding raises questions about the meaningfulness of treating existence as a predicate, particularly in light of Kant's critique that existence is not a property an object can possess but rather consists in the instantiation of a concept. This critique, along with opposition to the idea that something can both exist (in any sense) and not exist, leads to challenges for the Meinongian approach. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapters 5.1 and 5.2, so I will not address them here.

The supervenience theorist has to say that the statement is true because *Caesar* is excluded from the set of all presently existent things; hence, the statement is made true by a set of presently existent objects, properties, and relations, which is distinct from *Caesar*. The statement, then, does not predicate over what we think it does—Caesar. Instead, the statement predicates over a set of present things.

The problems outlined are less of a concern for other temporal theories. That is because all the other theories posit an existent past. Eternalists, growing blockers, and moving spotlighters may appeal to existent past objects as the referents of names and the truthmakers of truthbearers about the past. Thus, the ontologies posited by those theories provide an ontological ground to respond to questions of reference and truthmaking. For example, all of

these theories may appeal to the existent *Caesar* crossing the existent *Rubicon* at the existent past time *January 10th, 49 BCE* and say that that state of affairs is the truthmaker for the statement, "Caesar crossed the Rubicon." *Ipso facto, Caesar* is the referent of "Caesar."

Furthermore, if the past exists, then the problem of negative existentials and the past does not arise because past objects can be identified as the referents of true negative existential statements about the past. Under these theories, "Caesar does not exist" is false because the object referred to by the statement, *Caesar*, exists in the past, while "Caesar does not exist *now*" is true because the referent of the statement, *Caesar*, exists, just not *now*.

Lastly, these theories do not provide any reasons to suggest we ought to analyse statements about the past similarly to statements about fiction because they do not assume that the past is similarly non-existent as fiction. Thus, according to the account of the existent past that these theories provide, the problems of absence that face presentism seem like non-sequiturs.

Before moving on, let's consider how the problems impact on the ghostly versions of GB and MSV. While GGBers and GMSVers may respond to the problems of absence similarly to eternalists, GBers, and MSVers, they still face challenges because they deny certain properties of the past. Although GGB and GMSV can answer to the demands of the principle of relations, i.e., because they admit an existent past, their denial of certain properties of the past raises questions about the sufficiency of the truthmakers and referents they posit, casting doubt on the descriptions of the past they offer. If the past exists yet lacks specific characteristics that the present possesses, it is not clear that the referents and truthmakers provided for by these views can fully account for the references and truthbearers they relate to. For example, suppose the past or past objects lack consciousness and consider the statement, "Winston Churchill led Britain against the Nazis in World War Two." Presumably the subject

of the statement, “Winston Churchill,” was conscious when he led Britain against the Nazis. Presumably the truthmaker entails this fact. However, if consciousness is lacking from the past, then the referent of “Winston Churchill” is a man lacking consciousness, and the truthmaker does not entail the fact of the matter. Instead, it implies that a man lacking consciousness led Britain against the Nazis in World War Two, which is plainly false. Thus, if past objects are the referents of names and truthmakers for truthbearers about the past, the ontologies of GGB and GMSV fall short in explaining both reference and truthmaking.

It is less clear how seriously the problem of negative existentials and the past impacts GGB and GMSV. On the face of it, proponents of these views can offer the same response that is available to GB and MSV. While “Caesar does not exist” is false, “Caesar does not exist *now*” is true. However, GGB and GMSV face a unique challenge because the truthmakers for negative existential statements about the past differ from what the subjects of predication suggest. These truthmakers lack important properties that we associate with the subjects of predication, which raises doubts about the truth of the statements. For instance, when we say “Winston Churchill does not exist (now)” we do not mean that a specific man lacking consciousness and/or concreteness does not exist (now). We mean that a specific man possessing consciousness and concreteness does not exist (now). GGB and GMSV purport to provide the right referent for the subject of predication, yet the referent of “Winston Churchill” lacks consciousness and/or concreteness, leading us to question whether the statement really is true or whether it really is about the ex-leader of Britain. The statement is true and it is about the ex-leader of Britain. Nevertheless, an object cannot both lack and possess consciousness. Consequently, GGB and GMSV face a unique challenge because they generate a contradiction.

There is little need for GGB and GMSV to analyse statements about the past similarly to statements about fiction. However, in light of the issue I have just raised, GGBers and GMSVers may be tempted to deploy some of the strategies used to explain truths about fiction

to explain aspects of truths about the past. This would, presumably, involve appealing in part to the existent past and in part to something akin to fiction; the truthmakers for problem statements would be a merger of the actual past and non-actual elements that are ontologically equivalent to fiction. Not only would this present an overly complicated and messy analysis of statements about the past, but it would also seem to be a wasted effort because the past and fiction are ontologically distinct *tout court*.

It is important to note that, whilst eternalism, GB and MSV avoid the problems of absence, they still face the *problem of ontological parity*, because they assume an existential or ontological parity between various different times, including the past, present, and future. However, if the past, present, and future are dissimilar, then this conflation of metaphysical status provides reasons to doubt their explanations for the referents of names and truthmakers for statements about the past, and thereby the theories generally.[100] I will, therefore, ultimately argue that the explanations these theories give for the referents of names and the truthmakers for truthbearers about the past are inconsistent with the world's ontology.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that a referring term such as a name implies a referent, and a true proposition entails a truthmaker. Thus, reference and truthmaking imply a relation. On a standard understanding, a relation implies the existence of two *relata.* The implications of these principles cause problems for presentists considering references to the past, and true propositions about the past, because presentism implies the past does not exist. These problems of absence show that the objects we might expect to exist on the right side of a relation

[100] For absolute clarity, I do not mean "ontologically on a par," "ontological parity," "existential parity" or similar descriptions to imply that earlier or later times exist now, or that the past, present, and future exist simultaneously. In some contexts, specifically when I am discussing eternalism, I imply that all times are objectively equally past, present, and future, hence, quantitatively identical. In all contexts, I mean that the fundamental nature of different times is the same: the nature of the objects, properties and relations at one time are *on a par with* those at another time, just in case they are ontologically and existentially indistinguishable, even if the particular objects, properties and relations at one time are numerically distinct from those at another time.

involving the past appear absent from the presentist's ontology. A reference to the past implies a referent, but if the past does not exist, then the referent would seem to be lacking, making it unclear what the referent of a reference to a past object is. A true proposition entails a truthmaker, whether a positive state of affairs per the truthmaker maximalist's account, or a set of objects, properties and relations as the proponent of supervenience claims. However, if the past does not exist, then the past, objects, properties and relations that we might expect are the truthmakers are absent from the ontology. Apparent true propositions about the past must be false, or meaningless, or they do not have truthmakers. However, references to the past pertain to something, and they are meaningful. And true statements about the past have truthmakers. These issues give rise to two related paradoxes: what is the referent of a reference to a past object if the past does not exist, and how can a statement about the past be true if its truthmaker does not exist? These problems sit squarely in the presentist's domain because the other theories of time posit an existent past. Therefore, the onus is on presentists to explain what the referents of references to past objects are and what the truthmakers for true propositions about the past are.

Eternalists, GBers and MSVers avoid the problems of absence because they can appeal to actual past objects as the referents of references to the past and the truthmakers for true propositions about the past. In contrast, GGB and GMSV encounter versions of these problems because they deny some properties of the past. These theories can only partly explain references to and statements about the past and the ontologies they posit may lead to contradictions. Further explanation is needed to clarify the referents and truthmakers for statements about the past and how their ontologies address the question of the past. This will allow us to better understand what the past amounts to in a world where the actual past does not exist or exists but lacks certain properties that the present possesses. In the following two chapters, I present a range of responses that are available to presentists to resolve these problems, shedding light

on what the past is if it does not exist. Chapter 4 will focus on serious or actualist responses, while Chapter 5 will focus on non-serious or Meinongian responses.

Chapter 4: Truthmaking and Reference Without the Past

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss "serious" presentism, the view that only present objects exist and may possess properties and stand in relations, restricting the referents and truthmakers available to address the problems of absence. Serious presentism may be contrasted with "non-serious" presentism, the view that even non-existent objects have properties and they may stand in relations with non-existent and existent objects, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. This Chapter focuses on surrogate entities presentism, which argues that presently existent surrogate entities are the referents and truthmakers for statements about the past. I will commence by refuting serious approaches that deny truthmakers for statements about the past as groundless. Then I will motivate the surrogate responses by outlining Russell's theory of definite descriptions, introducing a way to account for the reference of naming terms that purport to refer to non-existent objects. Russell's theory suggests a way for presentists to resolve the problems of absence in the face of a non-existent past and past objects. By treating naming terms in statements about the past like definite descriptions rather than terms of direct reference, serious presentists have claimed to resolve the problems of absence. I examine three versions of serious presentism: *ersatz* presentism, which posits *ersatz* times, Lucretian presentism, which posits Lucretian properties, and thisness presentism which posits *haecceities* or thisnesses.[101] I argue that all three approaches fail to resolve the problems of absence because they either lack an ontological ground, are merely hypothetical, or they are not what true propositions about the past are *about*. Next, I argue that eternalism, GB, GGB, MSV, and GMSV have a ready response to the problems of absence due to the existent past they posit but that GGB and GMSV face problems in fully accounting for truthmakers for true propositions about the past. Finally,

[101] For a presentation of *ersatz* presentism, see Bourne (2006); for Lucretian presentism, see Bigelow (1996); and for thisness presentism, see Ingram (2016, 2018, 2019).

I will discuss Elizabeth Anscombe's and Michael Dummett's anti-realism about the past, further logico-semantic approaches to resolving the problems of absence. I argue that these responses are fundamentally flawed because they fail to distinguish between what makes a statement true and what may justify our belief in its truth.

4.1 Serious Presentism

Serious presentists deny that non-existent past objects have properties and stand in relations. These presentists may be divided into two broad categories. First, there are theorists who speak of true statements about the past but who deny that true statements about the past have any ontological implications. True propositions about the past need not have truthmakers. Second, there are theorists who accept that true propositions about the past have truthmakers but that these truthmakers are not pointing to anything beyond what presently exists. Tallant and Ingram (2015) have called the first approach "nefarious" because proponents of this approach "shirk their responsibilities, using the language of truth-maker theory but without paying any ontological price" (p. 355). Tallant and Ingram (2015) have called the second approach "upstanding" because they "aim to meet the challenge, positing presently existing truth-makers for truths about the past" (p. 355).[102] I follow their terminology in this thesis and begin in the following section with an explanation of the nefarious approach before turning to a discussion of upstanding approaches.

4.1.1 The Nefarious Approach

Nefarious presentists do not deny that true propositions about the past may be true, but they deny that for statements to be true they need truthmakers. (Remember, a truthmaker is that

[102] Asay and Baron (2014) have called the nefarious approach "the hard road" and the upstanding approach "the easy road" (which is not to be confused with Baron (2015) where he argues "the hard road collapses back into the easy road").

which makes a true proposition true by providing the ontological ground for its truth.) To appreciate the reasoning behind this approach, compare the following four statements:

(1) “Unicorns do not exist.”

(2) “There could be talking donkeys.”

(3) “Hillary climbed Everest.”

(4) “Ardern is the ex-Prime Minister of New Zealand.”

A negative existential statement, such as (1), is about a negative state of affairs, so it is not about how the world is. The statement is true because there are no unicorns. If our worldly inventory included unicorns, then the statement would be false. Thus, (1) is true despite the absence of a truthmaker.

A modal statement, such as (2), is about a possible non-actual world. A world that contains a talking donkey is possible. There is nothing contradictory about a donkey with vocal cords and a neurological system that permits them to communicate using language. Still, that possible world is not the actual world. Therefore, (2) is true despite the absence of a truthmaker.

(3) is about a possible world that presently existed at an earlier time. The past tense statement is about the past which, according to serious presentism, does not exist. No non-existent thing may serve as a truthmaker for (3). Therefore, (3) is true despite the absence of a truthmaker.

(4) is about the world presently, but its truthmaker is a fact in the past. The truthmaker is Jacinda Ardern who was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2018 to 2023. Consequently, the sentence is true in virtue of a past fact. On serious presentism or any form of presentism, (4) is true because there is a truthmaker for the statement, even though the fact that makes the statement true is no longer existent. On the nefarious approach, (1)-(3) are all true statements

even though their content does not exist to serve as a truthmaker for any of them. Tallant (2009) has said that this nefarious form of "presentism doesn't seem to be any worse off than the truth-maker theory" (p. 415).

Let's look more carefully at (3), the statement that is clearly about the past. Philosophers of time such as Tallant and Ingram (2015) and Sider (1999) have explained that past tense statements like (3) involve a primitive tense operator, [it was the case that], for which no further reductive analysis need be offered. Therefore, we may interpret (3) as, "[it was the case that] Hillary climbed Everest," where the operator, [it was the case that], modifies the statement such that no further reductive analysis is required. According to nefarious presentism, when a truthmaker does not presently exist but existed in the past, the truthmaker that makes the statement true no longer exists. Thus, the truth of a statement relies upon a logico-semantic explanation.

A semantic explanation of the truth of a statement about the past circumvents the truthmaking problem for presentism rather than solves it. Recall that the truthmaking problem arises because the principle of truthmaker maximalism demands that for every true proposition there is a truthmaker and there are no truthmakers that make statements about the past true. Nefarious presentists, who accept a logico-semantic explanation of the truth of a proposition about the past, fail to show how the past may serve as a truthmaker for such propositions; instead, they count the past as a primitive fact, and propositions about it may be modified by a tense operator: "[It was the case that]."

I agree with Asay and Baron when they say,

> these equivalences are neither here nor there when it comes to accounting for the sort of dependence at issue in truthmaker theory. If they were, then everyone would, quite trivially, be a truthmaker maximalist. For if all there is to a proposition's 'having a

> truthmaker' is there being some sentence materially equivalent to '⟨*p*⟩ is true', then every proposition (or, at least, every proposition we can name) has a truthmaker. (Asay and Baron, 2014, p. 327)

If a truthmaking principle forgoes dependence of a truthbearer on a truthmaker, then ontological debates about the nature of the past have no bearing on whether statements about the past are true or false. The nefarious presentist must admit that the truth value of statements about the past has nothing to do with the actual past but some shadow existence revealed through a logico-semantic analysis.

One should expect there to be a difference between (2), a modal claim, and (3), a statement about the past, because one is grounded in events or objects that once existed but no longer exist while the other pertains to far off possible worlds. However, the nefarious presentist fails to recognise a relevant distinction between them. (2) and (3) are about non-existent entities, the truths of which are obtained through a logico-semantic analysis.

On an alternative account, there is no need to invoke far off possible worlds to explain (2). Instead, the nefarious approach takes seriously the idea that the present state of the world should be sufficient to ground all modal truths. Accordingly, (2) is not about some distant world, but the actual world—how it could be, but is not. Kripke (1980) adopts a similar line of reasoning in his famous Humphrey Objection (p. 45), rejecting Lewis' (1968) claim that *de re* modal truths are grounded in counterparts in other possible worlds. Instead, he argues that such claims are about how the actual world might have been—for instance, had it contained talking donkeys.

Moreover, the nefarious presentist will argue that truths about the past are not grounded in possible worlds. Instead, they invoke a non-existence-entailing cross-temporal dependence between how things were and how things are now to make a statement about the past true: what

must have been is entailed by how things are now. However, this fails to provide anything more than a merely hypothetical ontological ground for the truth of many statements about the past, as there may not be anything in reality that distinguishes the ground of a truth about the past from that of a statement about fiction—other than one's saying so.

Whatever we may make of Kripke's argument, we should expect a distinction between modal claims and past-tense claims. Modal claims (of mere possibility) concern how the actual world could have been but is not, while past-tense claims concern once-actual states of affairs. If the truth of a past tense statement lacks a substantive ontological ground—something that unequivocally exists—then, like a *de re* modal claim, its truth is grounded only hypothetically. The nefarious presentist's analysis fails to adequately distinguish between truths about the past, which are dependent on how the actual world was, and truths about fiction or modal possibilities. Consequently, whether Hilary or talking donkeys existed at one time seems to matter little beyond rhetorical assertions for the nefarious approach.

4.1.2 No Truthmakers

Approaching truthmaking as the nefarious account does is a perilous path. First, if any beliefs may be true even if nothing in the ontology makes them true, then this may lead to scepticism. Asay and Baron have made this point:

> If a belief such as the belief *that there is a mind-independent external world* is true, then there must be some mind-independent thing that makes this belief true, namely, the external world. If, however, truthmaker theory is false, and true beliefs need not depend on what exists, then the belief that *there is a mind-independent external world* can be true without there being anything whatsoever that makes this claim true. So for all we know, the external world does not exist, even though we believe truly that it

> does. Hence, by giving up truthmaker theory, one courts scepticism. (Asay and Baron, 2014, p. 315)

This argument may be raised against proponents of the nefarious account. It is difficult to appreciate how such a view can be taken seriously if logico-semantic functions are involved in making true propositions true.[103]

Second, on the nefarious account, propositions may be true independent of the things, events, or states of affairs that make them true. Asay and Baron have said,

> [I]f ⟨Kripke exists⟩ doesn't depend on what exists for its truth, then its truth seems to be independent of the existence or non-existence of Kripke himself. We think, however, that it is obvious that the truth of ⟨Kripke exists⟩ depends on Kripke. Indeed, [the fact] that the truth of ⟨Kripke exists⟩ depends on Kripke possesses [i.e., is a] Moorean certainty: it is something that we know better than any philosopher's argument to the contrary. Hence, the obviousness of this dependence performs an immediate reductio on any view that treats the truth of ⟨Kripke exists⟩ as independent of Kripke's existence. (Asay and Baron, 2014, p. 316)

If nothing makes a statement true, then it is difficult to discern why the statement is true. Kripke exists and serves as a truthmaker for ⟨Kripke exists⟩; hence, we know why this statement is true.

There are good reasons to believe that statements about the past have truthmakers because if they do not, then there is no reason to think that such statements are true, or at least there is no reason to differentiate the bases of truth for these kinds of statements from the bases

[103] One might even go so far as to say that someone who is an advocate of denying the success of truthmaking offers a defence of solipsism. René Descartes' (1641/2017) hyperbolic doubt in *Meditations on First Philosophy* famously concluded with being certain of one's own mind; George Berkeley (2003) argued for subjective idealism where only things that exist in God's mind exist.

of truth for statements about unreal things, like fiction. Without truthmakers, statements about the past would be either false, have indeterminate truth values, or their truth would rest upon something no more real than fiction. Therefore, adopting a version of truthmaking that permits true statements about the past to be made true by the right kinds of things, for instance past things, would mean that we need not give up on truthmaker theory.[104] I agree with Asay and Baron (2014) when they say that, "no one should give up truthmaker theory *tout court*" (p. 9). The nefarious approach, therefore, should be set aside.

4.1.3 The Upstanding Way

In contrast with nefarious approaches, upstanding presentists rise to the challenge of identifying the truthmakers for true propositions about the past by showing how presently existent abstract objects, such as surrogates, "stand in place" of the past objects to make true propositions about the past true. It is worthwhile to spend some time discussing Russell's theory of definite descriptions to motivate the upstanding views (Russell, 1905/2005).[105] Russell's theory provides an account for analysing the meaning and reference in statements when we deny that terms within them are directly referential. Russell's approach to statements about fictional objects, for example, provide paradigmatic examples of statements about things that do not exist and how we can determine the truth values of these statements.

[104] The analysis presented in this chapter reveals precisely what presentists suggest "the right kinds of things" are.
[105] Ingram (2019), whose upstanding view I discuss, has highlighted the analogy between disguised definite descriptions and structured propositions (truthbearers) when he said "There is an analogy between disguised definite descriptions and structured propositions constituted by only qualitative properties; definite descriptions are not directly and non-accidentally about individuals, and so do not denote the very same individual in all possible circumstances" (p. 90-91). Ingram's aim is to address the issue of mistaken reference in definite descriptions involving only qualitative properties. To resolve this issue, Ingram proposes that singular propositions about wholly past entities are partly constituted by thisnesses, which he thinks are non-qualitative properties. However, both approaches aim to maintain direct and non-accidental aboutness, ensuring consistent reference to specific individuals. I am introducing definite descriptions as a motivation for approaches involving surrogate entities and to draw out why these approaches fail. I am not asserting that the approaches are one and the same.

By better understanding what statements about the past refer to and what makes them true, we can come to appreciate what the past is. Russell's theory sheds light on the question of the past by suggesting what the past is if not the set of actual past times and objects. In the following discussion, I motivate and explain Russell's theory, which provides the groundwork for the upstanding responses to the truthmaking problem.

Before proceeding, it is worth briefly addressing the question of whether direct reference is an existence entailing relation. Consider the statement "*x* refers to *y*." Clearly, there are two *relata* involved in this relation. If we think that reference is existence entailing, then both *x* and *y* must exist. Conversely, if we deny that reference is existence entailing, then either *x* or *y*, or both may be non-existent. The question of whether reference entails existence is secondary to the point that reference entails two *relata*. Hence, for actualists, who assert that only actual objects may possess properties and stand in relations, any relation of reference entails the existence of both *relata*. In contrast, for non-actualists non-existent objects may possess properties and stand in relations. Consequently, whenever a relation of reference arises, the onus is on the requisite theorist to explain what the *relata* are, given their respective ontological commitments.

If the past does not exist, then terms purporting to denote past objects cannot directly refer to those past objects. Nevertheless, statements involving terms purporting to denote past objects are meaningful, and true, so we must explain the reference of terms within them. Russell's account does this by explaining that such terms are definite descriptions, not direct references. A definite description is a term or phrase that appears to refer by providing a unique description, but it may not actually refer if there is nothing that matches the description. For example, the definite description for "Jacinda Ardern" may include "the woman who was the Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2017 to 2023." Only Ardern matches this description, so it uniquely picks her out; the name refers to the person. Compare this to "The present King of

France." The present King of France does not exist, so nothing matches the description and "The present King of France" is not a genuine referring expression; the expression does not refer. We can only evaluate the truth of statements if we know what they refer to. I would like to examine the temporal implications of Russell's theory because his analysis of naming terms that purport to denote non-existent objects paves the way for explaining what the referents and truthmakers for statements about the past may be if the names contained within them do not directly refer to past objects. It does this by showing what true propositions about the past may refer to if not past objects. Instead of requiring a direct reference between a name and a past object to determine the truth value of a statement about the past, Russell's approach requires only that we can show that a name *qua* definite description matches something in the world, and that the predicate of the statement holds good of that subject. This means that a present object that can be shown to match a definite description in a statement about the past can replace a past object as the referent and truthmaker for a statement about the past.

Russell's theory of definite descriptions is a theory of reference that explains how naming terms can only refer to things that exist. An expression that appears to name an object that does not exist is not a genuine naming term because it does not refer to any particular individual. As a starting point for considering Russell's theory, consider the true statement, "Jacinda Ardern is the ex-Prime minister of New Zealand." The proper name "Jacinda Ardern" can refer to the individual *Jacinda Ardern* because she exists. Alternatively, the definite description given by the name "Jacinda Ardern" matches *Jacinda Ardern* because she has the unique set of attributes implied by the description; hence the name refers to the person. This means that we can evaluate the truth of the statement about "Jacinda Ardern" by determining whether *Jacinda Ardern* has the property of *being the ex-Prime Minister of New Zealand*.

Next, consider a statement about a fictional character that does not exist: "Sherlock Holmes is a detective." There is no actual particular individual Sherlock Holmes so the name

"Sherlock Holmes" cannot refer to an actual individual, and we cannot evaluate the truth of the statement, i.e., because there is no individual to which it refers. However, there is a fictional individual in the Sherlock Holmes stories that matches with the definite description implied by "Sherlock Holmes." This means we can assess whether the predicate of the subject in a statement about "Sherlock Holmes" holds good of that fictional individual—in the story. If it does, we can determine that the statement is true *in the story*.

Now consider how this approach may be applied in a temporal setting. Take the past tense statement, "Caesar crossed the Rubicon." If Caesar does not exist, then as with the statement about "The present King of France" or "Sherlock Holmes," "Caesar" cannot refer to an actual individual and so we cannot evaluate the truth of the statement about "Caesar." It would seem that statements about past objects are either false or meaningless.

However, according to Russell's view, we should not analyse a term that names an object that does not exist as a direct reference. Instead, we should analyse it as a definite description. Treating a naming term for a past object as a definite description allows us to assess whether there is something existent that matches the description, eliminating the need to search for a past individual to which the name directly refers. If there is something that matches the description, then we can determine whether the statement is true, i.e., whether the predicate holds good of that subject.

Russell's theory of definite descriptions allows us to clarify the reference of a statement about a non-existent object, and consequently, evaluate its truth value. For example, in the statement "Māui fished New Zealand out of the sea," the reference of "Māui" is given by the set of definite descriptions appropriate for Māui. Since nothing satisfies this description, the predicate does not hold, making the statement about Māui false (of the actual world. It is true according to traditional Māori narrative). Under a similar analysis, in the statement "Caesar

crossed the Rubicon," the reference of "Caesar" is given by the set of definite descriptions that satisfy the proper name "Caesar." If nothing satisfies the description, the predicate cannot hold, and the statement about Caesar is false. However, if something satisfies the description, the predicate can hold, and the statement about Caesar may be true.

Explaining the reference of proper names by definite descriptions suggests a solution to the problems of absence encountered by presentism. Terms that purport to refer to non-existent past objects are like definite descriptions in disguise. If we apply a similar strategy when evaluating statements about the past as that taken to evaluate the truth of statements about fiction, then we can resolve the question of absence. The strategy with statements about fiction involves matching a definite description to a set of properties characterising a fictional character. The strategy with statements about the past involves matching a definite description with a set of properties characterising a past object. If presentists can show that present things match with the definite descriptions in statements about the past and that the predicates of those subjects hold good, then they can explain the truthmakers for statements about the past without relying on past objects. Presentists may explain that the truthmaking relation involved with statements about the past is one of reference where such reference may be settled by definite description.

Russell's approach has laid the groundwork for presentism that I am about to discuss. By showing that a naming term is just a definite description in disguise and that the definite description may account for reference to a non-existent object, Russell demonstrated how statements about the past may refer to something despite the non-existence of the individuals that terms purport to denote. In the next sections, I will turn to accounts that claim a truthmaker for a statement about the past is an abstract object, such as a *surrogate entity*. These objects are intended to match with the definite descriptions given in statements about the past, thereby meeting the requirement for true propositions to have truthmakers. If these approaches prove

successful, presentists can explain the past as constituted by the set of present things that match the definite descriptions about it.

4.2 Ersatz Presentism

The first candidate truthmakers to consider are so-called *ersatz times*, as discussed by Bourne (2006), Crisp (2007), and Markosian (2004). Considering this view allows us to consider whether we can simply conceive of the past as an abstract representation. An *ersatz* time is an abstract object, and the set of all *ersatz* times (representing times that have been, are or will be actual) *represents* all the times that have been, or will be present times.[106] For example, according to the *ersatzist*, there is an abstract time that represents a time yesterday, one that represents a time tomorrow, and one that represents every other time. Moreover, an *ersatz* time may represent the past objects denoted in statements about the past, so *ersatz* times can satisfy the definite descriptions contained within statements about the past.[107]

This *ersatz* explanation has been offered as a way for presentists to explain the meaning of talk of other times, and to explain the truthmakers for past (and future) tense statements. For example, the statement, "Caesar crossed the Rubicon," is made true by the *ersatz* time which represents the state of affairs on January 10th 49 BCE when Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

For this solution to work, one must be prepared to admit that abstract times represent the past times that is their content. Presentists may appeal to *ersatz* times that represent the way things were. Given that they exist in the present, the *ersatz* presentist can employ them as truthmakers.

[106] It is possible for an *ersatz* time to represent a merely possible time so it is important to clarify that *ersatz* presentists mean to restrict the set to include only times that were, are or will be actual.
[107] Whether an *ersatz* time truly does satisfy these definite descriptions is up for debate. For example, if the definite description for a past object includes "being concrete," this suggests that many definite descriptions in statements about the past are not satisfied, i.e., because *ersatz* times are not concrete.

One way to conceive of an *ersatz* time is by thinking about an abstract representation of the eternalist's four-dimensional manifold, i.e., the block universe.[108] The block universe includes all times, past, present, and future, and each point within the block amounts to a distinct instance of time. Times are ordered according to B-relations: *earlier than*, *simultaneous with*, and *later than*.[109] On the *ersatz* time view, conceptually, all times exist within the block. Hence, no represented time is ontologically privileged within the representation. However, the represented time, *t*, that corresponds with the present time may be distinguished from all the other represented times because *t* is the only abstract time corresponding with an existent or actual concrete time—the present. All the other represented times, which are earlier or later than *t*, do not correspond to actual concrete times. Therefore, the truthmakers for true propositions about the past are abstract representations, or abstract times, that sit in an *earlier than* relation to the abstract time corresponding with the concrete present. The past is the set of all abstract times earlier than the present.

One reason to be critical of the *ersatz* explanation is due to the idea that a truthmaker must be ontologically grounded. A truthmaker is not ontologically grounded if there is nothing in the ontology that serves as its ontological ground (or what exists is insufficient to entail its truth). For something that represents, such as *ersatz* times, there must be something represented. Nothing is represented. So there is no ontological ground. Thus, *ersatz* presentism cannot justify the truth of many true propositions about the past.

This argument appeals to the idea that truthmakers must be ontologically grounded or else truth is not connected to reality. Truth being disconnected from reality is unacceptable

[108] Another way to conceive of this explanation is by supposing that an ersatz time is a maximal set of propositions. See Bourne (2006) and Crisp (2007) for versions of this approach.
[109] These B-relations are the ones introduced by McTaggart (1908), which I have discussed in chapter 2.

because we believe that truth is deeply connected to reality. Hence, *ersatz* times must be ontologically grounded.

Due to their abstract nature, it is difficult to reconcile the idea that *ersatz* times are sufficient to explain truths about the past with the presentist's quantitatively lean ontology. For example, what exists to ground the truth that I ate 27 beans for breakfast on the 1st of June 1983? The way the world is now would be no different had I eaten one less bean.[110] Yet, it must be either true or false that I ate 27 beans. If it is true, there must be a truthmaker. An *ersatz* time that represents the state of affairs involving how many beans I ate is not ontologically grounded because there is nothing that exists *now* that speaks to this truth. We can conceive of various *ersatz* times that are similarly grounded in the world's ontology but serve up different truth values for a statement about how many beans I ate. Consequently, we have no reason to think that an *ersatz* time guarantees the truth of a statement about how many beans I ate, or about any other past events that are far more interesting.

Let us be charitable and suppose that an *ersatz* time is part of a maximal set of *ersatz* times such that every past and present fact they represent must be consistent. Even if we adopt this understanding, it still does not ensure the truth of the statement "Ben ate 27 beans on the 1st of June, 1983." Or, at least, it does not ensure that it is a truth about the actual world. Various sets of *ersatz* times could be conceived, each affirming or negating the truth of the statement and still the world would exist as it does presently. Presentism lacks the necessary ontology to ensure that *ersatz* times as truthmakers are ontologically grounded. This means that we cannot simply conceive of the past as an abstract representation. The past must be more substantive than a mere representation, no matter how sophisticated it may be, if we want to guarantee that the truth of our statements about it are ontologically grounded.

[110] This is the same point that Simon Keller (2004, p. 88) makes that I discussed in Chapter 3.

Even though an *ersatz* time may match the definite description within a statement about the past, there is no way to distinguish whether the represented conditions pertain to the actual world or some other nearby possible world. Hence, there is no way to distinguish between whether the truth holds good for the actual world or a merely possible world. To put this in Russell's terms, although an *ersatz* time may represent objects, properties, and relations corresponding with the conditions given in a statement about the past, there is no way to distinguish whether the *ersatz* time represents something like fiction or whether it represent the actual past. The ontology must provide a means for making this distinction so that we can determine that a statement is about the actual past and not some fictional past. Truth in a fictional world does not carry the ontological force of truth in the actual world and it is not what we mean when we speak truly of the past. The temporally lean present-centrist ontology of presentism does not provide for this distinction to be made. The past is not an abstract representation. Let us turn our attention to versions of presentism that attempt to overcome this challenge by drawing a closer connection between truthmakers and what presently exists.

4.3 Lucretian Presentism

Lucretian presentism appeals to the properties of presently existent things as the truthmakers for true propositions about the past. John Bigelow's (1996) theory of Lucretian presentism is motivated by two questions:

- How can there be a relation if one or both *relata* are not present, and therefore non-existent?
- On what ontological ground does the truth of a past tense proposition rest?

These questions arise for a past tense statement where the subject does not presently exist. The first question concerns *the principle of relations*; for every relation, there exist two *relata*. The second question concerns *the principle that truth supervenes on being*, the weaker version of

the truthmaking principle discussed in Chapter 3. Recall that the truthmaking problem arises when one admits the truth of the truthmaking principle in a presentist world.

We may summarise Bigelow's response in the following way. The truthmaker for "Caesar crossed the Rubicon" is a presently existing property of the world, such as *being the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon.* Prior to January 10th, 49 BCE when Caesar had not yet crossed the Rubicon, the world did not instantiate the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon, so the statement had no truthmaker. However, when the event occurred, this gave rise to the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon. Had the event not occurred, that truthmaker would not have come into being. Consequently, there would have been no ontological ground for the statement. Once the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon has come into being, it continues to exist so long as the world exists. As with the *ersatz* proposal, one may claim that Lucretian properties fulfil the definite descriptions in statements about the past.

The explanation to make this case is more complex than with *ersatz* times. *Ersatz* times can be said to represent the past with a one-to-one correspondence, so "Caesar" in the statement "Caesar crossed the Rubicon" can be said to refer to a representation of someone who matches the definite description "the Roman General who declared '*Veni, Vidi, Vici*' after a victory in Asia Minor in 47 BCE," and according to the *ersatz* representation, the predicate "crossed the Rubicon" holds good of that subject. In contrast, Lucretian properties involve past tense properties. Accordingly, the definite description for "Caesar" can be read as "the Roman General who declared '*Veni, Vidi, Vici*' after a victory in Asia Minor in 47 BCE" and the Lucretian property becomes *being the place where the Roman General who declared 'Veni, Vidi, Vici' after a victory in Asia Minor in 47 BCE crossed the Rubicon*. The Lucretian property matches with the subject of the statement, "Caesar"—which is given by the definite description, and the predicate holds good of that subject, also in virtue of the Lucretian property.

The primary motivation for Bigelow's (1996) argument is due to *the supervenience principle*: "truth supervenes on being—there could not be a difference in what is true unless there were a difference in what exists" (p. 38). According to the supervenience principle, two statements will be true in any two possible worlds with the same physical properties, because two possible worlds with the same physical properties will have the same non-physical properties. Thus, on Bigelow's account, the statement "Caesar crossed the Rubicon" cannot but be true because only in the case that the world instantiated different physical properties could it be false.

The supervenience principle is less demanding than truthmaker maximalism because it only requires that abstract, non-physical properties supervene on physical properties. This allows a range of objects and states of affairs other than past individuals to serve as the base of the supervenience relation. In contrast, truthmaker maximalism requires that there exists an object or positive state of affairs for every true statement. According to the supervenience principle, an abstract property that is dependent on a physical property will exist if the physical property exists. On Bigelow's account, so long as the physical world exists, the ontological ground exists to give rise to abstract Lucretian properties. This approach has allowed Bigelow to argue that truths about the past may supervene on concrete objects in the present, thereby meeting the requirement for true propositions to have truthmakers. Nevertheless, a statement about the present and a statement about the past that represent the same truth will fail to meet the truthmaker maximalist's standard if the positive states of affairs they require to make true propositions about the past true do not presently exist.

If Lucretian properties exist and supervenience is sufficient for truth, then not only can the *relata* of statements about the past be explained, but a response to the problem of truthmaking is also available. Bigelow has provided a response to the problem of relations involving past objects by explaining that the *relata* of a statement about the past, such as

Caesar, can be understood in terms of presently existing abstract properties of the world. Accordingly, a relation that apparently involves a non-existent past object *really* involves presently existing Lucretian properties. Therefore, the *relata* of statements about the past exist, and a violation of the principle of relations is avoided. Moreover, every true proposition about the past has a truthmaker: a Lucretian property.

Bigelow's response to this issue does not resolve the problem of truthmaking that arises in the face of truthmaker maximalism. Nevertheless, this challenge does not concern Bigelow because he rejects maximalism. In any case, the cost of accepting Lucretian presentism is high. We must be willing to countenance the existence of Lucretian properties and be satisfied that such *abstracta* are sufficient for the truth of statements about the past.

However, I argue that Lucretian properties are not sufficient to serve as truthmakers for many truths about the past because even though an ontological ground is *claimed* to be given, in many cases Lucretian properties are disconnected from reality. For example, consider the statement "Caesar ate cheese and seafood on the day he crossed the Rubicon." No physical evidence remains to either affirm or deny the truth of this statement, but it must be either true or false. Bigelow would assent to the view that if this statement is true, it is so because there exists a place along the Rubicon River where this event occurred long ago, and it presently exemplifies the property of *being the place where Caesar ate cheese and seafood.* This explanation fails to connect the truth of the statement with the world. One may claim that the definite description for "Caesar" is fulfilled by a Lucretian property, as they may claim the predicate is, but these Lucretian properties have no genuine or real connection to the things that exist. They are concocted. Sider advances a similar complaint when he says:

> The argument against allowing the presentist to 'cheat' by invoking primitive properties like *previously containing dinosaurs*, […] is that this cheat seems of a kind

> with the dubious ontological cheats of the previous paragraph [who cheat by "somehow incorporating tense into the properties or relations of present objects" or when they "stubbornly insist, that for example, it is a 'rock-bottom fact about the world' that the world has the property of *previously containing dinosaurs*]. In each case the cheater is unwilling to accept an ontology robust enough to bear the weight of the truths he feels free to invoke.
>
> The presentist's primitive tensed properties (or operators, or whatever) would be hypothetical. Whether the world has the property *previously containing dinosaurs* is not a matter of what the world itself is like, but points beyond itself, to the past. (Sider, 2001, p. 40-41)

Merricks has expressed a similar sentiment,

> I think that many of the primitive non-supervening past directed properties required by the Lucretian—properties like *being such that the Trojans were conquered*—are suspicious. That is, I think it is a cheat to rely on these properties, especially when exemplified by things like the universe or an abstractum, to satisfy Truthmaker [the truthmaking principle] and TSB [the supervenience principle]. (Merricks, 2007, p. 135)

Lucretian properties are merely "hypothetical" because there is nothing that obviously connects them to reality—to the reality of the past. What if Caesar ate bread and sausages on the day that he crossed the Rubicon? In that case, the world would exemplify the property *being the place where Caesar ate bread and sausages*. In either case there would be no difference in what things exist and how they are—beyond mere hypothetical constructs. The only difference that Caesar's eating seafood or sausages on that fateful day would make to the world now would be in the properties that a Lucretian posits.

This is not a question of *how* we can know what Caesar ate. It is a question of what makes a statement true—of what the ontological ground of the statement is that makes it true. If the ontology cannot ground all truths about the past, then there are gaps in the past, as evidenced by the fact that many statements about the past would have indeterminate truth values. This is unacceptable because it is inconsistent with our understanding of the past as complete and closed. Lucretian properties as truthmakers are disconnected from reality in many cases because there is nothing in reality that grounds them—that we can reasonably say exemplifies them, meaning they amount to merely hypothetical properties. Moreover, the ontology of the present does not support cross-categorial necessitation of truths about the past without severing the connection between concrete reality and the qualities that genuinely characterise it. Imposing past-directed properties onto present objects risks conflating the intrinsic present nature of those objects with relational properties that are past-directed. While it may be true to say that "Turkey is the place where the Trojans were conquered," this truth depends on a relation to the past, not on the intrinsic qualities that characterise Turkey as it is now. Properly understood, past-directed properties are relations because they are inherently *directed at* the past; they depend on it. The past does not amount to Lucretian properties exemplified by present things.

4.4 Thisness Presentism

The next strategy to consider avoids the problem of ontological grounding by positing a class of abstract properties whose (present) existence is not dependent on present things but on what did exist. Hence, we do not run into the problem that Lucretian properties did because we do not need to justify the claim that these properties are exemplified or instantiated by other presently instantiated objects. Instead, they exist in their own right. At face value, this looks like a better approach because it appears to connect truths about the past to the past. Notwithstanding the question of the mysterious ontological nature of these entities, the question

I will focus on is whether they deliver the advertised results—ensuring the truth of a true proposition about the past. I will argue they do not deliver the promised outcome because they are not what a true proposition about the past is *about*. This discussion will reveal why we cannot conceive of the past as a set of abstract properties even if they do not depend on presently existent *concreta*. Because the properties employed by this strategy are mysterious and because they offer the most hope for presentists to connect truths about the past to the past, I will take some time to explain them to provide a sufficient understanding for our analysis.

The Lucretian explanation offered by Bigelow has motivated an explanation which appeals to a particular class of abstract properties as the truthmakers for statements about the past, namely, *haecceities*, or *thisnesses*.[111] I focus on David Ingram's thisness presentism (2016, 2018, 2019). Ingram has defined a thisness:

> A thisness is the property of being a certain entity. That is, for some entity x, x's thisness is the property being x (or, if you prefer, being identical with x). A thisness is a property of a novel sort: a particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property. And, on my view every entity has a thisness. (Ingram, 2019, p. 58)

According to Ingram, the truthmakers for propositions that appear to involve as their constituents past objects actually involve presently existing *thisnesses* of those past objects. For example, the truthmaker for a proposition with the naming term "Caesar" refers to *Caesar's thisness* and not to the non-existent past object, *Caesar*. Ingram has argued that this approach solves the problem presentists face when trying to explain the truth of past-tense propositions.

Ingram's argument rests upon three central principles: the *nature*, *life* and *character* of a thisness. First, a thisness is a unique property that exemplifies an entity's essential

[111] For other discussions on thisnesses, see Adams (1979, pp. 5–26; 1981, pp. 3–41), and Keller (2004, pp. 96–99).

characteristics. For example, Elon Musk exemplifies the thisness of *being-(identical-with)-Elon Musk*. Only Elon Musk can exemplify this property. This approach implies that thisnesses match the definite descriptions in statements because thisnesses possess all the properties given by those descriptions.

Because every distinct object has a unique thisness associated with it, a thisness must be a particular. If thisnesses were not particulars, then they would not correspond uniquely to individuals. This would imply that different objects can share identical essential characteristics. This would be objectionable because a central feature of thisnesses is their unique association with individual objects.

A thisness is primitive because it is the ontological ground and cannot be further reduced or explained by something else. Ingram has said,

> A thisness cannot be reduced to (or analysed in terms of) any purely qualitative properties or relations to other entities. So, qua primitive property, a thisness is understood as a simple and unstructured entity. It is not a complex entity. [...] A simple and unstructured (non-qualitative) thisness is not constituted by or made up of anything at all. (Ingram, 2019, p. 59)

If thisnesses are fundamental and unanalysable, then we must accept them as similar to brute facts.[112]

Lastly, a thisness is a non-qualitative property because it involves an entity. In contrast, a qualitative property does not involve an entity. Ingram provides the example of *being the daughter of Barack Obama* as a non-qualitative property because it involves an entity,

[112] Recall from footnote 35 that brute facts are those kinds of facts that have no explanation.

specifically Barack Obama's daughter. In contrast, the qualitative property *being a daughter* is a universal and does not necessarily involve a particular entity.

Next, let's consider the *life* of a thisness; it begins when the entity it is associated with comes into existence. The thisness continues to exist indefinitely throughout the life of the entity it is associated with and beyond that entity's death. Ingram explains the life of a thisness:

> On my view, for any entity x, x's thisness *T* comes into being with x, *T* is uniquely instantiated by x throughout x's existence, and *T* continues to exist uninstantiated when x has ceased to exist. Thus, there are thisnesses of wholly past entities (i.e., particular entities that have existed, or have come into being, but exist no longer) and there are thisnesses of present entities, but there are no thisnesses of merely future entities (i.e., entities that have not existed, or have not yet come into being and, indeed, might never exist). (Ingram, 2019, p. 61)

For example, when Caesar was born in 100 BCE, his thisness came into existence at the same time. However, unlike Caesar, *Caesar's thisness* continues to exist and will continue to exist as long as the world does. Hence, today, there are thisnesses for all the individuals that existed in the past or that exist now. However, there are no thisnesses of future people because they have not yet come into existence.

Consider the ontological dependency at play between an object and its thisness. If a thisness rigidly depends upon its object, then if the object ceases to exist so too will the thisness. However, Ingram argues that the ontological dependency between an object and its thisnesses is non-rigid. He has said:

> a non-qualitative property *N* [such as a thisness] involves some entity x insofar as *N* depends upon x in a specific way, that is, *N* non-rigidly ontologically depends upon x. (Ingram, 2019, pp. 58–59)

We can think of the property of *uniqueness* to shed light on this statement. An object may be unique but the existence of the property of *uniqueness* does not depend on the existence of a particular object.

Ingram further explains the nature of non-rigid ontological dependency,

> a non-qualitative property that involves x can exist without x existing at the same time; specifically, for any x, x's *thisness* can exist in the absence of x. More precisely, I say that x's thisness continues to exist uninstantiated after x has ceased to exist. (Ingram, 2019, p. 59)

If a thisness continues to exist when its object ceases to exist, then there is no rigid ontological dependence between a thisness and its object. While a thisness is uniquely instantiated by its object, its ongoing existence does not depend on that of its object.

The final consideration in Ingram's explanatory tripartite is the *character* of a thisness. Ingram has said:

> On my view, x's thisness *T* instantiates higher-level properties that indirectly characterise x, and such properties initially correspond to some lower-level properties of x. Put differently, there is a class of properties, instantiated by a thisness, which characterise the entity that initially instantiates the thisness; such properties of x's thisness *T* indirectly characterise x in virtue of directly characterising *T*. (Ingram, 2019, p. 69)

To illustrate this point, Ingram suggests we consider Taylor Swift's thisness. Taylor Swift is a singer, so her thisness instantiates the higher-level thisness *being the thisness of a singer,* which corresponds with Taylor Swift because she is a singer. This means that the higher-level properties of a thisness (its character) depend on the first-order properties of the entity it is

associated with. For instance, Swift's thisness instantiates *being the thisness of a singer* because Swift herself is a singer.

Ingram's approach is both straightforward and thorough. A truthmaker for a proposition about the past is a presently existent thisness. For example, ⟨Caeser crossed the Rubicon⟩ is made true by Caesar's thisness and its associated properties. Caesar's thisness matches the definite description given by the name "Caesar," and its associated properties entail the truth of the predicate. All statements about the past are said to be made true in this way. Therefore, on Ingram's account, when we refer to the past, we are referring to the presently existent thisnesses of all the objects that existed in the past. The past amounts to the set of presently existent, albeit uninstantiated thisnesses.

We have one final point to clarify to shed light on how thisnesses can serve as truthmakers without leading to undesirable consequences. If the truthmakers of true propositions about the present are actual individuals and the truthmakers of true propositions about the past are thisnesses, then they have distinct constituents; they are about different things. This is an undesirable result because for a true proposition to express the same truth, it must have identical constituents whether it is about the present or the past. We must wonder how a proposition about Caesar expressed now some 2000 years after his death can be about the same thing as a proposition about him expressed when he is alive. To spell this out, consider again the lifecycle of a thisness using ⟨Caesar crossed the Rubicon⟩ as an example. During his lifetime, the truthmaker for this proposition was Caesar crossing the Rubicon. When he is alive, "Caesar" refers to the constituent *Caesar* and when he is dead, "Caesar" refers to the constituent *Caesar's thisness*. The constituents and truthmakers differ depending on whether Caesar is present or past. If the propositional constituents that make the proposition true differ, then the truth of the statements about the present and past differ too.

Ingram has acknowledged the issue and proposed a solution:

> I propose that thisnesses constitute all singular propositions. On my view, singular propositions about the present (i.e., propositions that are directly about present entities) are partly constituted by thisnesses and not constituted by the present entities themselves. (Ingram, 2019, p. 92)

Even when Caesar is alive, the truthmaker for a true proposition about him includes his thisness. This explanation rids us of the problem because the truthmaker for the statement about the present and the truthmaker for the statement about the past are identical. They are Caesar's thisness.

Ingram's solution to the problem delivers the desirable result that we need not distinguish between two different Caesar's, i.e., Caesar for the statement about the present and Caesar's thisness for the statement about the past. The statement about the present involves the same thisness that is involved by the statement about the past. Truthmakers are not the particular objects to which a statement appears to refer, even when those objects exist. Instead, propositions are made true (at least partly) by thisnesses.

Having set out the essential features of thisness presentism, I will now explain why thisnesses fail to resolve the truthmaking problem for statements about the past.

4.5 The Aboutness Constraint

The objection to Ingram's proposed solution to the truthmaking problem that I will present is based on the idea that thisnesses are not what true propositions of the past are *about*. This objection applies equally well to *ersatz* and Lucretian presentism, and on my account it carries the greatest force against presentism's ability to adequately respond to the problems of absence. This discussion serves to highlight that serious presentism cannot account for the past, setting

the stage for the rest of the thesis where I will focus on a consideration of what the past is if it is not bound up in the present.

Aside from the mysterious nature of uninstantiated thisnesses, the main reason to dispute Ingram's proposal is due to the so-called *aboutness constraint*, popularised by Trenton Merricks (2007): the view that a true proposition is *about* a truthmaker (pp. 22–34, 136–142).[113] Any strategy of resolving the truthmaking problem that does not purport for the true proposition to be about a truthmaker is "cheating." Introducing a surrogate entity, like a thisness, *ersatz* time, or Lucretian property for the true propositions to be about points away from the true proposition's truthmaker and points toward something other than what makes the expression true. This is a form of cheating and dubious. As Sider (2001) has put it, "[t]he point of the truth-maker principle and the principle that truth supervenes on being is to rule out dubious ontologies" (p. 40).

The challenge for serious presentists is to explain how some truthmakers may satisfy the aboutness constraint. This is especially true for statements about the past. Suppose that true propositions are about surrogate entities. There would be no violation of the aboutness constraint and statements about the past may be satisfied by surrogate entities. However, if these true propositions are not about surrogate entities, then the surrogate entities cannot stand in for the past in statements about the past. This gives us reason to reject the existence of surrogate entities, especially if their only purpose is to explain the truth of statements about the past.

This problem arises due to the following tripartite of claims:

1) There are true propositions about the past.

[113] For discussions of this constraint, see Baron et al. (2019), and Ingram (2018).

2) True propositions have truthmakers (whether one adopts truthmaker maximalism or the supervenience principle).

3) The truthmaker for a true proposition about the past does not involve a past object, property, or relation (that is, because the past does not exist).[114]

(1) serves as an expression of what the statement is about, namely the past. This means that the true proposition is "directed at" or is about the past. Barry Smith has described the relation:

> a truthmaker for a given judgment should fall within that portion of reality to which the judgment corresponds (roughly: it should fall within the mereological fusion of all the objects to which reference is made in the judgment). (Smith, 1999, p. 278)

And,

> A truthmaker for a given judgement must […] be part of that which the judgement is *about*, must satisfy some relevance constraint. (Smith, 1999, p. 279)

Merricks has said of the aboutness constraint that,

> [o]ur insight into Truthmaker's *aboutness* relation comes from examples. (Merricks, 2007, p. 33)

And,

> [I do not have] an absolutely decisive rebuttal for the sceptic who objects that […] we cannot really make sense of Truthmaker's *aboutness* relation. (Merricks, 2007, p. 34)

But,

[114] Baron (2013b) has presented a version of this argument.

> to deny that we can make sense of the relevant *aboutness* relation is to deny that we can make sense of Truthmaker [the truthmaking principle]. (Merricks, 2007, p. 34)

A truthmaker theorist must understand what the aboutness constraint is because the relation between true proposition and truthmaker may be an aboutness relation.[115]

If a truthmaker for a statement is constituted by "all the objects to which reference is made in the judgment," then it is difficult to understand how past objects cannot be constitutive of the truthmakers for a statement about the past.

However, if the past does not exist, then a statement about the past is directed at something non-existent. Three options are possible: there are no true propositions about the past, true propositions about the past have no truthmakers, or true propositions about the past have special truthmakers.[116] Proponents of serious presentism that I have presented agree that there are true propositions about the past and that they have truthmakers. They have claimed that true propositions about the past are directed at special truthmakers.

Ingram has said,

> my account of truth-makers […] adequately addresses the truth-maker objection; the putative truth-makers satisfy the aboutness constraint. (Ingram, 2019, p. 128)

On Ingram's account, a thisness partly constitutes what a proposition is about. An individual and their thisness partly constitute the truthmaker for a proposition about the present. On the other hand, an individual's thisness partly constitutes the truthmaker for a proposition about

[115] Certainly "making true" also involves (conditional) necessitation; a truthmaker must necessitate the truth of a truthbearer. However, truthmaking is distinct from necessitation because necessitation on its own opens the door to dubious truthmakers, and therefore, dubious truths. If part of the role of truthmaking is to rule out dubious ontologies, then necessitation alone fails. For more on necessitation and why it is necessary but not sufficient for truthmaking, see Merricks (2007, pp. 5–11, 34).

[116] If we accept the serious-presentist's understanding of what the non-existence of the past implies, then special truthmakers must exist in the present. In contrast, non-serious presentists can say these special truthmakers are non-existent objects.

the past, but the individual does not because the individual no longer exists. Ingram has explained,

> A proposition about the past is about some past x and x's thisness, because the proposition is partly constituted by x's thisness. So, e.g., ⟨Curie discovered Polonium⟩ is about Curie and Curie's thisness, and the proposition is made true by a fact that includes Curie's thisness. […] the truth-makers proposed—generated by the presentist's ontology of thisness—thus satisfy the aboutness constraint, because the putative truth-makers are facts involving thisnesses and the propositions they make true are about the very same thisnesses. (Ingram, 2019, p. 129)

While Ingram (2019) seeks to resolve presentism's challenge of accounting for truths about the past, an inconsistency arises between the truthmaker for ⟨Curie discovered Polonium⟩ when Curie is alive and existent and when she no longer exists after her death. According to Ingram, the proposition's constituent, what it is about, and the truthmaker are one and the same: Curie's thisness, which he argues satisfies the aboutness constraint for truths about the past. On this account, the aboutness constraint on a truth about x is satisfied so long as *either* x or x's thisness partly constitute that proposition. Whether Curie herself is also part of the truthmaker when Curie is alive seems to matter little which is reinforced by the following claim from Adams that Ingram cites:

> a singular proposition about an individual x is a proposition that involves or refers to x directly, perhaps by having x or the thisness of x as a constituent. (Adams, 1986, p. 315)

This is important because Ingram thinks it allows him to disregard the need for Curie herself to exist to fulfil the aboutness of the proposition. Let us grant all that has been said so far and assume that the truthmaker for a proposition about Curie is Curie's thisness—both while she

is living and after her death. Furthermore, recall that a thisness x is self-identical with x. This implies that the truthmaker for ⟨Curie discovered Polonium⟩ when Curie is alive is a thisness that is self-identical with a living person. In contrast, the truthmaker after Curie's death is a thisness that is self-identical with a person that no longer exists. Consequently, the thisness of x when x exists and the thisness of x when x does not exist are ontologically distinct—one being instantiated and the other uninstantiated. If the truth that Curie discovered Polonium is unchanging, then its truthmaker must also be unchanging. Thisnesses fail as truthmakers.

The person who lived in the past, Marie Curie, does not exist now. So, on Ingram's account, any reference that one may make to Curie since she is dead is a reference to Curie's presently existing thisness.

Nevertheless, ⟨Curie discovered Polonium⟩ is about Marie Curie's discovering the element Polonium. This statement is about a concrete individual who discovered a rare radioactive metal at a particular spatiotemporal location other than the present time. The statement is not about an abstract property that presently exists because the abstract property that aligns with Curie is not the person who discovered the mysterious element. Even though Curie's thisness partly satisfies the definite description given by "Marie Curie," the thisness and Curie are distinct objects. Even if Curie's thisness was a part of Curie at the time she discovered the element, it was not the thisness that discovered the element. It was Curie herself! If the properties that constitute the individual that the statement is *about*, such as *being physical*, *being existent*, or even *being-self-identical*, are Curie, then they should be able to replace Curie in the proposition without losing much content. They cannot be replaced without losing content. Thus, the truthmaker for the statement cannot be the thisness of Curie but what the statement is about, namely Curie herself.

Ingram thinks he gets around this objection by claiming that, e.g., ⟨Curie discovered Polonium⟩ is about Curie's thisness, which is self-identical to Curie, thereby preserving the full content. However, when we use terms like "Curie" or "the individual who discovered Polonium" we are referring to a physical person. Either the thisness is not self-identical to *that* person because it lacks the property of *being physical,* so it fails as a truthmaker, or the thisness is not what the proposition is fundamentally about. The response is to claim that Curie's thisness presently instantiates the past tense property *having been physical.* This may be true, nevertheless, the proposition does not refer to Marie Curie *now*; it refers to her when she discovered Polonium, a time when she did indeed instantiate the property of *being physical*. In sum, I contend that Curie's thisness *now* is not self-identical with the person who discovered Polonium.

Another concern I have about thisnesses *qua* the property *being-identical-with-x* is due to the nature of the identity relation itself. If a thisness, *y,* is identical to an object, *x*, and *x* is non-existent, then it follows that *y* is identical to something non-existent. Since serious presentists think that something non-existent has no properties, the identity of *y* is empty, i.e., devoid of content. Even if we accept non-rigid ontological dependence, this does not explain the identity between *x* and *y presently*. All we can say is that *y* is self-identical with *y*. However, *y* is not *Marie Curie* because "Marie Curie" denotes a physical person.

Thisness presentists may respond by insisting that my analysis cannot be correct since on any form of presentism only present things exist. If only present things exist, then we have no option but to rely upon what presently exists to be a truthmaker for a statement about the past. If thisnesses are presently existing, then thisnesses are the most viable candidates to serve

as truthmakers for these statements.[117] Consequently, we must resign ourselves to violating the aboutness constraint so far as truths about the past go. However, truthmaking need not resign itself to what presently exists. What makes a true proposition true may be what it is about, and we can adhere to the aboutness constraint.[118] This leaves open the possibility that statements about the past are about real concrete individuals at past times, not abstract entities at the present time. Thus, if an analysis of the aboutness relation in statements about the past contradicts what serious presentists argue for, then this is a reason to reject presentism, not the aboutness constraint.

Thisnesses are more suspicious properties of propositions than is the aboutness relation that holds between the true proposition and the truthmaker.[119] As a reminder, a virtue of the truthmaking principle is "to rule out dubious ontologies" (Sider, 2001, p. 40). To suppose that surrogate entities exist and act as truthmakers for a statement about the past seems to be just the sort of ontological commitment that the truthmaking principle should rule out. Thisnesses may provide a solution to the problem of truthmaking, but their nature is mysterious and concocted. If a philosopher had not created thisnesses, it would still be the case that Caesar crossed the Rubicon because a real man named Caesar traversed that river named Rubicon. This argument does not amount to a question of knowledge of the fact. It is a question about which truthmakers are more dubious. The less dubious ones are more acceptable than the more dubious ones. In explaining what makes a statement true, it is less dubious to call upon a person who crossed the river at a past time than to call upon a presently existent uninstantiated thisness

[117] That is due to Ingram's thorough explanation of their nature, life, and character. Of the three surrogate entities I have considered thisnesses come the closest to obviously satisfying definite descriptions given by the names of past objects.
[118] I note that Merricks (2007) points out that "Truthmaker presupposes that certain theories should be rejected. So any well-articulated version of Truthmaker fails to be an independent reason to reject some (but not all) of the theories that violate it" (p. 38).
[119] For discussions of this kind of critique, see Merricks (2007, pp. 35–38).

that instantiates a near-complete set of properties of the person who crossed a river many years ago.

The last point I will reinforce about thisness and aboutness regards the distinction between an individual and their thisness. A property of an individual is distinct from that individual. For example, I am *Benjamin Young*; I am not the property of *being Benjamin Young*, even if I may instantiate this property. Thus, a statement about me is about me as a *whole*; it is not merely about the property of *being self-identical (with Benjamin Young)*. When I think truly of my long-dead father, my thoughts are true only if they are *about* that individual, the real man. If my thoughts are about the presently existing thisness of my father, then it is not my father that I am thinking truly of. Instead, it is the thisness that instantiates a mere reflection—*qua* set of properties—of my father's substantive being. While a thisness may describe many of my father's characteristics, it fails to capture his fundamental essence as a real man. Reducing a truthmaker to its thisness fails to preserve that a statement about the past is about a particular truthmaker and not about some mysterious set of nearby properties.

The argument from aboutness against thisnesses applies just as well to both *ersatz* and Lucretian presentism because, just as statements about the past are not about thisnesses, they are also not about presently existent *ersatz* times or presently existent past tense properties of the world. They are *about* the past and past objects. Because *ersatz* times and Lucretian properties are present and involve present objects, they are not what these statements are about, and so these approaches violate the aboutness constraint.

4.5.1 The Aboutness Constraint, Eternalism, GB, MSV, GGB, and GMSV

Let's briefly consider how the aboutness constraint impacts on other theories of time. Eternalism, GB, and MSV all meet the challenge of the truthmaking problem because on each

of these views past objects are said to exist. The truthmakers for statements about the past for these three views are the very objects that the true propositions denote.

Eternalists, GBers, or MSVers believe that the past exists. If past times and the objects located at those times exist, then the truthmakers for statements about the past are precisely the things that the statements are about, namely past times and objects. The truthmaker for the statement, "Hillary climbed Everest," is the state of affairs involving Hillary's climbing Everest. There is no need to employ Russell's theory of definite descriptions to explain a reference to a past object such as "Hillary." The names of past objects can directly refer to those objects because the past exists. Considering the view of the past that these theories adopt, they can easily explain the ontological ground of truthmakers and the aboutness of true propositions about the past without violating the aboutness constraint. Hence, the problems of absence for references to and statements about the past do not arise for eternalists, GBers, or MSVers.

In contrast, GGB and GMSV differentiate between the nature of the past and the present by proposing that the past is "ghostly" while the present is not. According to the ghostly views, the past exists like the present but the past lacks particular properties that the present possesses. Zimmerman (2011) has explained the difference in terms of concreteness and spatiotemporal location possessed by present things but lacking in past (and future) things, the past is "strangely intangible" (p. 170). Accordingly, in these worlds, the truthmaker for a true statement about the past must lack or have distinct properties from what the proposition is *about*. For example, in a world with a ghostly past, the statement, "Hillary climbed Everest," is about an existent but non-concrete object that is not associated with a spatiotemporal location. This suggests that these objects do not fully satisfy the definite descriptions given in the names of past objects. GGB and GMSV are problematic because they enlist "ghostly" past objects to serve as truthmakers. "Ghostly" past objects are not the past objects themselves.

Consequently, the referents and truthmakers of statements about the past according to GGB and GMSV are not past objects but their "ghostly" equivalents. Since "ghostly" equivalents ought to be avoided for truthmakers of statements about the past, there is reason to reject these views.

4.6 Challenging Anti-Realism About the Past

In this section, I argue that the anti-realist approaches taken by Michael Dummett and Elizabeth Anscombe to the question of the past, which relies on present justifications and language use conventions, is fundamentally flawed because it fails to distinguish these elements from the past itself.

A main disagreement in the philosophy of time arises due to the dispute between realism and anti-realism about the past. Realists argue the actual past is a constituent of reality, while anti-realists contend that the past *qua* the past is not actual. We face a challenge in determining the best method of approaching this issue due to our immediate experience immersed in time. One entry point into this debate has been to consider the meanings of statements about the past. The thought is that by determining the meanings of statements about the past, we can better understand *what* they may refer to.

The works of Michael Dummett (1978, 2004, 2005, 2006) and Elizabeth Anscombe (1981) present paradigmatic examples of the logico-semantic approach, both challenging the notion that statements about the past can directly refer to the actual past, as the actual past is not directly accessible to us. Dummett argues that the meaning of a statement about the past is closely connected to the conditions that justify its truth, which are things within our, more or less, immediate grasp, such as personal and public evidence, personal memories, the memories of individuals we have access to, and the conventions of language use.

In contrast, Anscombe challenges the effectiveness of traditional justifications in explaining the meanings of statements about the past. Instead, Anscombe calls upon the circumstances in which we use language, and the ways we use it, leading to a Wittgensteinian account of meaning as language use.

I argue that Dummett's and Anscombe's theories fail to shed light on the nature of the past because the insights they provide only inform our understanding of language use associated with talk of the past and our present justifications for believing that given statements about the past are true. They say nothing of the past itself nor what fundamentally makes statements about the past true.

The challenge in explaining the meanings of statements about the past is to demonstrate what they refer to. Dummett and Anscombe argue that only demonstrably existent particular things suffice to explain the meanings of such statements, rejecting explanations invoking intermediaries or mere *abstracta*. For instance, Anscombe has said,

> We are not concerned here with any other objects of thought besides particular things, events, circumstances, places, persons and so on. That is, not with abstractions, generalizations, imaginary things. (Anscombe, 1981, p. 103)

Dummett (1978) frames the challenge in terms of identifying "conditions which we can recognise as obtaining," arguing that the meaning of a true statement, its referent, must be an obtaining state of affairs (p. 358). We can only justify the truth of a statement if we can demonstrate the existent state of affairs from which it derives its truth. Since we cannot demonstrate the existence of the past, we cannot demonstrate that it is the referent of a statement. Anscombe also makes this point:

> The name or thought of something past seems to point to its object in just the same way as the name or thought of any other actual thing; yet how can it, since its object does not exist? (Anscombe, 1981, p. 103)

Anscombe's framing of the issue assumes the non-existence of the past. Dummett (2005) is not so forthright; as a justificationist, he "regards physical reality as containing only what there is evidence that it contains" (p. 679). Since we lack evidence that the past exists, we cannot appeal to the past as the referent or justification for the truth of a statement about the past.

Nevertheless, statements about the past are meaningful, so we must find another means of explaining their meaning. Underlying this search for meaning is the distinction between a true statement and a statement that is not true. Whether one adopts a realist or an anti-realist viewpoint, both agree that a statement's truth is dependent on the way the world is, while a statement that is not true fails to represent the way the world is. One way to characterise the point of difference between realism and anti-realism about the past is due to their different understandings of the verb "is"; Realists adopt a tenseless reading, while anti-realists adopt a tensed reading. Dummett makes this point:

> What the realist would like to do is to stand in thought outside the whole temporal process and describe the world from a point which has no temporal position at all, [...] from this standpoint [...] the different points of time have a relation of temporal precedence between themselves, but no temporal relation to the standpoint of the description–i.e., they are not being considered as past, as present or as future. The anti-realist takes more seriously the fact that we are immersed in time: being so immersed, we cannot frame any description of the world as it would appear to one who is not in time. (Dummett, 1978, p. 368)

This statement emphasises that anti-realists give more weight to the implications of tense on the adopted viewpoint than realists. For example, take the statement, "It was the case that *Q*," *R*. On the realists' account, *R* is true because the tenseless statement, "it is the case that *Q*", *S*, is true. *R* and *S* range over the same past state of affairs, which constitutes the meaning of the statement in both cases, despite their difference in tense. The tense merely indicates the temporal position of the state referred to relative to the time of utterance.

In contrast, all the anti-realist can say is that *R* is now true. Because the anti-realist "takes more seriously the fact that we are immersed in time," the range of their most unrestricted quantifiers differs from the realists. While the realist's quantifiers range over all times, past, present, and (possibly) future, the anti-realist restricts this range to include only those things we can now *recognise* as true. Consequently, anti-realists identify the meaning of a past tense statement with the truth conditions that we can now recognise. We cannot presently recognise the truth conditions for *S*–because they are past.

Consider the anti-realist thesis regarding the meanings of statements, which Dummett explains,

> the meanings of statements of the class in question are given to us, not in terms of the conditions under which these statements are true or false, conceived of as conditions which obtain or do not obtain independently of our knowledge or capacity for knowledge, but in terms of the conditions which we recognise as establishing the truth or falsity of statements of that class. (Dummett, 1978, p. 358-359)

Accordingly, the meaning of a statement is not independent of what we know or may know; it depends on what we are capable of recognising. This approach avoids begging the question as to whether there are obtaining states of affairs beyond our epistemic reach.

Anti-realism is attractive if we think that "the conditions which we recognise as establishing the truth or falsity of statements" and the conditions which establish the truth or falsity of statements are one and the same. We (should) determine a statement true only when we can recognise a justification for doing so. This tempts us to conflate the basis of justification for truth with the state of affairs that the statement describes as true. Hence, this approach fails to distinguish between the basis of justification for asserting truth and the past state of affairs that we speak truly of. Dummett leads us to focus on the conditions we can recognise, but what we should focus on are the conditions necessary to ensure truth.

We may mistake the justification for the truth of a statement about the past. This is evidenced throughout history whenever a presiding judge rules, "You are the guilty party," and sentences an innocent person for a crime they did not commit, suggesting that the truth value of a statement is not just a matter of justification. The past itself is what ultimately determines whether a statement is true or false, not whether we think we are justified in determining it as such.

Anti-realism about the past renders the past itself an ontological mystery. Anti-realists believe that while we may intuitively understand the implications of past tense statements based on our personal experiences in time, we cannot clearly articulate the nature of a past state of which we claim to speak truly. All we can precisely describe are the present conditions that justify our belief in the truth of a past tense statement. Anscombe has expressed this viewpoint by highlighting that,

> only the account of meaning given by Wittgenstein enables one without begging the question to introduce mention of actual past events into one's account of knowing the past that one *has* witnessed. This is made possible precisely by that feature of his method which is most difficult to accept: namely, that he attacks the effort

> at justification, the desire to say: "But one says 'was red' because one knows that the light *was* red!" One says "was red" in these circumstances (not: *recognizing* these circumstances) and that *is* what in this case is called knowing the past fact. (Anscombe, 1981, p. 118)

Although Dummett and Anscombe both warn against assuming the existence of the actual past, and instead look to the conditions we can know with certainty to explain the meanings of statements about the past, Anscombe rejects Dummett's justificationism. For instance, for Dummett, one's memory of a past instance of a red light provides sufficient evidence to justify the truth of the statement, "The light was red."[120]

Anscombe demurs. By applying Wittgenstein's method, she challenges the traditional approach of seeking to justify past facts, or facts about the past, and instead highlights the circumstances in which we use the past tense. Accordingly, it is the circumstances themselves and the way we use language in a particular context that gives rise to language's meaning. Anscombe (1981) says "It is in these circumstances that we speak of knowing such and such; it is this use that gives that statement a sense" (p. 118). Hence, when one is presented with an apparent memory of a past instance of a red light, one says "The light was red." Through our own appreciation of what a red light is, of what a memory implies, and of how we use language to convey our experiences, we come to understand the meaning of this statement.

Critically, for Anscombe, the search for justification is misplaced. We cannot access a past instance of a red light, and there may be no physical evidence in the present that it occurred, or the evidence may be corrupted. Even memory is not sufficient to justify the truth of a statement about the past.

[120] Moreover, for Dummett one's memory of the past instance of the red light is constitutive of the meaning of this statement.

First, a memory may falsely represent the past (facts).[121] Second, we cannot explain the justification for a genuine memory without appealing to the actual past.[122] The justification for the truth of a statement cannot be the same thing as its meaning without permitting errors between meaning and reality, or without driving the analysis farther back.

If a statement about the past that we are justified in determining true, is really false (or *vice versa)*, then the evidence taken as the truth conditions or justification for that statement must be distinct from its meaning. If the two were not distinct, then the meaning of a true statement about the past may be a different matter from what actually took place in the past. Consequently, the statement would not be about actual past events. One who fails to recognise this distinction commits the error of confusing the past with unreality.

Both Dummett (1978) and Anscombe (1981) have approached the question of *the reality of the past*, yet they do not answer the question of the past. Instead, they provide an analysis of what they take to constitute the present meanings of statements about the past.

To bring the issue I am highlighting into focus, consider the following example. Say that a person, Rebecca, is trying to explain the meaning of the statement, "Dinner Plain is in Eastern Victoria," *P*, to another person, Jonathan. On a piece of paper, Rebecca will sketch an outline of Victoria and a compass rose indicating the orientation of the cardinal directions. Next, Rebecca will place a mark in the eastern region of her sketch, and declare, "This is what I mean." Jonathan will have a sense of the meaning of *P*; however, he will understand that the ultimate target of *P*—the part of reality that entails the statement's fundamental meaning, and

[121] Either the mind may falsely represent what one actually witnessed, or what was actually witnessed may have been mistaken at the time the memory was formed. For example, one may remember witnessing a man at the scene of a crime when, in fact, what they saw was a waxwork figure (Anscombe, 1981, p. 107–108). The mistake here is not of memory but of perception at the time of memory formation.

[122] For instance, if one realises that what they genuinely witnessed was a waxwork figure, one must appeal to the actual past to distinguish their false memory of a man from their true memory of a waxwork figure. We can only explain what differentiates a false memory of a man from a true memory of a waxwork figure by relating the memory to the actual event.

truth—goes beyond the images sketched. The ultimate target of *P* is bound up in an actual state of affairs.

The example just presented is uncharitable to the anti-realist due to its simplicity. Nevertheless, it underscores the difference between what may reflect the meaning of a statement and what that statement ultimately means, and especially what makes it true. Dummett and Anscombe respond to the question of what reflects the meaning of statements about the past, but they remain silent with respect to those statement's ultimate targets.

But, of course, Dummett and Anscombe would deny that they have remained silent. Dummett will claim that the meaning of a statement and its ultimate target are the same thing. I have already explained that it is an error to conflate that which makes a statement true with the justification for holding a belief.

On the other hand, Anscombe will say that our search for an ultimate target is misplaced because such a search can only result in speculation. The only meanings for statements about the past we can truly know are given by the circumstances and ways that we speak about the past: the language games we play.

Both responses highlight the problem at hand. For the very reason that we can distinguish the image sketched on paper, or the circumstances and ways that we speak from the actual state of affairs involving Dinner Plain and Eastern Victoria, we can also distinguish between the surface-level or reflective meaning of a statement about the past and that statement’s ultimate target or truthmaker. The conditions that support our belief in a statement’s truth may be expressed in various ways, and the language games we play may convey a sense, both of which help us to understand the meaning of a statement. Nevertheless, these things are not necessarily what a statement is ultimately about, and they are never what a statement about the past is ultimately about.

The question of the reality of the past is fundamentally an ontological question. If we fail to answer the ontological question, then we also fail to describe the nature of the past. Describing the present conditions that justify a belief in the truth of a statement about the past merely explains the reasons we may have for holding a given belief. However, the description fails to identify the very event or state of affairs of which we claim to speak truly. Likewise, the language games we play may have a sense attached to them, but the meaning of this sense floats free from the world unless it is grounded in something beyond the circumstances and ways in which we use language.

Conclusion

The problems of absence arise for presentists because they deny that the past exists. Presentists cannot deny that true propositions about the past have truthmakers because that leads down the nefarious path, which employs the language of truthmaking but denies any ontological implications. Nor can they deny truthmakers for statements about the past because that is to court scepticism. Upstanding or serious presentists have aimed to resolve the problems of absence by positing presently existing surrogate entities. This approach is motivated by Russell's theory of definite descriptions, which suggests we can account for the reference of naming terms that appear to denote non-existent objects by treating naming terms as definite descriptions. If something in the world matches a definite description, we can claim that is what a name refers to and evaluate the truth of a statement containing that name by assessing whether the statement's predicate holds good of that subject. Similarly, if a surrogate entity matches the definite description in a statement about the past, then we can treat that entity as the subject of the statement. I discussed *ersatz*, Lucretian, and thisness presentism and refuted these theories because they either lack an ontological ground, are merely hypothetical, or violate the *aboutness constraint*: truthmakers must involve those objects that true propositions are about. For these reasons, the serious responses discussed fail to adequately resolve the problems of

absence. The past is not an abstract representation, nor is it bound up in hypothetical properties of present things, nor is it the lingering thisnesses of past objects. Eternalism, GB and MSV all avoid the problems of absence because they admit an existent and complete past. However, like presentism, GGB and GMSV fail to resolve the problems of absence, because these theories deny specific properties of the past. Finally, I discussed how Anscombe's and Dummett's explanations for the meanings of statements about the past fail to distinguish between what reflects meaning and what allows us to justify a belief about the past, and what these statements ultimately mean and what makes them true.

This chapter suggests that eternalism, GB, and MSV all offer viable explanations of what the past is due to their ability to provide substantive resolutions to the problems of absence. However, in Chapter 7, I will argue that this is not the case because these theories conflate the nature of the past with that of the present or future, which implies an error in their reasoning. In the next chapter, I will explore non-serious presentism, which offers a unique approach to resolving the problem of the past, namely, by viewing it as a non-existent object.

Chapter 5: Truthmaking and Reference with the Non-Existent Past

Introduction

In this chapter, I present Meinongian presentism to show one way that presentists may respond to the problems of absence and to highlight that non-serious responses to these problems are no less valuable than serious responses in approaching the question of the past.[123] First, I will sketch a general outline of MP, distinguishing between Michele Paoletti's (2016) version, which views non-existence as merely the absence of existence, and Palle Yourgrau's (1987) version which views non-existence as a mode of being. I will proceed through the chapter focusing on Yourgrau's style of MP, because it informs my view. Just as different forms of Meinongianism have done so, MP allows for a distinction between objects that occupy a mode of existence and those that occupy a mode of non-existence.[124] This allows MPs to respond to the problems of absence by appealing to non-existent past objects. I will summarise the theory of non-existent objects according to Alexius Meinong's (1960) *object theory*[125] and Richard Routley/Sylvan's (1980) analysis and explication of that theory.[126] This will help us better

[123] Kris McDaniel (2017) presents a version of presentism he calls "Presentist Existentialist Pluralism (PEP)" that he says is not a version of Meinongian presentism because "the fundamental quantifiers recognized by PEP have disjoint domains" while the quantifiers in Meinongian presentism are "nested" (p. 85). Nevertheless, if serious presentism entails only one fundamental existential quantifier, then McDaniel's PEP is a non-serious view (*Cf.* McDaniel (2017)). Moreover, even though views like McDaniels' are arguably "actualist" because they do not posit non-actual modes of being, serious presentists are clear about their commitment to a single fundamental mode of existence. For this reason, I understand views that posit multiple modes of being to be non-serious. Whether McDaniel's PEP is viewed as serious or non-serious will ultimately come down to where the line is drawn between actual and non-actual existence.

[124] I must highlight that Paoletti (2016), who accepts that there are non-existent objects, cautions against attributing a unique, separate mode of being or existence to them (pp. 5–6). On Paoletti's view, existence is a first-order property instantiated by some objects but not by others (p. 6). Non-existent objects do not instantiate existence but neither do they possess any other mode of being distinct from existence. For example, Paoletti thinks there is an object that the term "Socrates" refers to and this object lacks existence; however, this does not imply that it possesses some other mode of being.

[125] For presentations of Meinongian theory, see (Chisholm, 1982; Dale & Liliana, 2017; Findlay, 1963; Lambert, 1983; Meinong, 1960).

[126] Philosophers who have defended versions of Meinongian presentism include Gallois (2004), Hinchliff (1988), Yourgrau (1987), and Paoletti (2016), while discussions of versions of Meinongian presentism can be found in Berto (2013, pp. 98–101), and von Solodkoff and Woodward (2013, pp. 573–574). My presentation of Meinongian presentism aligns with Yourgrau's version but expands upon it by deriving a deeper understanding from Meinong's (1960) original object theory and Routley/Sylvan's (1980) work explicating that theory. McDaniel (2017) points out that "The real Meinong rejected Meinongian presentism for most of his career. […] According to J. N. Findlay (1963, pp. 79–80), late in his life Meinong changed his mind and endorsed something like Meinongian presentism.

understand how MP addresses these problems and provide a deeper appreciation of the theory, shedding light on how my theory can also overcome them concerning a non-existent present and future. I will discuss some common objections to Meinong's object theory and show how these challenges are overcome because existent and non-existent objects possess properties in different ways. Finally, after showing that Meinongian theories need not be viewed as inherently problematic, I will argue that MP does not provide a satisfactory response to the question of the past due to its failure to accurately characterise the ontological distinction between the past, present, and future.

5.1 Meinongian Presentism

For presentists, past (and future) objects are non-*actual* and do not exist. The commitment to an *actualist* ontology restricts standard presentists from easily resolving the problems of absence. Meinongian presentists, such as Paoletti (2016), and Yourgrau (1987) adhere to the same thesis as other presentists that nothing exists which is not present. However, while serious presentists deny non-actual objects outright, Meinongian presentists embrace the thesis that *there are* non-existent objects.

The Meinongian presentist thinks that there are past objects, but such objects do not exist. For example, the referent of "Hillary" in the statement "Hillary climbed Everest" is the past object *Hillary*, even though *he* does not exist. Distinguishing between things that exist and things that do not provide non-serious presentists with a way to account for the past even if it does not exist. If there are non-existent objects, and if we amend the truthmaking principle such that any objects may serve as truthmakers—not just existent objects—then it is possible to appeal to non-existent past objects as truthmakers for statements about the past.

Meinongian presentists argue that non-existent objects may serve as truthmakers for statements about the past. They accept the presentist thesis that only present objects exist and

they accept the truthmaking principle that for every true statement there is a truthmaker. We can derive the following argument for non-existent objects as truthmakers based on the conjunction of presentism, truthmaking, and the acceptance of non-existent objects:

1. Either statements about the past are false or truthmakers of statements about the past do not involve existent past objects. (premise)
2. Statements about the past may be true. (premise)
3. Truthmakers of statements about the past do not involve existent past objects. (1,2)
4. There are non-existent past objects. (premise)
5. Therefore, statements about the past that are true involve non-existent past objects. (3,4)

Meinongian presentists consider non-existent past objects to be part of the ontology just as much as present objects. Only present objects exist. Past objects are not simply *nothing* because they are not purely non-existent like golden mountains or round-squares are non-existent. We can differentiate past objects from these other kinds of objects because past objects did exist while these other objects never have and never will exist. Therefore, past objects are either *being-less* or they subsist, similar to how we may view properties or universals.

One version of MP that does not subscribe to the view that past objects subsist is due to Michele Paoletti (2016). On Paoletti's account, past objects do not subsist. Instead, they simply do not exist, even though they possess other characterising properties. Paoletti claims not to distinguish between being and existence. He has said,

> In my perspective, it is neither necessary to claim that things which do *not* exist now do *not* have now being, nor that things which do not exist nevertheless have being, provided that nothing forces us to attribute some mysterious being – different from

existence – to things that do not exist (and/or that do not exist now). (Paoletti, 2016, p. 5)

Paoletti's version differs from the view of MP that I will focus on, which aligns more closely with Yourgrau's (1987) MP, and a reading of Meinong's (1960) original theory that distinguishes between being and existence. Yourgrau has said:

> The approach I favor is what the facts themselves seem to be urging us to accept: that death concerns the nonexistent as well as the existent; that, therefore, some things don't exist—i.e., that there are nonexistent objects. We should distinguish, therefore, between being something, being an *object* (which we express by 'there is', or '(∃*x*)'), and being an *existing* object. Existence is that property, delicate as an eyelid, which separates the living from the dead. I express it with the predicate 'E!'. When I say "Some objects do not exist," I write it as follows: (∃*x*) (∼E!*x*). I thus preserve existential generalization: from '*Fa*' I can always conclude '(∃*x*) (*Fx*)', and thus from "Socrates is dead" I conclude: "There is an object that is dead and this object is Socrates." (Yourgrau, 1987, p. 89)

I will proceed with the understanding that non-existent objects possess a mode of being (which may be non-being) distinct from standard or actual existence. When I refer to "MP" and "Meinongian" I have this notion of non-existent objects front of mind, recognising that there are other ways to conceive of them. This understanding allows for a straightforward analysis of MP, which is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. The benefit of focusing on this understanding of MP is that it lays the foundation for my view regarding how I treat existence and non-existence, which is more important than comparing and contrasting different versions of MP or analysing Meinong's theory in an exegetical manner.

Let me spell out precisely why serious presentists and non-serious presentists disagree. Under MP, *there are* past and future objects that do not exist. The serious presentist upholds an *actualist* ontology which equates the terms "there are" and "exists," or as Quine (1948) does, discards the term "exists" altogether (p. 23).[127] Quine has explained:

> We have all been prone to say, in our common-sense usage of 'exist', that Pegasus does not exist, meaning simply that there is no such entity at all. If Pegasus existed he would indeed be in space and time, but only because the word 'Pegasus' has spatio-temporal connotations, and not because 'exists' has spatio-temporal connotations. If spatiotemporal reference is lacking when we affirm the existence of the cube root of 27, this is simply because a cube root is not a spatio-temporal kind of thing, and not because we are being ambiguous in our use of 'exist'. (Quine, 1948, p. 23)

The serious presentist, who, like Quine, is predisposed to actualism, means that *there are* only existent objects, which may include *concreta* and *abstracta*, but all of them are in the present. The Meinongian presentist demurs because they believe there are non-actual or non-existent objects, some of which are not in the present.

An ontology including non-existent objects provides an answer to the question of reference concerning naming terms for non-existent objects. If *there are* non-existent objects, then they are available to serve as the referents of naming terms about them. Similarly, MP can appeal to non-existent past objects as the referents of naming terms about them.

MP has an answer to the problem of negative existentials. Consider the statement "Socrates does not exist," which is true because there is no physical instantiation of Socrates. This raises a question about *what* precisely does not exist, thereby generating a puzzle: how

[127] To explore this issue from the *actualist's* perspective, see Quine (1948).

can we ascribe non-existence to something if the very object we ascribe this characteristic to is absent from the ontology? However, according to MP, there is a non-existent Socrates. Thus, the non-existent Socrates is the object that we associate non-existence with, and the puzzle is resolved.

MP also has an answer to the problem of truthmaking for statements about the past. Because MP includes non-existent objects in their ontology, those objects are available to act as the truthmakers for statements about the past. Suppose that one speaks truly of Socrates. Socrates does not exist because only present objects exist and Socrates is not present. Nevertheless, we can refer to Socrates so "Socrates" must refer to something, namely an object lacking existence. Furthermore, Socrates did exist, so he is distinct from something merely non-existent like the golden mountain which never has and never will exist. Socrates is also distinct from something abstract like the number two, which also never had and never could have concrete existence. Finally, Socrates possesses the characteristics that describe him. Therefore, the referent of "Socrates" is a past object, *Socrates,* who shares a unique non-existent mode of being with other past objects. He, along with the properties he possesses, are available to act as a truthmaker for statements about Socrates.

5.2 Underlying Meinongian Presentism: Meinong's Theory of Objects

Let's consider Meinong's view in more detail to reveal precisely how we may conceive of non-existent objects to resolve problems about them, especially concerning temporal objects like the past, or as I will later argue, the present and future. Even if past objects do not exist there are still past objects, events, and states of affairs so they may serve as truthmakers for true propositions about the past.

Meinong's ontology accepts the following core theses as articulated by Richard Routley/Sylvan (1980, pp. 2–3):

M1) Everything whatsoever is an "object".[128]

M2) Many objects do not "exist".[129]

M3) Non-existent objects are constituted in one way or another and have determinate natures; that is, they have properties.

It is important to pause here for a moment and discuss Meinong's view of properties. Properties may be either "characterising" or "non-characterising." A characterising property is constitutive of an object's nature (a *nuclear* property). A non-characterising property is not constitutive of an object's nature but may supervene on its nuclear properties (an *extra-nuclear* property).[130] To clarify this point, consider the round-square. Its nuclear properties include both *roundness* and *squareness*; they characterise the object and are constitutive of its nature. Extranuclear properties are features such as *being determined by (the nuclear property) roundness* or *being contingent (on the nuclear property roundness)*; they are not constitutive of an object's nature.[131] Hence, extranuclear properties depend on nuclear properties but do not characterise the object *per se*.

M4) Existence is not a characterising property of any object.[132]

[128] "Everything" of M1 quantifies over every conceivable and every inconceivable thing. I will explain this further later in the chapter, but it is useful to briefly explain how this understanding can be represented logically. Edward Zalta makes a distinction between the existence predicate "E!" and the logical or metaphysical existential quantifier "∃". While "E!" denotes existence, "∃" captures existent and non-existent objects within its domain. This interpretation diverges from the conventional understanding that "∃" only ranges over existent things. See Zalta (1988).

[129] This distinguishes between "there are" and "exists." Only a subset of all the objects that "there are" "exist," hence, there are objects that do not exist. This distinction is important for Meinongian ontology because it permits a distinction between objects that exist and those that do not. For an argument presenting the case that there are non-existent objects which seeks to make sense of this claim, see Parsons (1982).

[130] For more about this distinction, see Parsons (1980, p. 23).

[131] Terence Parsons (1980) identifies four types of "extranuclear predicates": modal, ontological, intentional and technical (p. 23). See Parsons (1980) for a detailed discussion of these categories.

[132] "Existence" is an extranuclear property. If an object's nuclear properties completely determine what it is, then its existence is based on those properties. Moreover, a completely determined object will have the extranuclear property of *being completely determined*. Objects that are completely determined exist.

M5) Essence precedes existence, so every object possesses the characteristics it does irrespective of whether it exists.

M6) If an object can be characterised, that object has those characteristics used to describe it.

A fundamental consequence of these core theses is that both existent and non-existent objects, even those that may have contradictory properties, are part of the ontology.[133] To gain insight into Meinong's theory, let's review it.

First, think of an object as a collection of properties. If we try to think of an object without any of its associated properties, then it might seem like there is nothing left to think about. However, according to Meinong, something remains to think about. He describes this object:

> Blue, or any other Object whatsoever, is somehow given prior to our determination of its being or non-being, in a way that does not carry any prejudice to its non-being. We could also describe the situation from its psychological side in this way: if I should be able to judge that a certain Object is not, then I appear to have had to grasp the Object in some way beforehand, in order to say anything about its non-being, or more precisely, in order to affirm or to deny the ascription of non-being to the Object. (Meinong, 1960, p. 84)

There is something at the core of any collection of properties that precedes our determinations, which Meinong (1960) called "the pure object" (pp. 83–86). The pure object represents the fundamental or underlying essence of all objects, regardless of what specific properties they

[133] See Meinong (1960). For recent defences of possible worlds in a broadly Meinongian spirit, see Berto and Jago (2019) and for a contemporary version of how being is fragmented see McDaniel (2017).

may have or whether they exist or do not exist, hence it is said to "stand beyond being and non-being."

> Second, a pure object possesses a special mode of being: *aussersein*,
>
> the pure object stands beyond being and non-being; both alike are external to it. Whether an object is or not, makes no difference to *what* the object is. The pure object is said to be ausserseiend or to have aussersein: it lies 'outside.' (Findlay, 1963, p. 49)

Aussersein is the broadest possible *mode of being* an object can possess beyond being and nonbeing. Accordingly, we cannot classify objects that have *aussersein* as simply existent or non-existent because their fundamental essence—*being such that they are objects*—is not contingent on their existential status. All objects are *ausserseiend* whether we can conceive of them or not. Thus, *aussersein* objects need not be restricted by what may be thought about.

Third, objects that have *aussersein* divide further into *sein* or non-existence, which includes *nichtsein* and subsistent objects. Objects that have s*ein* are those that actualists would associate with *concreta*, like tables, donkeys, and planets. These objects are tangible physical things, composed of material substance. Their being is complete so they possess a positive mode of being.

Fourth, in contrast, *nichtsein* negates *sein*. If *concreta* have *sein* and objects possessing *sein* exist, then objects possessing *nichtsein* are *non-concreta*; hence, they do not exist because their being is incomplete.[134]

[134] It is worth clarifying that, as with the meanings of the terms "nonexistent" and "non-existent," we must distinguish between "*non-concreta*" and "non-physicality"—the negation of *being physical. "Concreta*" is a technical term that means "being instantiated in the world." Thus, "*non-concreta*" means not being instantiated, which we may distinguish from merely lacking physicality. The point is that we may wish to distinguish between different types of objects that are not *physically* instantiated.

"Nichtsein" can be read in several ways. First, *nichtsein* suggests a specific mode of *nonexistent* being. Second, it may refer to an object that simply lacks existence—a *non-existent* object. To be clear, Meinong believed that only objects possessing *nonexistence* possess *nichtsein.* But this does not imply that all objects that do not exist share the same singular mode of being.[135]

Fifth, another non-existent mode of being is *subsistence.* Two categories of subsistent objects I will discuss are *abstracta* and relations. *Abstracta* that subsist constitute a distinct mode of *aussersein* as they can be differentiated from other *non-concreta*. Compare an abstract object like *the number six* with *the golden mountain*. The number six lacks concrete form, yet it still possesses a mode of subsistent being. Meinong has expressed this thought:

> [a] number does not exist [in the sense of sein] in addition to what is numbered, supposing the latter does exist; this we clearly know from the fact that we can also count what does not exist. (Meinong, 1960, p. 79)

The being of a mathematical object is necessary; it does not depend on any contingent factors or concrete instantiations. Numbers are neither *sein* nor *nichtsein*. Therefore, the number *six* is something in addition to the physical instantiation of six of any thing. In contrast, the golden mountain is non-existent because it is not instantiated in the world, but there could have been a world in which it is instantiated. There may be a possible world where the golden mountain exists. Subsistent objects include specific kinds of *abstracta,* like mathematical objects and true propositions that are not *sein* because they lack concrete form and are not *nichtsein* since they differ from merely contingent things. J. N. Findlay has highlighted the distinction between different objects:

[135] It is worthwhile to clarify the meaning of "non-existent;" it may imply either a non-existent mode distinct from *nonexistence,* or no mode of being whatsoever.

> [W]e have such objects as golden mountains, whose non-existence is merely a matter of brute empirical fact; then we have such objects as round squares, which cannot exist because they involve a contradiction; finally we have such entities as the equality between three and three, or the diversity between red and green - even in ordinary language we recognize that such things may subsist (*bestehen*), but not exist 'like a house or a tree.' (Findlay, 1963, p. 18)

Meinong's views on time are not central to his philosophical contributions. However, if we understand time as a relation between objects, then it has a special ontological status distinct from *sein* and *nichtsein*: *subsistence.* Even though time does not exist, time serves as a relation between objects, past, present, and future. Relations (including mathematical objects), complexes, and characteristics are so-called *ideal objects,* occupying the unique category of *subsistence*. Time is a relation; it does not fall into the category of *sein* or *nichtsein*. Just as numbers do not exist in addition to what is numbered, neither do times exist in addition to the objects they relate.

Routley/Sylvan (1980) offers the following brief argument for the non-existence of times: "No universals [properties] exist. Time is a universal [a property]. Therefore Time does not exist" (brackets in original; p. 395).[136] Meinongians like Routley/Sylvan think that universals do not exist because they are independent of particular instantiations. For example, *redness* is independent of any particular red thing; and similarly time is independent from any particular object. Hence, if time is a universal it does not exist.

According to Routley/Sylvan, *Time* is a (relational) universal, like the (relational) property of *betweenness,* which is independent of particular instances. Under Meinongianism, universals do not exist (even though particular instances of them may subsist). Therefore, if

[136] For Routley/Sylvan's development and defence of the major premise supporting this argument, see Routley/Sylvan (1980, pp. 697–755).

Time is a universal, it does not exist. However, while *Time* as a universal lacks existence, temporal relations, i.e., *times*—as ideal objects—subsist between objects. This understanding allows for times (i.e., particular moments) to relate objects temporally. Routley/Sylvan's argument focuses on maintaining *Time* as a universal independent of particular instantiations, while still allowing temporal relations or individual times to subsist.

Lastly, Meinong called the property-like features that characterise an object, "*sosein."* *Sosein* represents the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics that objects possess and it determines an object's nature.[137] An object has *sosein* whether or not it exists (M3).[138] For example, we can attribute properties to Jacinda Ardern's younger self. She was brown-haired, brown-eyed and ambitous, which partly constitute her *sosein* attributes. Furthermore, we can still characterise Ardern's younger self differently than how we characterise her current self. Thus, the two objects are distinct. When Ardern's younger self was instantiated she had *sein*. Now that Ardern's younger self is not instantiated, that object lacks *sein*. However, even though Ardern's younger self does not exist because it is not instantiated, that object still possesses *sosein,* which we can compare to the *sosein* of her current self.

The ability to attribute properties to objects with or without *sein* gives rise to *the principle of the independence of sosein from sein*.[139] According to this principle, we can ascribe characteristics to objects regardless of their existence. For example, we can say that "Hillary is a mountaineer," regardless of Hillary's existential status. This shows that existence is not a prerequisite for objects to possess properties. Hence, *sosein* is independent from *sein*. We are now in a position to consider this ontology in a temporal setting.

[137] Sosein are alternatively called nuclear and extra-nuclear properties. I discuss this further later in this chapter.
[138] This leads to the concept known as "The principle of the independence of sosein from sein." In simple terms, the existence of an object is a separate matter from the attributes it has. For instance, Socrates is a philosopher whether he exists or not. For an in-depth consideration of this issue, see Lambert (1983, pp. 13–38).
[139] For an excellent discussion of the principle of the independence of *sosein* from sein, see Lambert (1983).

I do not subscribe to MP; however my view employs a Meinongian strategy because I distinguish the existent past from the non-existent present and future, thereby indulging in multiple modes of being. For this reason, it is worthwhile to address some of the challenges Meinongian theories have faced. Philosophers like Quine have rejected Meinongian theories because they view them as inherently problematic due to the contradictions that are thought to follow from them. Let's briefly turn to set theory to consider some of the contradictions that arise from set-theoretic puzzles. The application of set theory to ontologies involving non-existent objects has been used to argue that these ontologies lead to contradictions and paradoxes.[140] By viewing objects as sets of properties, we can analyse whether the concerned sets are logically consistent or whether they violate the principle of non-contradiction. Considering some of the problems of contradiction that Meinongian object theories have been charged with allows us to consider how these objections may be overcome and what impetus they may provide for rejecting MP. My aim in this discussion is to demonstrate that the main objections against views that distinguish between objects that exist and those that do not are unfounded.

The guiding intuition for the most extreme forms of Meinongianism (that *every* non-existent thing is an object) is that given a set of characteristics or properties, there is an individual that has those properties. For example, consider the properties of the Sky Tower in Auckland: it is called "the Sky Tower," it is the tallest man-made structure in New Zealand, it is located in the heart of Auckland City, it has two observation decks, it has a revolving restaurant, it has a sky-jump and sky-walk experience, and it has changing lighting colours. Suppose this list is exhaustive. If someone is presented with this set of properties, then they

[140] The relevance of set theory to Meinongian ontology can be traced back to Bertrand Russell's work, particularly in The Principles of Mathematics (1903/2020). Russell raised questions about the nature of sets and their membership criteria (*Cf.* Russell, 1902/2002, 1903/2020). Especially relevant are the paradoxes that may arise when we consider sets with ill-defined membership criteria. Russell noted that such sets may lead to contradictions.

could reasonably deduce that the properties belong to the Auckland Sky Tower. It seems that we may determine all objects in this way.

The principle which states that any unique set of properties determines an individual is known as *the naïve comprehension principle.*[141] Formally, it may be stated: For any property *P(x)*, there exists a set *S* of all objects *x* that satisfy *P(x)*.

The first problem to consider arises when we try to define a singleton set. Suppose that *P* is the property of *being a philosopher*. An object *x* that satisfies this property can be represented as a singleton set *S*: (*x* | *Px)*. Suppose that we introduce another property, *Q*, *being bald*. This gives rise to a distinct set, *S1*: (*x* | *Px* ⋀ *Qx*) consisting of *x* with properties *P* and *Q*. We cannot suppose that both sets associated with *x* determine the same individual even if they share the same property, *P*, because the two sets, *S* and *S1*, determine distinct sets of properties. Thus, they determine distinct objects. This means that a set which purports to involve a single property, like *being a philosopher*, will be a distinct object if it *really* involves additional properties.

Consider how this analysis impacts *the principle of bivalence*, that a proposition is either true or false.[142] For instance, does *x* possess the property of *hairiness* or *baldness*, or, more fundamentally, does *x* possess the property of *being human* or *being non-human*? These questions lead to indeterminate truth values because it is neither true nor false that *x* is hairy, bald, human, or non-human. Consequently, *x* is an incomplete object.

A second issue with the naïve comprehension principle is that it permits a prescribed condition to involve only one property. However, even an object with the single property of *being a philosopher* has at least one other property: *having only one property*, which results in

[141] The origin of this principle is generally traced back to set theory and attributed to Ernst Zermelo (1908). However, sometimes it is attributed to Gottlob Frege's (1972) work on the concept of extensions.
[142] An early expression of this principle can be found in Aristotle (1998, Book Gamma, Chapter 4).

the object having two properties. But the object that has only one property cannot have any other property than that property. Since the object *having only one property* has a second property, *being a philosopher*, it has contradictory properties.

Additionally, to be a philosopher or to be bald presupposes a third property, *being human*. It is therefore unreasonable to assume a singleton set of properties determines an object possessing only one property.

Finally, consider an object with contradictory properties such as a round-square or a married bachelor. The properties of *roundness* and *squareness*, and *being married* and *being a bachelor* are mutually exclusive; something round cannot be square, and a married man cannot be a bachelor. Nevertheless, the naïve comprehension principle asserts that defining a set whose members possess mutually exclusive properties, such as *roundness* and *squareness*, or *being married* and *being a bachelor*, is possible. As a result, there must be objects that have these contradictory properties which is *prima facie* objectionable.

The problem of objects possessing contradictory properties is most pressing when we consider a non-existent object because this implies that an object both exists and does not exist, a problem that Quine dubbed, "Plato's beard," of which he said,

> The is the old Platonic riddle of nonbeing. Nonbeing must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not? This tangled doctrine might be nicknamed Plato's beard; historically it has proved tough, frequently dulling the edge of Occam's razor. (Quine, 1948, p. 21)

Russell and Quine thought that the problem of Plato's beard arises because we treat existence as a predicate when we should not.[143] This idea has been expressed by Kant when he said,

> Thus when I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates I like (even in its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing is. For otherwise what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists. Even if I think in a thing every reality except one, then the missing reality does not get added when I say the thing exists, but it exists encumbered with just the same defect as I have thought in it; otherwise something other than what I thought would exist. (Kant, 1781/1998, pp. 567–568 [A600/B628])

Kant's point is that predicating the existence of an object *adds nothing* to the description of that object which is not already described by other properties the object has. If describing something as existent adds nothing to the characterisation of that thing, then "existence" is not a genuine predicate of individuals, and an object neither lacks nor possesses the property. If existence is not a predicate, then any theory of time that accepts the principle should be rejected.[144]

[143] The opposition to existence as a predicate has come from quarters that oppose the reality of mythical creatures, fictional characters, and other chimera. For example, see Russell (1905/2005) and Quine (1948) which are directly critical of Meinong's theory of non-existent objects. For an object to be physical, it must have a location and extension in space. By definition, a non-existent object exemplifies neither of these features. For example, Pegasus, Sherlock Holmes, and the golden mountain possess neither spatial location nor extension. However, if we accept that "Pegasus," "Sherlock Holmes," and "the golden mountain" do refer to the individuals they name, then it is sensible to think that existence is a predicate.

[144] Others have argued that existence is not a predicate. For instance, Frege (1884/1953) and Russell (1918/2010) held that existence is not a first-order property that individuals possess. Instead, they believed that existence is a second-order property that arises due to the instantiation of other first-order properties. For Frege, existence is a property of concepts; for Russell, existence is a property of propositional functions. On another account, McGinn (2000) thinks that existence is a property of properties. For a thorough contemporary defence of the second-order property view, see Williams (1981, 1992); for a recent analysis supporting it, see Katzav (2008).

Contrary to Kant's view, let's now consider why we might believe that existence is a property. First, take an actual object: Jacinda Ardern. If existence is a genuine property, then it follows that if Jacinda Ardern exists, then Jacinda Ardern instantiates the property of *being an existent* or, simply, *existence*. The object is prior to the property. Therefore, Jacinda Ardern is prior to the property of *existence*.

Next, consider the fictional character Sherlock Holmes. If Sherlock Holmes does not exist, then Sherlock Holmes does not instantiate the property of *existence*. It is possible that there is a world that includes the object *Jacinda Ardern,* but in that world, Jacinda Ardern lacks the property of *existence*. Thus, *existence* is a contingent property.

Two critical conclusions follow from this explanation: characterising an object as "existent" does add something to its description, and *existence* is not necessary to an object's being at all.

However, even if one is willing to countenance a pluralist ontology (*cp*. McDaniel (2017)), it seems *prima facie* contradictory to argue the *being* of something that does not exist.[145] To say of some object that it both *is* and *is not* defies the principle of bivalence.[146] Nevertheless, only those who oppose Meinong believe that it is contradictory to accept non-existent objects.

[145] Despite this, some philosophers have offered arguments for at least two modes of being. For example, Kris McDaniel (2017) has said, "In metaphysics, we often focus on the question of what there is, and what it is like. This can lead us to consider the different ways in which things can be present in the world, or the different modes of being that they can have. Some things are physical objects, some things are mental states or events, some things are abstract entities like numbers or sets, and so on. Each of these ways of being is distinct, and it is important to understand how they relate to one another and how they fit into a broader metaphysics of existence" (p. 1). Although McDaniel does not explicitly mention a non-existent mode of being in the above quote, he distinguishes different modes of being, some involve *concreta,* and some involve *abstracta*. Philosophers like McDaniel may or may not condone the reality of non-existent objects. For example, a pluralist may accept that existence and being are distinct but deny that *there are* non-existent objects. This kind of ontological pluralist might hold that there are multiple modes of existence that an object may occupy, such as *abstract* and *concrete* modes; however, there is no non-existent mode of being. For example, Bigelow (1996), Bourne (2006), and Ingram (2019) hold this view (even though they understand these modes as actual existence), which I discussed in Chapter 4.

[146] This complaint led Quine (1948) to argue that trying to distinguish between *being* and *existence* is pointless.

Meinongians who accept multiple modes of being argue that the contradiction can be avoided by distinguishing between *being* and existence, which we believe comes out in Meinong's (1960) well known statement, "There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" (p. 83). Once we appreciate that being and existence are different modes of being, we can understand this expression: "*there are* objects of which it is true that there *exist* no such objects." [147] By distinguishing between what *there is* and what *exists*, the contradiction fails to arise because objects may possess various modes of being. Non-existence is not a singular concept equivalent in meaning to "the negation of existence." Adopting this reading of Meinong is important to my theory because, like Yourgrau (1987), I distinguish between different kinds of non-existent objects.[148] Some of them will exist, some have existed, while most of them never have and never will.

I now turn to a strategy that employs multiple modes of being and distinguishes between different types of properties, clarifying why accepting non-existent objects into the ontology need not lead to contradiction. This discussion will illuminate why a theory that employs multiple modes of being, mine included, need not be viewed as *painting itself into a corner* from the outset.

One way to distinguish between different modes of being is an approach that involves two strategies introduced by Ernst Mally (1912) with respect to abstract objects. Such strategies may be deployed to explain other non-existent objects, too.

[147] Certainly, not all Meinongians will agree with this reading. For example, Paoletti professes Meinongianism but rejects the distinction between being and existence (*Cf.* Paoletti, 2016). Meinongians of this kind advocate for literally being-less objects. Nonetheless, under their account we can still differentiate between objects that exist and those that do not. Out of all the objects, only some of them exist.

[148] Yourgrau (1987) makes a more forceful distinction than I do between non-existent objects because he claims that some of them, like fictional objects, are nothing, while past and future objects are something. He has said, "The dead, then, we can now see, are not nothing. But what are they being contrasted with? What is nothing? (If I may be allowed to put it thus.) A partial answer is: Pegasus is nothing—it is nothing at all, since there is no such thing as Pegasus. My ontology is thus more Parmenidean than Meinongian. Names in fiction (and myth), I believe, are not genuine names for specific nonexistents, but "mock-names" with which we pretend to refer to existent objects" (p. 91).

The first strategy distinguishes between two distinct kinds of properties: ones that are part of the nature of something and one's that are external to its nature.[149] This distinction, introduced by Mally and later incorporated by Meinong, is commonly referred to as the nuclear/extra-nuclear property distinction.[150] Terrence Parsons (1978), who defends a theory of non-existent objects, also adopts this distinction (pp. 138–142). Following this terminology, a nuclear property is a property that an object possesses in all possible worlds. Parsons (1978) highlights the obvious point that "p = q if and only if it is necessary that p and q apply to the same individuals" (p. 138). Consequently, if world *w* has an individual exemplifying a property, *p*, and world w_1 has an individual exemplifying property, *q*, *p*, and *q* are identical properties if they both represent the nuclear attributes of the individual concerned. So, one might ask, what makes a property a nuclear attribute of an individual?

Distinguishing between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties is straightforward enough. Take an object, *x*, along with all of *x*'s other-worldly counterparts and suppose the set of all possible worlds where *x* and *x*'s counterparts occur. In each of these worlds, *x* and *x*'s counterparts will exemplify a range of both nuclear and extra-nuclear properties. Nuclear properties that are exemplified by *x* in one world will be exemplified by *x*'s counterparts in every other possible world where *x*'s counterparts occur. However, extra-nuclear properties exemplified by *x* or *x*'s counterparts in one world will not necessarily be exemplified in other worlds where *x* or *x*'s counterparts occur; extra-nuclear properties may vary among counterparts.

To clarify the nature of nuclear and extra-nuclear properties, consider the case where *x* has one more or one less property than *x*'s counterparts. Suppose a world where *x* exemplifies a property, *R*, which is not exemplified by *x*'s counterparts in any other world. In this case, *R*

[149] *Cf.* Nelson (2022).
[150] See, Findlay (1963, p. 176) for a note on Meinong's adoption of this distinction from Mally.

must be an extra-nuclear property of *x*. Furthermore, suppose a world where an object, *z*, possesses all the nuclear properties possessed by *x* (and *x*'s counterparts) bar one property, *R'*. In this case, either *R'* is a nuclear property, and *z* is a distinct object from *x* (and *x*'s counterparts), or *R'* is merely an extra-nuclear property, and *z* is a counterpart of *x*. We can formalise this,

If *R'* is a nuclear property of *x*, then *z* is not a counterpart of *x*.

Or

If *z* is a counterpart of *x*, then R' is an extra-nuclear property of *x*.

First, the approach purports to provide a solution to some of the problems discussed earlier. According to Parsons (1978, 1980), only nuclear properties determine the nature of an object. Conversely, extra-nuclear properties do not determine an object's nature. This explanation allows one to restrict the naïve comprehension principle to conditions involving only nuclear predicates. In so doing, the idea is that problematic properties, like *existence*, are regarded as merely extra-nuclear, so they are beyond the scope of the naïve comprehension principle. In other words, an object may be determined by its nuclear properties, and since existence is not a nuclear property, an object does not need to be existent for it to be determined as an individual.

The distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties closely parallels the distinction between essential and accidental properties, though there are subtle differences. Both distinctions help to identify which properties are fundamental to an object's nature (nuclear and essential) versus those that are extrinsic to it, or at least dependent on external conditions (extra-nuclear and accidental). While the nuclear/extra-nuclear distinction is commonly connected to Meinongian object theory, classifying properties of both existent and non-existent objects, the essential/accidental property distinction is primarily connected to

modal discourse. It addresses whether properties are necessary (essential) or contingent (accidental) for an object's identity across possible worlds, and commonly involves some kind of existence condition.

Second, the nuclear/extra-nuclear properties strategy allows us to avoid the problem of incomplete objects. An object may have only one nuclear property, but it may have many extra-nuclear properties. Returning to an example I mentioned earlier: the object that *has exactly one property* which is *being a philosopher* would have exactly one nuclear property, namely *being a philosopher,* and at least one extra-nuclear property: *having exactly one nuclear property* which completes the characterisation of the object without giving rise to a paradox.

The second strategy is what Mally (1912) has called "determining and satisfying," and Zalta (1983, 1988) has called "encoding and exemplifying."[151] This approach distinguishes two modes of predication. Exemplifying a property is akin to what is called instantiating a property. On this strategy, the naïve comprehension principle ranges over a single class of properties, but the class of properties may be divided into two distinct categories: exemplified by existent objects or *exemplified properties* and not exemplified by existent objects or *encoded properties*.[152] An object which occupies an abstract or otherwise non-existent mode of being may encode a property that is never exemplified. For example, Sherlock Holmes encodes the property of *being married to Irene Adler*. However, this property can never be exemplified since Irene Adler is fictional. Sherlock Holmes also *encodes* the property of *being a detective*, but unlike *being married to Irene Adler* this property can be existentially instantiated. For example, the present National Manager of Organised Crime in New Zealand, Virginia Le Bas, *exemplifies* the property because she is a detective. Lastly, the first female detective in the

[151] This distinction has also been discussed by Hector-Neri Castañeda (1978; 1989) who called it "internal and external predication;" William Rapaport (1978), who called it "constituency and exemplification" and Kit Fine (1982b) who called it "implicit and explicit predication."
[152] For Zalta's explanation of the distinction between encoding and exemplifying, see Zalta (1988, p. 16f.).

Chicago police force, Alice Clement, *encodes* the property because she is no longer alive, and so she is not existentially instantiated to exemplify the property even though she did when she was alive. The point is that non-existent objects, like existent objects, really do possess the properties ascribed to them because they encode those properties. And in light of the exemplifying/encoding distinction this does not lead to contradictions or paradoxes.

The distinction between exemplified and encoded properties allows for the round-square to be both round and square because it encodes the properties of roundness and of squareness. The round-square does not exemplify these properties because no existent object simultaneously instantiates *being square* and *being round*. According to Zalta, the principle of noncontradiction only applies to exemplified properties and not to encoded ones. Hence, the encoding and exemplifying strategy resolves many of the problems mentioned earlier due to the naïve comprehension principle.

In closing, Zalta's strategy offers a way to make sense of the claim that a past object may have properties even if it does not exist. We can say that the properties of non-existent past objects are not exemplified but instead encoded by these objects. Consequently, the notion that properties are existence entailing is rejected. Furthermore, Zalta's strategy is semantically and logically coherent, so one cannot reject it for the reason that it is not. This means that serious presentists and other opponents of theories espousing non-existent objects must reject Meinongian views on other grounds. Nevertheless, the ontological cost of these views is admitting non-existent objects into the ontology.

5.3 Meinongian Presentism and the Question of the Past

Despite Parsons' and Zalta's strategies of distinguishing between different kinds of properties, which avoid the contradictions that appear to follow from an ontology including non-existent objects, the apparently contradictory nature of non-existent objects may entice one to reject

theories involving them, i.e., if one rejects the nuclear/extra-nuclear property distinction or the strategy of restricting the scope of the naïve comprehension principle. The apparent existence of these contradictions has led philosophers, like Quine, to reject theories espousing non-existent objects. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the problems are insignificant to the question of the past because the past and past objects are unlike nonexistent (*nichtsein*) objects. I will briefly explain why these problems are not significant in a temporal setting.

True statements about the past do not refer to objects possessing any problematic qualities that give rise to the aforementioned problems.[153] The past has a complete, fixed and determinate nature. It should not then be a question whether past objects have contradictory properties or are incomplete. Moreover, if existence is a predicate, then the past and past objects can be non-existent without generating the problem of Plato's beard. "The past does not exist" means that the past lacks the property of *existence*; it does not imply a binary opposition to existence. Because we can overcome Plato's beard, and because the past has its own unique mode of being (or is simply *being-less*), characterised by completeness and immutability, there are no opportunities to align the problems of paradox and contradiction facing many non-existent objects with MP.

Meinongians can respond to the problems of absence, including reference, truthmaking, and negative existentials, by appealing to non-existent past objects as the referents of names and statements about the past. "Hillary climbed Everest" is true because there is a non-existent past event such that the non-existent Hillary has climbed the non-existent Everest. "Edmund

[153] One wrinkle would come from statements that refer to statements in the past about contradictory objects. For example, the statement "Meinong referred to the round-square" is about both the past and a contradictory object. This can be ironed out in two ways. First, we can appeal to the nuclear/extra-nuclear property distinction. Second, if one holds steadfast to a denial of non-existent objects because they are contradictory, then we can simply agree to exclude contradictory objects from the ontology. This is the strategy Yourgrau (1987) takes. Their existence has no bearing on past objects anyway because past objects do not involve contradictory properties any more than present objects do. I would go so far as to argue that past objects are even less predisposed to contradictions than present objects are.

Hillary" refers to the non-existent past object, *Edmund Hillary.* And "Hillary does not exist" is true because that object does not possess the property of *existence.*

A concern may arise because it might seem that there is no way to distinguish a truth about a non-existent past object from one about a non-existent fictional object. For example, what marks the difference between "Hillary existed" and "Sherlock Holmes existed"? (One is true; the other is not.) Clearly, the answer lies in the fact that Hillary once existed whereas Sherlock Holmes never did. But how is this fleshed out in ontological terms? Do we require past-tensed properties in this account as well, or a non-existent past event of Hillary existing?

One answer is that Hillary possesses the property of *being past* while Sherlock Holmes possesses the property of *being fictional*, highlighting the need to distinguish between distinct kinds of non-existent objects or distinct modes of non-existence. On this account, existence amounts to a property that Hillary possessed but no longer does, entailed by his *pastness*. In contrast, Sherlock Holmes never possessed existence, which is entailed by his *being fictional*. Consequently, *pastness* as a property ontologically grounds truths about non-existent past objects such as "Hillary existed," distinguishing them clearly from truths about fictional objects.

The entailment arises from the set of events constituting a particular world, establishing the dependency from *pastness* to the truth of Hillary's prior existence, making it unnecessary to posit a non-existent past event of Hillary existing. *Pastness* grounds truths about Hillary's prior existence by anchoring him in that world. Accordingly, existence is a property that Hillary must have possessed in virtue of *being past*. This allows truths about Hillary's past existence to hold without needing an existent counterpart.

I have shown that Meinongian theories face several critical challenges requiring sophisticated responses. The purpose of raising these challenges has been to show what

motivates actualists and serious presentists to reject theories that implicate non-existent objects, which may be boiled down to their assessment that such views lead to paradoxes and contradictions. However, as I have said, many of the problems that give rise to this rejection do not apply in a temporal setting. It has been vital to show that Meinongian theories can be both semantically and logically coherent because the central thesis statement of this thesis is that only the past exists, which implies that the present and future are non-existent. Furthermore, while past objects conceived of as non-existent do not face most of the paradoxes and contradictions I have discussed—because their nature is determinate and complete—this may not be the case for present and future objects. For this reason, it has been essential to demonstrate that ascribing non-existent being to them need not inherently entail contradictions.

Although I have painted MP in a favourable light, a critical flaw with the theory remains, whichever understanding of non-existence we adopt, i.e., subsistence or *being-less-ness*. I contend that it is essential to distinguish between different kinds of non-existent objects.[154] If the past is *being-less*, then it is like any other non-existent thing. If the past possesses a mode of non-existence, then which kind of non-existence does it possess? Routley/Sylvan has told us that past times are universals, relations to be precise, so they have a necessary kind of subsistence. For example, when we speak of a past event like The Battle of Waterloo, we entail a relation of *being past* between that event and ourselves at the present time of utterance. However, when we speak of a future event, we must equally well entail a similarly subsistent relation with a non-existent future event. Hence, past and future relations, as well as past and future objects, are similarly non-existent. Nevertheless, we may distinguish their specific modes of being because the past is closed, unchanging and immutable, while the present is open, changing and mutable. Assuming that the past and future have different modes

[154] This is highlighted by the discussion of Hinchliff in Chapter 2, and also by Yourgrau's view in this chapter.

of non-existence goes a way toward avoiding (mistakenly) conflating their ontological status. Nonetheless, I will argue that it does not go far enough.

The explanation that the past and future are non-existent, and the present is existent does not hold up under scrutiny because, although a distinction between the past, present, and future is made, both the past and the future are deemed to have a non-existent mode of being (or they are simply *being-less*), which contrasts them with the existent present. The mistake lies in where the point of contrast is defined. If the past is fixed and immutable and the future is open and changing, then the future is more like the present than it is like the past. The present and the future are both subject to change.

One may counter that the past and future are not concrete while the present is concrete. However, this exposes an error in reasoning. Just because we cannot access the past or future, it does not necessarily follow that they are not concrete. We do not demand that we can access a present object to determine that it is concrete, and neither should we demand that we can access past or future objects to determine their status.

In Chapter 7, I will also argue that the mental representations we assume to be of the present, depicting the existent world as it exists independently from our representations of it, involve representations of the past—so far as they depict existent reality. Mental representations of the existent external world cannot arise simultaneously with that which they represent. Therefore, what we perceive as a present mental representation of the existent external world actually involves an anticipation, much as a thought about the future does.[155]

[155] This idea has some empirical grounding in the predictive processing account of perception, which Jakob Hohwy (2013) describes: "What you experience now is given in your top-down predictions of sensory input, rather than the bottom-up [sensory] signal" (p. 48). Andy Clark (2014) elaborates, stating: "Each layer in these [cognitive] systems thus displays two functionally distinct properties. It encodes how it takes the world to be, and it registers mismatches between those 'takings' and predictions coming from the layer above. Mismatches flow forward as error signals to the level above, while its best guesses about the state of the world flow downward as predictions to the layer below" (pp. 24–25). This aligns with the argument in Chapter 7, where I contend that what we assume to be representations of the present involve anticipations.

Any change that we perceive in the present reflects a non-existent mode of openness which is distinct from the closed mode of the past.

Combined, these issues lead me to conclude that, although Meinongian theory can offer a coherent description of an ontology including non-existent objects, MP makes a fundamental mistake by determining the past and future non-existent, and the present existent.

Conclusion

The chapter has focused on MP and Meinong's object theory, the view that existence is not a necessary condition for an object's having properties or standing in relations. It is the foundation of non-serious presentism, of which MP is the most well-known form. According to Yourgrau's version of MP, which I have focused on, the non-existent past (and future) possesses a non-existent mode of being, which I referred to as "subsistence."[156] This allows the past and past objects to have properties and stand in relations, despite their non-existence. MPs claim to resolve the problems of absence by appealing to non-existent past objects as the referents and truthmakers for statements about the past. The naïve comprehension principle was discussed to elucidate a motivation for rejecting Meinongian theories. This principle implies that for any set of properties, there is a set of all objects that satisfy those properties, leading to charges that Meinongian theories lead to contradictions. Notably, the question arose about how an object can both exist and not exist. The notion of existence as a property was discussed and I introduced two distinct strategies: Parsons', which distinguishes between different kinds of properties, and Zalta's, which distinguishes two modes of predication, as a means of avoiding contradictory outcomes. This distinction also helps us to understand how past objects can possess properties, even if those objects do not exist. Despite these solutions,

[156] I highlight again that Paoletti (2016) is a Meinongian presentist who rejects the idea of a non-existent mode of being. Nevertheless, he does subscribe to a non-actualist view and distinguishes between objects that possess *existence* and objects that lack it.

the problems of contradiction do not provide a reason to reject MP because the past is not like any of the problematic objects mentioned. Even if we treat past objects as non-existent, they do not exemplify contradictory properties because the past is closed and complete. Instead, these issues only emphasise the need to distinguish between objects that have existed in time and objects that have never existed. Nevertheless, I challenged MP on the basis that the view incorrectly determines the past and future non-existent and the present existent. If the present and future are alike while the past is distinct, then the point of contrast is mistaken and the explanation from MP fails. This chapter contributes to my overall thesis by highlighting that we can make sense of strategies employing non-existent objects, even if MP itself fails to provide an accurate characterisation of the past, and by extension, fails as a theory of time. In the next chapter, I will consider intentionality to illuminate an approach to the question of the past that sheds light on the connection between our thoughts about the past and external reality, especially the reality of the past.

Chapter 6: Intentionality and the Ontology of Time

Introduction

Chapter 6 approaches the question of the past by considering the relation of intentionality, which can be understood preliminarily as a thought's *directedness* towards an object. I consider the relationship between a mental presentation of the past and the objective or external reality it represents or refers to that necessitates that what is presented to the mind is representative of the series of events that occurred prior to the present—the reality of the past. First, I will emphasise the importance of understanding the relationship between a thought about the past and the object towards which it directs, highlighting how our thoughts may represent the past. Next, I introduce the *puzzle of thinking about things that do not exist* and the *puzzle of thinking about the* past. Both puzzles underscore the problem of establishing *what* thoughts representing non-existent or non-present objects direct towards. Next, I introduce Franz Brentano's theory of intentionality to elucidate the connection between a thought and the object it is directed at, which Brentano says is an *immanent* or intentional object. I consider the nature of intentional objects and how they are related to objects in the external world. Following Kazimierz Twardowski, I distinguish between acts of thought, mental contents, and the objects that mental contents represent, shedding light on Brentano's thesis. The chapter then introduces Arkadiusz Chrudzimski's research on theories of mediating entities, including representational and object theories, illuminating some of the challenges facing representational theories and favouring an intentional object account. Finally, I argue that presentism, GGB and GMSV cannot account for mental representations of the past. Eternalism, GB and MSV better account for mental representations of the past but because these theories do not distinguish the ontological nature of the past from that of the present, or future, they fail to fully explain the representational content of thoughts about the past.

6.1 From Mind to World

We may take thoughts about the past for granted because we may not fully comprehend the relationship between our thoughts (the mind) and objective or external reality (the world). We may not appreciate the relation between thoughts and the external world necessary to determine that our thoughts about the past represent external reality and not something unreal. If the object of a thought about the past is mind-dependent, what is its relationship to external reality? If the object is objectively real, how is it related to the contents of our minds?

Suppose the object of a thought about the past is like that of the present. Then we have an excellent reason to evaluate our thoughts similarly in both cases. On the other hand, if the objects of thoughts about the past and present are distinct, this suggests a reason to evaluate our thoughts about the past and present differently. If the objects of thoughts about the past are less closely connected to reality than those of the present, we may question the objective reality of what thoughts about the past represent.

One way to inform these questions is to compare the objects of thoughts about the present with the objects of thoughts about the past. First, consider two statements:

A: "The Sky Tower is in Auckland."

B: "The Crystal Palace was in London."

Next, consider the thoughts that give rise to *A* and *B*. What are the objects towards which each thought directs? What makes us think that *A* is about the present and *B* is about the past? Instead of analysing the meanings of the statements, let's consider the relationship between our thoughts and the objects those thoughts are about.

The objects that thoughts may be about make up the ontology. Van Inwagen and Zimmerman (2008) believe that the object of study in metaphysics is, "the world" and "*absolutely everything there is*, not just everything there is within the universe of space and

time we inhabit" (p. xiii). Dummett (2006) agrees: "the fundamental question that metaphysics strives to answer is 'what is there?', or, expressed more sententiously, 'Of what does reality consist?'" (p. 1).

Few ontological theories have cross-examined the examples that they employ to promote their views. Many of the statements analysed in ontology do not concern presently existing things. Even Russell's example from "On Denoting" (1905/2005) wanting to know about the informativeness of identity examined the historical example of the author of Waverly. If the author of Waverly was Scott, then Scott is Scott. There is nothing informative about the definite description. The most mundane examples in ontology and metaphysics ask us to consider the past, assuming that we understand towards what a reference to a past object refers.

The question of the past concerns what the past is, which is suggested by the events and objects that function as truthmakers for true propositions about the past, and what grounds our references and thoughts about the past. Our thoughts about the past are fundamental in each case and our judgements may have the past as its object, which means we will need an explanation for the relationship between our thoughts and the past. The analysis to which the question gives rise should illuminate how we conceive of the past to determine whether the thoughts that we have about the past represent a reality of the past that is independent of our memories or recollections of it.

On some theories of time, the past may be more like fiction than reality. This suggests that an evaluation of the past and its contents is no different than an evaluation of fiction and its contents. The two would be deeply connected if not identical. This offends our sensibility about the reality our thoughts about the past enjoy because we believe they refer to something more ontologically robust and significant than mere fiction. For this reason, a theory of time

should permit a distinction between the object of a thought about the past and the object of a thought about fiction.

If, however, a theory of time cannot distinguish the reality of the past from an object of fiction, then there is reason to doubt that it gets the explanation of the past correct. For example, the Lucretian property, *being the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon*, which Bigelow believes is characteristic of the reality of the past supervenes on a place in the world even though nothing at that place can be reasonably said to presently exemplify the properties involved with the event itself. This process of abstracting from a set of exemplified properties to conceptualise non-exemplified ones is exactly the one taken when we think about fiction. For instance, consider the property, *being the place where Sherlock Holmes lived*. Similar to the Lucretian property, this property is derived from a set of exemplified properties. Neither Sherlock Holmes nor 221B Baker Street exists. The non-exemplified property represents something unreal. We cannot distinguish in a non-arbitrary way the reality of the past, Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, from the unreality of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Lucretian presentists must explain what distinguishes Lucretian properties about the past from those of fictions and how we can differentiate a thought representing past reality from a thought representing fiction.[157]

Answering the question of the past demands an explanation of what is required to ensure that the contents of the mind represent external reality. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the contents of thoughts, the objects they represent, and the

[157] This challenge extends to other presentists who invoke surrogate entities without any apparent ontological grounding in the objects or parts of the world purported to exemplify them. For instance, just as one might claim that, in the distant future, when the Earth has died, a region of empty space exemplifies the property of *being the place where Caesar crossed the Rubicon*, so too might one claim that an *ersatz* time or abstract thisness represents the fact. This undermines the notion of a grounding connection between objects and properties. It is the event itself that grounds the property, not a region of empty space in the distant future or an abstract time or property with no apparent connection to actuality. For a thought to be grounded in reality, it must represent something real—which requires both a representation and that which is represented. If there is nothing in reality that a thought can be reasonably said to represent, then nothing distinguishes the substantiveness of a representation of the past from that of fiction.

relation between the two. Clarifying this relationship helps to explain how one can distinguish between a thought representing the reality of the past and a mental construct that does not accurately reflect external reality. Analysing what is required for a thought to amount to a representation of the reality of the past illuminates the nature of the objects, properties and relations that are implicated.

Let us contrast thoughts about reality with thoughts about non-existent things. Some thoughts are about things that exist. For example, a thought about "The Sky Tower" is about something existent. Explaining what a thought about The Sky Tower refers to is straightforward. The Sky Tower exists, so we can point to its physical instantiation to indicate what we are thinking about.

However, many thoughts are about things that do not exist. For example, we can think about a unicorn. A unicorn is a mythical object. All mythical objects do not exist. Hence, unicorns do not exist. That there are no existent unicorns does not mean that we cannot think about unicorns. Even though unicorns do not exist, a *unicorn* can be an object of our thought. If a *unicorn* can be an object of thought, it is something. Consequently, even though, strictly speaking, a *unicorn* does not exist, there is a sense in which it does exist because only if it did not exist in any sense could it not be the object of a thought. This brings us to the *puzzle of thinking about things that do not exist*. This puzzle arises when we realise that a thought about a non-existent object implies that there is something the thought is about.

In his paper, "On What There Is," Quine (1948) introduces this problem as "the old Platonic riddle of non-being," stating that "Non-being must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not?" (p. 21). Our attention is drawn to the contradiction that arises when one asserts that a non-existent object, something that may be thought about but that does not exist in external reality, is nothing. Something that is nothing lacks all characteristics, so it is

incorrect even to call it "something." But a non-existent object that we may think about is presented to the mind as something. Therefore, even though it may be correct to determine such an object non-existent in the strict sense, it would be wrong to conclude that it is nothing. For this reason, such objects "must in some sense be."

Because the *something* presented to the mind does not correspond with anything in the external world, Quine concludes that we ought not be ontologically committed to the objective existence of non-existent objects to explain thoughts about them. Instead, we can pragmatically explain thoughts about non-existent objects by appealing to imaginary scenarios such as possible worlds or fiction. Moreover, Quine thinks we can conceive of imaginary scenarios as mental constructs with no mind-independent existence in themselves. Instead, they are characterisations of different ways the world could be. On Quine's view, a thought about a non-existent object presents a negation of the way the world is.

We can characterise the non-existent objects we think about by expressing the properties presented in thoughts about them.[158] Yet, these properties are not instantiated by an individual in the world. Positing a non-existent mode of being goes beyond what we can know based on our observations and the assumptions that empiricist philosophers like Quine think are justified. Nevertheless, we cannot apply the exact same reasoning to an analysis of thoughts about the past because the past is unlike fiction; the past did exist while fiction never did and never will. The fundamental difference lies in that past objects once existed, entailing a substantive ontological connection to reality, whereas fictional or mythical objects never existed, so they lack such a connection. Thoughts about the past are intentionally related to the

[158] For example, even if a thought about a non-existent object is about something that does not exist externally and independently of one's thinking about it, we can share the content intersubjectively. My thought about unicorns and your thoughts about unicorns share at least two properties: *being a horse* and *being one-horned*. Even on Quine's account, a thought about a non-existent entity, Pegasus, is shared by those who have such a thought. Pegasus is said "to pegasize" (Quine, 1948, p. 27).

reality of the world, regardless of the past's existential status. In contrast, thoughts about fiction lack any intentional relation to substantive reality. This distinction implies that thoughts about the past require a substantive ontological ground, whereas thoughts about fiction do not.

Consider a thought about the past. As the puzzle above has shown, even a thought about a non-existent object is directed at something. On Quine's account, if our thinking is directed towards something non-existent, then our thinking does not represent external reality. A thought about the past is directed at something that no longer exists, indicating that a thought about the past does not represent external reality. Nevertheless, the past did exist suggesting that our thought about it is directed at something more closely connected to reality than a thought about fiction.

An object of our thought which is presently non-existent could be some event that occurred in the past or some object that existed in the past—independently of our minds. If these occurrences and objects do not exist, then our thoughts about the past are directed at a non-existent thing, just like our thoughts about fiction. Similar to the *puzzle of thinking about things that do not exist*, a challenge arises when we claim that the objects of our thoughts about the past no longer exist because the things that they direct towards are absent from the ontology. Call this the *puzzle of thinking about the past*.

The puzzle of thinking about the past reminds us of the problem of truthmaking. Just as it is not easy to explain the truthmaking relation between a non-existent truthmaker and its true proposition, we have difficulty explaining how our thinking may be directed at objects and events that existed in the past but no longer exist. Theories of time that deny the existence of the past have just as much a problem explaining how our thoughts may be directed toward past objects as they do accounting for the truthmakers for true propositions about the past.

The two problems highlight a need to identify the ontological status of the relation's *relata*. While we may appeal to surrogate entities to serve as truthmakers for statements about the past, surrogates fail to explain how a thought may be directed at a past object. Even if it may be acceptable that surrogates explain how a thought may be directed at a fiction, directing our thoughts at the past comes with a degree of objectivity that cannot be explained by the content of a thought about it in precisely the same terms as the object of a thought about fiction. That means something beyond the mind that is more substantive than expressions of fiction must ground a thought about the past.

The theory of intentional objects I will discuss shortly explains the *relata* of thoughts about non-existent individuals. It is a view that accepts intentional objects, entities that exist within the consciousness or that are mind-dependent. This explanation is one step further than serious presentists can offer for the *relata* of thoughts about the past. For instance, serious presentists would have to explain the *relata* of such thoughts by appealing to abstract entities that supervene on the present, even though the present does not exemplify the characterised properties. Intentionality theorists appeal to immanent or intentional objects to explain the positive characteristics depicted in thought. Nevertheless, they must still explain the relationship between intentional objects that represent reality and the external reality they represent.

I have outlined that analysing the relationship between thoughts about the past, the objects they direct towards, and the external world is essential to explain how mental content about the past may be related to the external world. This study informs our understanding and evaluation of the past because it may be an object of thought. However, the ontology must provide for a distinction between the objects of thoughts about the past and those of thoughts about fiction, or else the basis of one's beliefs about the past would be no more substantive than the basis of one's beliefs about fiction.

6.2 The Intentionality Relation

According to the intentionality thesis, mental states are about or directed at something: an intentional object.[159] For example, a thought about a bird flying over one's head is directed at a bird flying over one's head, while a thought about Munch's "The Scream" is directed towards that artwork. The canonical statement of intentionality comes from Franz Brentano:

> Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves. (Brentano, 1874/2015, pp. 92–93)

The view has at least three important characteristics. First, Brentano's intentionality thesis distinguished between an act of thinking or mental phenomenon (the psychological or epistemic thesis) and that towards which it is directed (the ontological thesis). Second, it

[159] Theories of intentional objects were popularised by Brentano (1874/2015), Meinong (1960), Husserl (1913/1983) and Ingarden (2014). They have been discussed by a wide range of philosophers, including Kripke (1980), Putnam (1975), and Searle (1983/2004; 1969/2012). Many authors trace the origins of discussions of intentionality back to Augustine, the Stoics, Aristotle, Plato, the Sophists, and Parmenides. Nevertheless, Brentano's work is a central focus of this chapter. For valuable comprehensive discussions of intentionality, see Crane (1998), and Knudsen (1988).

highlighted the directedness of conscious acts. Third, thoughts are directed at *immanent* objects, which we might also call the contents of thoughts.[160]

First, the intentionality thesis distinguishes between a thought and its content, and this distinction can be explained using an analogy. Just as a container is built to contain something, a thought is built to have or to be directed at content. Given this analogy, a thought and its content are distinct. This distinction seems robust because the notion of a thought without content is just as difficult to comprehend as the concept of a container that cannot have any content. Even though the past does not presently exist, there is something that constitutes the content of a thought about the past.

The second characteristic emphasises a thought's directedness towards a content. For example, when I see a road sign, my sight is directed at a road sign. Hence, *seeing* is an intentional relation where *seeing* is a thought's directedness toward something seen. Moreover, directedness is an essential characteristic of *seeing*, as the absence of directedness towards something seen entails the absence of any mental state involving *seeing*. On Brentano's account, all thoughts involve some form of directedness.

It is worthwhile to refute the idea that thoughts about the past may involve undirected mental states because if they did, there would be no need to consider what a thought about the past may be directed at. Brentano's intentionality thesis may be criticised because it may be argued that feelings and emotions are undirected mental states, implying that some mental states may be undirected. If a thought about the past is such a mental state, then it may be argued that such thoughts have no objects. John Searle (1983/2004) has argued, "Some, [but]

[160] Additionally, we can note that, fourth, a "reference to a content" is the defining characteristic of mental phenomena and, fifth, the defining characteristic distinguishes mental phenomena from physical phenomena. The fifth characteristic is that intentionality, which is directedness towards a content, is "the mark of the mental" (Crane, 2014, p. 91). Any phenomenon lacking directedness toward a content is not a mental phenomenon. I will not discuss these characteristics.

not all mental states and events have intentionality" (p. 1). A typical example of a non-intentional mental state is pain. The mental experience of pain may lack an object because there may be nothing towards which an experience of pain is directed. Even emotional states, like happiness, pleasure, elation, and sadness, have been said to be undirected mental states. Louise Antony has argued:

> while mental items like beliefs and desires clearly have objects or contents (an idea is an idea of something, and a desire is a desire for something), things like pleasures, pains, moods and emotions don't, on the face of it, appear to be about anything at all. (Antony, 1997, p. 25)

However, Patricia Greenspan (2014) has argued, "the intentionality, or "aboutness," of emotions survives in cases commonly thought of as "objectless." […] Such feelings retain their difference from genuinely objectless *sensations*" (p. 16). Greenspan's (2014) argument says that emotions, feelings, and pain are directed toward an "internal object," "an evaluative proposition" or "object of feeling," which serve as an "external object." The object of the emotion or feeling is "the proposition that *amounts to* its internal object" (p. 16).

Nevertheless, Searle's appeal to pain and emotions as undirected mental states raises an interesting question for thoughts about the past. If pain or emotions are undirected mental presentations, then are thoughts about the past similarly undirected mental presentations? Pain and emotions may be undirected mental states, characterised purely by subjective feeling within one's body. A thought about the past is not purely subjective in the same way. A mental state about the past aims at an event or object, it is the representation of a state of affairs that once existed but that does not now exist. Therefore, a thought about the past is not like an emotion or feeling like pain. Emotions and feelings need no object towards which they are directed for them to have an effect. Any thought about the past is a thought *about* something

that occurred in the past or an object that existed in the past. There is a clear object of thought. Therefore, thoughts about the past are intentional.

However, thoughts about the past differ in their directedness from thoughts about the present. While thoughts about the present direct towards objects that we assume to exist simultaneously with our thoughts, thoughts about the past direct towards objects that do not exist simultaneously with our thoughts. The idea of simultaneity is important because it implies that were we directly in front of the object of a thought about the present at the very moment the thought occurred, we would be able to directly perceive that object's existence. In contrast, there is no possibility of directly perceiving the object of a thought about the past. It is only possible to remember or conceive of the past. Hence, the directedness of thoughts about the present involve direct perception, or at least the possibility of direct perception, while the directedness of thoughts about the past involve memory or conception. This casts more doubt on the nature of the objects towards which our thoughts about the past direct.

The third characteristic is the *immanence* of the intentional object that a mental experience directs towards. Such an object is *intentionally inexistent*. It is incorrect to characterise a thought as simply being directed at a physical object because a physical object is not internal to a mental experience. By way of illustration, a physical bird cannot be the content of a thought about a bird, because a physical bird cannot exist within a mind. This characteristic leaves open the question of how the content of a thought represents something in the external world. Nonetheless, if intentional objects are immanent within mental experiences, then the immanent objects of thought about the past or non-existent things inexist in the consciousness similar to the immanent objects of thoughts about the present or existent things. Whether a thought is about the present or the past, or something existent or non-existent, the immanent objects of all thoughts are similarly inexistent in the mind. Yet, the fact that the immanent objects of thoughts about existent and non-existent things both similarly inexist in

the mind should not be taken as implying that we cannot distinguish between their objective reality.

Consider the different kinds of objects that immanent objects may represent. A thought about Mount Everest is about the object *Mount Everest*; a thought about the number 2 is about the abstract object *number 2*, and a thought about a round square is about an impossible object *a round square*. Hence, an immanent object may represent something physical, abstract, or impossible. The past is not impossible, but neither is it merely abstract. On the other hand, if the past no longer exists, then it is no longer physical. So, what *kind* of object does the immanent object of a thought about the past represent?

Exploring the content of mental acts or thoughts about the past, present, and future considering Brentano's intentionality thesis raises an interesting question about their content: *are thoughts about the past, present, and future directed at objects of thought that "in-exist" in the mind?* Brentano's description would have us believe that all mental acts are directed at immanent objects. This would include objects in time, too, suggesting these objects are similar.

However, *being past* characterises the immanent object of a thought about the past. The content of that thought represents something that one could have directly perceived or experienced at an earlier time, but which it is no longer possible to directly perceive or experience. *Being present* characterises the object of a thought about the present. The content of one's thought about the present represents something that it is possible to directly perceive or experience. And *being future* characterises the object of a thought about the future. The content of thought about the future represents something that has not yet come to be, so it may or may not be possible to one day directly observe or experience.

Additionally, a thought about the past represents something fixed and immutable, and thoughts about the present or about the future represent something changing and mutable.

Despite the equal inexistence of the immanent objects representing these different times, these distinct characterisations suggest a difference between the contents of thought about the past, present, and future.

If there was no difference in the representational relations between the immanent objects of thought in time and the external world, then thoughts about the past, present, and future would be indistinguishable. They would all be fixed and immutable or changing and mutable. Of course, events and objects of the past cannot change, even if our thoughts about those events and objects do change. This is at least one way in which thoughts about the past differ from those of the present and future. Isolating the mental content from an external world entails that all the events, past, present, and future, are not on an ontological par. However, this ignores the representational aspect of mental content that allows us to evaluate whether it is congruent with external reality. These distinctions lead us to question *how* our thoughts about the past, present, and future are connected to reality.

There are good reasons to argue that the four main theories of time do not appreciate the nature of the intentionality relation. According to serious presentism, present objects are sufficient to ontologically ground our thoughts about the past, while the past itself does not exist, which brings into question the objects towards which thoughts about the past are directed. This means that the intentionality relation is not representational, challenging our understanding of the relation between the object of thought and what exists independently of thought.

According to eternalism, GB, and MSV, the past exists, justifying intentionality as a representational relation. Yet, eternalism suggests that *pastness* is not an objective feature of reality, and the past, present and future are ontologically on a par. This is not how we perceive them, so intentionality still cannot be strictly representational.

GB says that the past is essentially ontologically on a par with the present even though we experience them differently, meaning intentionality is not a true representational relation.

Lastly, MSV suggests an ontological parity between the past, present, and future. It distinguishes the past from the preeminent present in virtue of the property of *presentness*, but it says the past and future similarly lack this preeminence. We however do not experience the past and future similarly, implying that intentionality causes a misrepresentation of the external world. However, if the intentionality relation is truly representational, then our thoughts suggest a substantive difference between the past, present, and future that is not captured by these theories, providing a reason to doubt how they describe the past.

Having laid out the essential aspects of Brentano's thesis, let's turn to a critical analysis of the intentionality relation. This discussion explains the connection between a thought and the external world, elucidating the identity and nature of the objects or *relata* that may be involved in intentionality depending on how we understand the relation. The overall purpose of this discussion is to establish whether the ontologies posited by theories of time can adequately support the idea of an intentional connection between thoughts and the reality of the past.

Brentano claims thoughts are directed at objects that "in-exist." This inexistent content of thought is not an objective reality that exists independently of mental content. To understand how the inexistent mental content connects with objective reality, for example, consider the act of thinking about a present object, such as Jacinda Ardern. Brentano explained what the content of such an act is when he said, "In every act of consciousness, I have something as an object. "To have something as an object" = "being conscious of something."" (1874/2015, p. 281, fn. 1). The conscious act of thinking about Jacinda Ardern is directed toward its object; however,

whether this object includes the content of the thought is unclear as Brentano does not disambiguate between the two. We can represent this:

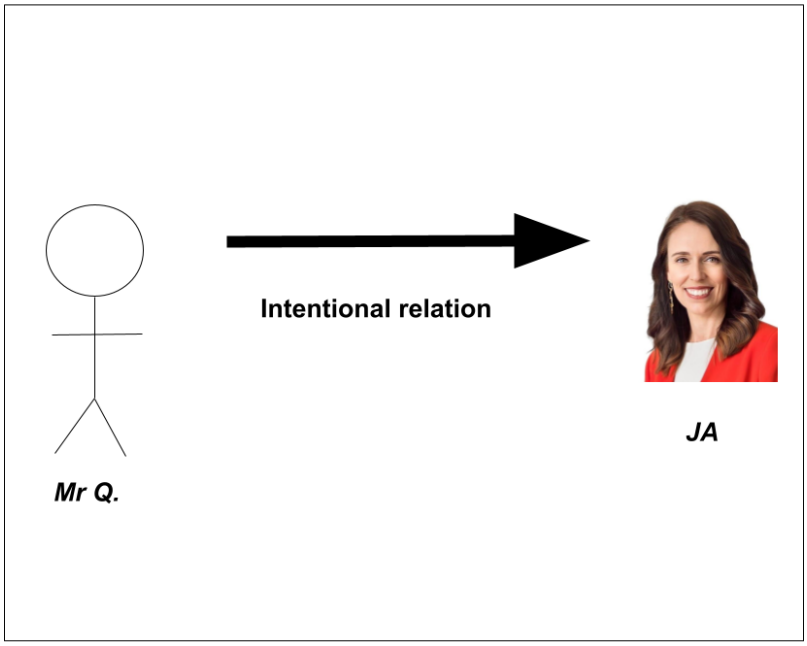

Figure 1. The folk model of intentionality[161]

In Figure 1, the arrow denotes the intentional directedness of *Mr. Q's* conscious act towards *Jacinda Ardern* ("*JA*"). Chrudzimski (2013b) has called this view the "folk theory of intentionality" (p. 190). This picture is too naïve because a physical object cannot be the content of a conscious act, but ideas may be. Ideas constitute consciousness rather than the physical objects that exist outside of the mind. *Jacinda Ardern*, the person, and Jacinda Ardern, the content of Mr *Q*'s conscious act, are distinct. The argument here is straightforward: Only mental phenomena can be the content of consciousness. Physical objects are not mental phenomena. Therefore, physical objects cannot be the content of consciousness. Consequently, we must distinguish between the content of a conscious act and a physical object to which it refers, which Figure 2 illustrates.

[161] Figures 1, 2, and 3 include the profile photo of Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand Labour Party, 2020).

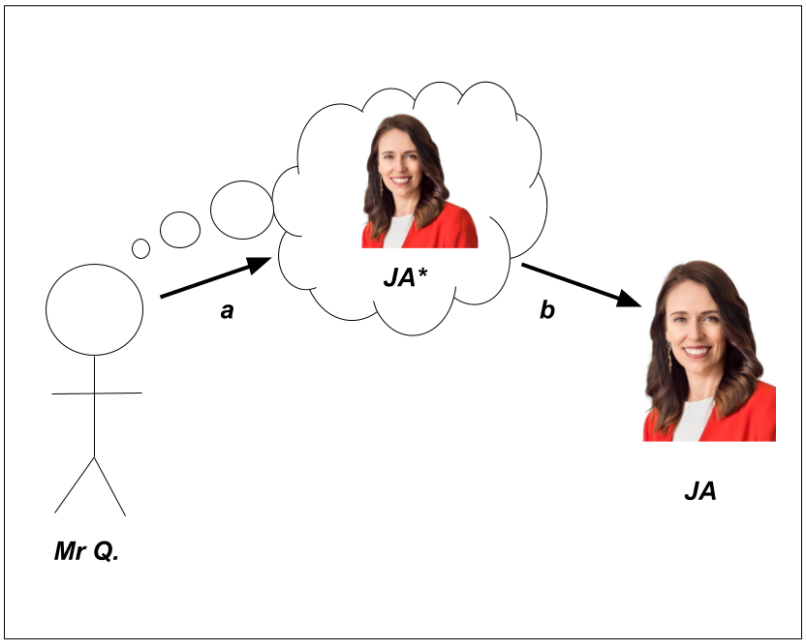

Figure 2. The Brentanian model of intentionality

Figure 2 is a more accurate account of Brentano's 1874 understanding of the intentionality relation than is *Figure 1*. The content of Mr *Q*'s consciousness is not the physical instantiation of *JA* but a mental representation of *JA*, namely *JA**. *a* is an intentional relation between *Mr. Q*'s conscious act and the content *JA**, while *b* expresses the representational relation between *JA** and *JA*. As the illustration suggests, *JA* is the target towards which Mr *Q's* conscious act aims.

Before going further, it is worth noting Searle's criticism of the Brentanian model of intentionality. Searle (1983/2004) complained that intentional objects require more than merely the mental objects contained in our thoughts about the world. Searle argued that the intentional directedness of mental acts requires there to be a representative relation between the content of one's thought and that which is represented (p. 17).

> In […] the case of intentional states, if there is no object that satisfies […] the representative content, then […] the intentional state cannot be satisfied. In such

> cases, […] there is no "intentional object" of the intentional state: if nothing satisfies the referential portion of the representative content then the intentional state does not have an intentional object. (Searle, 1983/2004, p. 17)

Searle (1983/2004) presented the following example to illustrate his notion of an intentional object: "if Bill admires President Carter, then the intentional object of his admiration is President Carter, the actual man and not some shadowy intermediate entity between Bill and the man" (pp. 16–17). Only an intentional object with an existent referent may satisfy the conditions represented in mental content. Searle and Brentano agree that intentionality is directedness towards an object, but they disagree on what may serve as an intentional object. While Brentano believes the content of thought may serve as the target of intentional mental acts, Searle believes only existent objects and events may serve as the target.

Searle has this view of intentional objects to escape an objection that Brentano's view faces. If Bill's admiration is directed at a mental object and not the actual man, *President Carter*, then it is not the case that Bill admires President Carter. Instead, Bill admires the mental object or a "shadowy intermediate." Brentanians must explain how Bill admires *President Carter* and not the intentional object of his admiration, a mental representation of *President Carter*. Searle denies that thoughts about non-existent or unreal things may serve as objects of intentional acts. He compares such thoughts to propositions whose truth conditions are not satisfied. Just as a false proposition does not correspond with a state of affairs, the content of a thought about something non-existent cannot represent or refer to an object.

One problem with Searle's view is that it means that a thought about something abstract or non-existent has no intentional object. Instead, such thoughts are either undirected or directed toward a mere belief. For example, mental states such as the belief that "2+2=4", or "a unicorn has one horn" either have no intentional object or are directed at one's own belief.

This is a false dichotomy. Thoughts about mathematical and mythical statements point at the content of thought. The content of thought may not represent something in the external world, but there is an intentional object towards which our thoughts are directed.

Even dreams or hallucinations are directed towards non-existent or mental objects. Dreams and hallucinations are directed mental states and their content is the content of one's dreams or hallucinations. The fact that these conditions do not refer to objects or events in the external world does not undermine the directedness of our thoughts towards them. For this reason, denying the directedness of thoughts about non-existent or abstract objects seems plainly false.

If the past is non-existent, then, on Searle's account, it cannot serve as the content of one's thought. There is nothing towards which my thought about the past is directed. Searle, however, is wrong about this. An act of thinking about the past is directed at an object or event as much as any act of thinking is. The question is whether a thought about the past is representative of an external reality.

On Searle's view, the conditions denoted by beliefs about the past must be satisfied by an intentional object in the external world. Yet, in a presentist world, no conditions in the external world satisfy a thought about the past; on everyone's account, no present objects do. Thus, in such a world on Searle's view, there is no intentional content of our beliefs about the past. The past is unreal and cannot serve as an object of thought because the conditions denoted by the content of a thought about the past cannot be satisfied in external reality.

The Brentanian model preserves the directedness of conscious acts, whether they involve existent or non-existent objects, because all conscious acts are directed towards intentional objects. A thought about an existent object aims at an existent individual, so there is disagreement about whether we should construe the intentional object of such a thought as

the mental presentation or the external object it represents. Nevertheless, a thought about something strictly non-existent does not aim at external reality, so the intentional object of such a thought cannot be an existent individual. However, this does not mean that the content of such a thought is not representative. For example, a physical instantiation of a unicorn does not exist, so the content of a thought about a unicorn cannot represent an existent unicorn. Still, it can represent the characteristics of a unicorn.

At this juncture, we can draw several critical conclusions. First, a conscious act implies a directedness towards an intentional object. Second, intentional objects may be the mental content of thought even if the ultimate terminus of the object of thought is physical. Third, sometimes mental content represents existentially instantiated objects, and sometimes it represents non-existent or abstract objects. This leads to the question about how an object of thought is intentionally related to external reality.

Recall that in Brentano's account, a conscious act involves a directedness towards its content or a mental presentation, which is distinguished from the external object it represents. Brentano's explanation lacks clarity about the relationship between a thought and the external world, and how it is possible to think about things outside of the mind. One way to explain this relationship is to distinguish between a conscious act, the content of the act, and an external object towards which an act aims. Kazimierz Twardowski highlights just such a distinction between an act of thinking, a mental content to which an act refers, and an external object.

> One has to distinguish, accordingly, between the object at which our idea "aims, as it were," and the immanent object or the content of the presentation. This distinction is not always made and has been overlooked. […] Language facilitates here, too, as so often, our mistaking one thing for another in that it lets the content as well as the object be "presented." It will also turn out that the expression 'the presented' is in a

similar fashion ambiguous as is the expression ‘presentation.’ The latter serves just as much to designate the act and the content as the former serves to designate the content, the immanent object, and also the non-immanent object, the object of the presentation. (Twardowski, 1894/1997, p. 2)

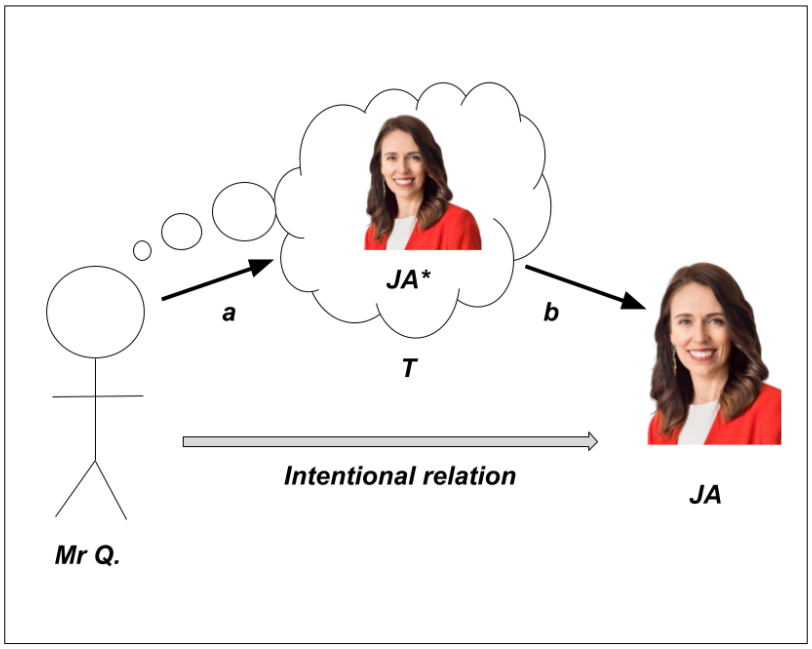

Figure 3. The Twardowskian model of intentionality

The Twardowskian model of intentionality (Figure 3) captures more clearly than the Brentanian model of intentionality the distinction between an act of thinking, “*T*,” the mental content of the act, *JA**, and the external object towards which the act aims, *JA*. On this model, *“a”* denotes a relation of immanence, and *b*, representation. The Twardowskian model of intentionality exemplifies the *intentional relation* between Mr *Q* and *JA*.

Chrudzimski’s (2015) *theory of mediating entities* clarifies the role of the objects and relations involved. His view maintains that intentionality is a relation between a subject and an object, but notes two additional relations. Chrudzimski has called these “IMM,” for immanence, “that which exists between the subject and its immanent object,” and “REPR,” or

the representation relation between an immanent object and the object it represents (p. 82).[162] If we apply Chrudzimski's account to the Twardowskian model, "*a*" is IMM, and "*b*" is REPR. Consider again how Bill's thought about President Carter is related to the actual man *President Carter*. An immanent object represents *President Carter* and that representation gives rise to Bill's thought. How does an immanent object come to represent (REPR) the properties that *Carter* exemplifies? The properties of the immanent object cannot be the properties of *President Carter*.

The Twardowskian model illustrates a so-called representational theory.[163] Proponents of representational theories hold that the properties observed in immanent objects or mediating entities are representative. Accordingly, an immanent object is the content of a mental act, whereas an intentional object is the ultimate *target* of the mental act. Properties of the content of thought are not intrinsic to immanent objects themselves. Instead, they serve a representational function that merely *mirrors* or *reflects* properties exemplified by objects that are external to the act itself.

One way that representational theorists conceive of REPR is by saying that the properties represented by an immanent object supervene on exemplified properties in the world. For example, suppose the immanent object of a thought is a green apple. The properties represented in consciousness, such as the *greenness* of the apple, supervene on the exemplified properties of an apple in the world. One may explain this by saying that sensory data, such as one's perception of light reflected from the apple's surface, gives rise to the representative content in a subject's mind. Therefore, the represented characteristics of an immanent object cannot differ without the exemplified properties of an external object differing, too.

[162] For an earlier version of this work, see Chrudzimski (2013a). Taieb (2017) has also argued that some mental presentations are involved in a further relation of reference to the object represented by the subject of a representation. Taieb attributes this distinction to Brentano (Taieb, 2017, p. 120).
[163] For a discussion and analysis of various versions of representational theories, see Chrudzimski (2015).

Some immanent objects are non-existent, such as *centaurs*. This leads to a question about the intentional objects of such representations: What is the intentional object of a thought about a centaur, or upon what does a representation of a centaur supervene? Is REPR the same kind of representation relation operative for non-existent objects as it is for existent objects? These questions are important because they inform the question of the intentional object of a thought about the past.

One way to conceive of the external *relata*, or subvenient base of the relation is to suppose that a mental presentation of a centaur represents a set of properties pieced together from disparate objects in the world, or a creature depicted in an illustration or fiction. The mental presentation in thought of an existent object has a one-to-one correspondence with what it represents. In the case of piecing together a centaur using a set of properties derived from disparate objects, the mental presentation of a centaur has a one-to-many correspondence. The mental presentation of a centaur is a constructive act that forms one object using the properties of many different objects.

One may believe that REPR in the centaur case is distinct from REPR in the case of an existent object because in the centaur case there is not a one-to-one correspondence relation between the content of thought and what it represents, while in the case of an existent object, there is a one-to-one correspondence. The onus is on representational theorists to better articulate how an immanent object represents the external world, and more importantly, how the mind can represent an individual that does not exist. The problem is not that the world lacks the properties of *being quadrupedal*, *muscular* or *human-like*, but that one cannot derive the property of *being a centaur* from anything in the external world. There is nothing that could entail this property because a set of properties taken from disparate objects does not explain the *individuality* of a centaur. A thought about a centaur is about an individual centaur. The conjunction of the following properties: *being quadrupedal*, *muscular*, *human-like*, and *an*

individual does not pick out a particular individual centaur. Despite this, it is possible for an individual centaur to be immanent in consciousness.

The property of *being a centaur* cannot be derived from an illustration of a centaur because an illustration of a centaur has as its property: *being an illustration of a centaur*. Even though a particular fictional story may mention a centaur, one can think about a centaur without referring to fiction, i.e., we can think about a centaur *simpliciter,* distinct from a centaur in such and such fiction. *Being a fiction* need not be a property that needs to be taken up for something *to be a centaur*. It is possible on the representational account of Twardowski for a centaur to be immanent in consciousness without referring to an illustration, fictional representation, or an existent centaur. The centaur is the mereological sum of its own properties. It has its own identity.

The point of these arguments is to demonstrate that even if one may explain the relation between some conscious acts and the external world by appealing to supervenience, the explanation fails to explain all the characterising properties presented in thought and, consequently, all of the objects that one may think about, including the past.

This brings us back to a thought about the past. If there is only one true past, then a thought about the past must involve a one-to-one correspondence, not merely a constructive act that pulls together a variety of disparate properties. To associate a property with the past that does not characterise the one true past is to mistake a contrivance for the reality of the past. On the other hand, if the past does not exist, then a one-to-one correspondence between a thought about the past and the one true past is impossible—because there is nothing that the thought could have a one-to-one correspondence with. If the past exists in the same manner as the present or future, then thoughts about the past, present, or future are mistaken and involve

a constructive act distorting our mental representations of one or more of them such that they appear differently to what they are really like in external reality.

This issue of correspondence is not a question of *completeness*. No thought offers a complete representation of the external world. The issue pertains to the reality of that which is represented. For instance, a thought of a red apple may not accurately correspond with the objective *redness* that an apple exemplifies. Nevertheless, the *redness* presented in consciousness corresponds with something that exists in external reality, namely the colour properties of the apple. In contrast, the property of *being a centaur* presented in consciousness does not correspond with something that exists in external reality because centaurs do not exist. If the past does not exist, then our representations of it are like the property of *being a centaur*—they represent something that does not exist in external reality. If the past exists similar to the present or future, then the connection between our mental representation of these different times and their objective reality breaks down because our representations differentiate them.

6.3 Intentional Objects and Time

In contrast to accounts of intentionality that primarily emphasise intentionality as a representational relation, such as Twardowski's, intentional object theorists argue that the properties of immanent objects may be intrinsic to the immanent objects themselves. Chrudzimski (2015) appeals to Zalta's (1988) notion of *encoding* to explain how immanent objects may possess the properties they represent (p. 99; p. 16 f). Encoding is a non-standard exemplification, whereas standard exemplification is existential. On Zalta's account, *there are* abstract objects that do not standardly exist. Because these objects do not exist like ordinary objects, they do not standardly exemplify their properties like ordinary objects do. Instead, they encode their properties, which means their nature is determined by those properties even though they do not exemplify the properties in the way that physical or instantiated objects do.

Encoding is how abstract objects have properties without requiring that they exist like concrete objects.

Chrudzimski (2015) has said that we can think of intentional object theory as a variation of representational theory where REPR is understood differently than Twardowski's traditional definition (p. 99). Accordingly, REPR is not a mirroring relation; instead, REPR is an *identifying* relation between immanent objects and the targets towards which mental acts aim, and meaning is contained within the immanent objects themselves. Zalta explains how the encoded properties of abstract objects convey meaning:

> Abstract objects, therefore, encode partial information about individuals and about the world in virtue of encoding ordinary properties. […] By doing so, they can serve to represent these things, and this representational role proves to be an important part of the nature of intentionality. (Zalta, 1988, pp. 36–37)

A significant benefit of intentional object theory over standard representational accounts is that it provides an explanation for all of the characterising properties presented in conscious acts.

Intentional object theorists believe that a property presented in a mental act entails the in-existence, existence, or subsistent being (possibly *being-less-ness*) of the object that (non-standardly) exemplifies it. Examples of such objects include Brentanian in-existent or immanent objects, Meinongian objects, and Zalta's (1983) abstract objects.[164] Another example suggested by Chrudzimski (2013b) is Roman Ingarden's purely intentional objects (p. 189). These ontologies allow one to say that the immanent object of a thought about something abstract or non-existent is the intentional object. Accordingly, there is no need to assume the existence of the *relata* that these objects represent to explain their intentional objects.

[164] I have discussed Meinongian objects in chapter 5. They are the pure objects that "stand beyond being and non-being" and possess *aussersein*.

Intentional objects do not standardly exist. They are not existentially instantiated in the world; instead, they have a different kind of existence or being.

REPR is a relation *through* which the ultimate target of a mental act is perceived or understood. Not only does this model explain the relation between a thought and the external world, but it also explains how an immanent object can represent something non-existent. There are no physical centaurs with which the immanent object can be identified. Still, it is possible for a centaur to be an immanent object because intentional objects may be the terminus of thoughts about non-existent things.

Chrudzimski (2013b, 2015), following Brentano's 1874 view, distinguishes his theory from Zalta's. On Chrudzimski's account, an intentional object's existence depends on a thinking subject (p. 197; pp. 102–103). According to Zalta's view, abstract objects may exist irrespective of whether they are the target of a mental act. Chrudzimski and Zalta differ in their accounting for the relation between a conscious act and an intentional object *qua* immanent or abstract object. For Chrudzimski and Brentano, the (in)existence of the targets of intentional acts about abstract or non-existent objects depends on one's consciousness. In contrast, Zalta and Meinong emphasise the independent *being* (or non-being) of these objects. Accordingly, on Chrudzimski's account, in a world with no minds, what would otherwise be the targets of mental acts about abstract or non-existent things do not exist in any sense. On Zalta's account, abstract objects exist as *abstracta*. Finally, Meinong assigns non-existent or abstract objects a non-existent mode of being (or *being-less-ness*). These different explanations shed light on our understanding of the nature of the targets of mental acts about abstract or non-existent things, which may include the past. If the past is abstract or non-existent, then it either exists only in our consciousness, or its mode of being is abstract or non-existent (or it is *being-less*).

My own view falls somewhere between Brentano and Chrudzimski on one side, and Meinong and Zalta on the other side. On the one hand, abstract or non-existent objects appear ontologically dependent on consciousness, just as physical objects ontologically depend on space. Consequently, I agree with Brentano and Chrudzimski in ascribing this ontological dependency. This is particularly evident with fictional objects like Sherlock Holmes. If Arthur Conan Doyle had not thought of Sherlock Holmes, I doubt he could have otherwise been discovered. However, this suggests not only an ontological dependency but also a causal one.

On the other hand, many non-existent objects appear independent from any individual acts of thought despite their apparent dependence on consciousness. For instance, mathematical objects like *pi* (π) do not depend on individual acts of thought; rather, great minds discover them. Moreover, there are many objects that we may not—and probably cannot—conceive of, such as the cardinal number *beth omega* ($\beth\omega$). Nevertheless, that there are such numbers regardless of any individual thinking about them seems indubitable. Similarly, the past, if non-existent, is not dependent on any individual thinking about it.

According to Chrudzimski's view, when we think about an object, the immanent object *qua* the intentional object, encodes all of its properties. If there is an object that exemplifies them, then the act indicates an objectively real object. Chrudzimski explains,

> Intentional objects represent by means of the identifying property φ; and more exactly – by having the identifying property. An intentional act is successful (it fits reality) iff there is also an object in the external world that has the required identifying property φ. (Chrudzimski, 2013b, p. 196)

This explains the characterisation of an immanent object and the directedness of a conscious act, as well as how we can distinguish the object of a thought about something real from that of a thought about something unreal. Specifically, encoded properties characterise an object of

thought. If the encoded properties possessed by an immanent object correspond with the exemplified properties of an external object, then the thought fits reality. If the exemplified properties of an external object do not correspond with the encoded properties, then the thought does not fit reality. This raises a question about the past if a thought about the past does not fit reality. However, let's consider intentional objects further before addressing this question.

The identifying relation demands only a one-to-one correspondence between represented properties; it does not necessitate that an immanent object represents *every* exemplified property to achieve a fit with reality. An intentional object cannot be identical to a physical object because a mental presentation is always an incomplete representation of a physical object. While a physical object may be the target of a mental act, it is imprecise to refer to it as *the* intentional object. The immanent object of a physical object is an aspect of it, presented to the mind. The complete object is beyond the reach of the immanent object. Let's return to Bill's admiration of *President Carter*. Bill's admiration is not directed towards *President Carter*. Bill admires the aspect of President Carter that is represented in his consciousness. Nonetheless, the aspect of President Carter is *President Carter* himself; Carter exemplifies the very properties that Bill admires. With this explanation in mind, it would be unreasonable to assert that Bill admires the actual entirety of President Carter *qua* complete object. Rather, Bill can only admire the aspects of Carter that he is aware of or exposed to. Bill's admiration is directed towards the intentional object that his consciousness can represent. Furthermore, the properties presented in Bill's consciousness have a one-to-one correspondence with the aspect of President Carter that they represent. Given this aspectual view of external reality, we should expect thoughts about the past to be incomplete representations of the reality of the past. Nonetheless, we should also expect the aspects presented in consciousness to reflect external properties, so far as they relate to an external reality.

Chrudzimski's account sheds light on Brentano's statement regarding the "intentional inexistence of an object." If we understand inexistence as a kind of "existence" that is dependent on consciousness, then inexistence means "existence within consciousness." To appreciate this, compare the relationship between an intentional object and consciousness with that of a physical object and space. A physical object cannot exist without space—the latter is a necessary condition for the existence of the former. In a similar vein, consciousness is a necessary condition for the inexistence of an intentional object.

The intentional object of a thought about a physical object depends on consciousness insofar as it is perceived as a complete object because the intentional object represents only one aspect of the actual object. However, the actual object itself, which encompasses all aspects and is independent of isolated considerations, is not dependent on consciousness. Therefore, a Brentanian intentional object is dependent on consciousness, but the aspect it represents is not.

Several consequences follow from this view. First, immanent objects encode the properties that characterise them. Second, if the encoded properties of an immanent object are identical to the exemplified properties of an external object, then one's thought is about external reality. However, if the encoded properties and exemplified properties are non-identical, then the thought is about a mental construct. In other words, the ultimate targets of thoughts about purely non-existent things are not *out there* in the world; such thoughts are not about objective reality. Rather, they are about mental constructs. This outcome is a virtue regarding the objects of thoughts about fiction, and myths because, on this view, we get the right result: we know that they do not have a mind-independent existence. Nonetheless, the consequences of intentionality cause problems for the extant theories of time because the ontologies they posit lead us to question whether our thoughts about the past represent reality. Now I will provide a critical discussion of the implications for theories of time that follow from a consideration of intentionality as an identifying relation.

Those who deny the existence of the past such as presentists, will have a challenging time accounting for the different models of intentionality thesis because a thought about the past would amount to a thought about something completely unreal—there is nothing in the world the thought could be reasonably said to represent. This issue of a lack of representational correspondence between objects represented in thoughts about the past and external reality may be seen as a feature of presentism. Indeed, presentists argue that if their thoughts about the past corresponded with something in external reality—the past—it would negate their central thesis, as it would imply the existence of something beyond "only present objects." However, they overlook two critical implications of this lack of correspondence. First, thoughts about the past cannot be reasonably understood as representing an external reality; rather they may be more accurately understood as representing mental constructs that are no more real than a merely possible world. In terms of their representation, such thoughts correspond only with objects within consciousness. Following from this, while thoughts about the past are directed towards an external reality, they ultimately represent merely mental constructs rather than a genuinely mind-independent reality.

GGBers and GMSVers who describe the past as lacking particular properties that the present possesses will also have a challenging time because mental representations of the past represent many properties that GGB and GMSV says do not exist. Hence, these views imply that many aspects of the past that are presented in consciousness are not representative of mind-independent reality. If someone accepts that the past exists, as eternalists, GBers and MSVers describe it, then the encoded properties represented in thoughts about the past are identical to properties exemplified in the world. The mind represents the past as fixed and immutable, so the ontologies posited by these theories secure the objective basis of our thoughts about the past, but at the cost of saying that the past, present, and future, or any combination of these are ontologically or existentially indistinguishable. This ontological or existential parity, despite

differing mental representations, raises doubts about the ability of eternalism, GB, and MSV to account for the objective reality of the external world, as the mind presents the past, present, and future as having both ontological and existential distinctions. In the final part of this chapter, I will show how adopting the intentionality thesis is a strategy for contending with the issues that different theories of time face regarding the question of the past.

Let's consider presentism first by returning to two examples mentioned earlier in the thesis and the thoughts that underlie them:

A: "The Sky Tower is in Auckland."

B: "The Crystal Palace was in London."

Call *A*'s set of encoded properties, *S*, and *B*'s set of encoded properties, *T*. According to the presentist, the encoded properties of *S*, are identical to the set of exemplified properties, *S**. *A* is representative of an actual object. The encoded properties of *T* are not contained in the exemplified set, *T**, because *B* does not presently exist. Whether we view REPR as merely representational or as an identifying relation, there is nothing for *T* to represent. Accordingly, thoughts about *B* are not thoughts about a mind-independent reality. They would amount to thoughts about nothing objective at all.

Even supervenience does not provide a basis for thinking that *B* is about the reality of the past in the present. The properties of the immanent object would not supervene on the object of the past because the past does not exist. *B* would be a mental construct or something akin to fiction because, while *B* represents some exemplified properties, those properties do not guarantee that *B* represents a real object. This is just like the properties upon which a thought about Sherlock Holmes supervenes does not guarantee the reality of Sherlock Holmes.

Serious presentists will want to argue that the properties represented in thoughts about the past supervene on present states of affairs; however, the properties of thoughts about the

past are so dissimilar to present states of affairs that there is no way for thoughts about the past to be reconciled with present states of affairs. If the past does not exist, then the ontology is insufficient to explain the positive characterisation of the properties presented in thoughts about the past. There is no identifying relation between the encoded properties presented in thoughts and the exemplified properties of objects in the external world. This means that our thoughts about the past are confined to the immanent object of thought. The bases of our thoughts about the past have little more substance than the targets of our conscious acts about fiction.

That the past is the object of thoughts intentionally directed at the past does not adversely affect the argument for the reality of the past. No part of this thesis has claimed that the past exists *because* we have thoughts about the past. It is not an idealism that I am trying to support here. Even if there were no conscious beings to think about the past, the reality of the past would remain. Recall that the reality of the past is just the series of events that occurred prior to the present, the one true past. Just as we do not suppose that the objective reality of the world depends on our thoughts about it, neither should we suppose that the reality of the past does.

On the presentist's account, however, the reality of the past seems to depend on the conscious act of thinking about the past. Since only presently existing things exist, the past is not something that exists. If the past is not something that exists and can only be accessed through our thinking about it or using surrogates to represent it, then the past on presentism's view is confined to one's thoughts about the past or to presently existing things standing in for the past. However, suppose that the present contains traces of the past—that ground fixed, immutable truths about the past—in virtue of how things were (i.e., the past), and has the resources to capture the objective reality of the past (in the present).

Even with this explanation, concerns remain regarding the distinct and immutable nature of the past. If the past is merely represented through traces in the present, it suggests that truths about the past are contingent upon present objects and states of affairs—which are constantly changing.

While some of these traces undoubtedly exist and may be continuous with the past, they fail to represent the complete and immutable past due to the dynamic nature of the present and its incomplete representation of the past. Grounding truths about something complete and immutable in something incomplete and mutable violates the aboutness constraint. The objective reality of the past, which is complete, fixed, and immutable, would be mistaken on the presentist's view.

Non-serious or Meinongian presentism may not be any better off. Meinong argued that non-existent objects, such as the past, subsist (or they are *being-less* objects). Even if there are no thinking subjects, the past subsists, so the past is real. Similarly with Zalta's view, if the past is a mind-independent abstract object, then its reality does not depend on an intentional act of consciousness. Therefore, Meinongian strategy may explain the objective reality of the past in a presentist world and our current thinking about the past could be intentionally related to that past. The fundamental problem with Meinongian strategy, especially as it is employed by MP, is that it relegates the past to a similarly non-existent status as the future. Even though, on Meinongian views we can explain the mind-independent basis of the (non-existent) past, the intentional objects of the past would be ontologically on par with those of the future. The intentional objects of the past are not at all like those of the future because the objects of the past once existed but do not now exist, and they are immutable. In contrast, the objects of the future never have existed but *may* exist, and they are open. Given these substantive differences between our representations of the past and the future, it is challenging to align them

ontologically, casting doubt on MP's ability to explain the identifying relation between our thoughts and reality.

Now let's see if eternalism, GB, and MSV may do any better than presentism. Purveyors of these theories can explain the relationship between thoughts about the past and the reality of the past by appealing to REPR. A conscious act that is directed towards the past has as its content an immanent object. Because the encoded properties of the past are identical to the exemplified properties of an external object, REPR is instantiated. The act is successful, implying that thoughts about the past on each of these views are about reality. This explains how the eternalist, GBer, and MSVer may have thoughts about the past that aim at an objective or mind-independent reality. Proponents of these theories can explain how, even if no conscious acts exist, the objects we think of as past exist in mind-independent reality. Their view, unlike presentism, does not require a mental act to construct these past objects. Intentional objects represent aspects of the past *qua* the past.

However, eternalists face the challenge of explaining how the ontological status of the present and future is on a par with that of the past. On their view, the past exists, is fixed, and is immutable. If the past, present, and future are identical, then no genuine change is possible. Eternalists may see this as a virtue. However, accepting this conclusion suggests we cannot trust the identifying relation between encoded and exemplified properties so far as they concern the present and future. To deliver the right results in an eternalist world, the encoded properties of conscious acts directed towards the present and future should only represent fixed aspects. Yet, thoughts about the present and future characterise the world as changing and open: the present changes and the future is open with possibilities. If we have a reason to doubt that encoded properties represent the true nature of objective reality in this case, then we have a

reason to doubt that they represent reality in all cases.[165] The unpalatable consequence of eternalism and intentionality is the realisation that we would have to deny genuine change in the face of an ever-changing present and open future, and what we perceive as the past is not ontologically distinct from the present and future. Since under eternalism the past is relative to an observer's viewpoint, *pastness* does not correspond to an objective feature of reality.

GB and MSV face a similar challenge. On GB the past and present similarly exist but the present is the moment of becoming. However, we do not experience the past and present as similarly existent. Neither do we experience the future as non-existent *tout court.* Hence, GB is unable to reconcile our psychological experiences with the mind-independent world. MSV is unusual in that it posits the equal existence of the past, present and future, yet privileges the present. This understanding goes a way towards explaining how our thoughts may be connected to a mind-independent past, present, and future. However, we do not experience the past as equally existent to the present and future, nor do we experience the past and future as being on an ontological footing that is equally inferior to the present.

Moving on, GGB and GMSV cannot account for many thoughts about the past because in many cases these theories do not provide for the instantiation of REPR between encoded properties presented in thoughts about the past and exemplified properties in the world. GGB and GMSV imply that many of the encoded properties of immanent objects representing the past do not correspond with exemplified properties. Also, because the past has a ghostly status, the encoded properties representing the robust reality of past times and objects would not correspond with the exemplified properties of the past.

I distinguish the problem faced by GGBers and GMSVers from that faced by presentists because the former can claim that REPR instantiates due to the identifying relation between an

[165] For a more thorough treatment of this argument, see Section 7.2, where I detail the argument for deriving ontological conclusions from intentional experiences of time.

immanent object and a *past individual*, whereas the latter cannot. It is noteworthy that presentists may go a similar route to explain the reality of some properties represented in thoughts about the past, for instance, the property of *being a palace in London* represented in *B*. They may argue that they can determine the reality of represented properties like this because of the instantiation of REPR due to an identifying relation between them and presently exemplified properties. Nevertheless, both responses lead to the same problem: many encoded properties do not fit with exemplified ones, suggesting they represent something unreal.

The problem I am highlighting is not simply that the world does not exemplify some of the properties encoded in thoughts about the past. On the contrary, the non-existence of such properties is precisely the view that these theorists assert. Instead, the problem lies in the ontologies failing to permit us to distinguish the reality of many aspects of the past from fiction. If the encoded properties presented in our thoughts about the past do not correspond with exemplified properties, then we cannot distinguish the reality of the targets of these thoughts from the reality of historical fiction. In other words, the targets of our thoughts about the past, upon which our understanding of past reality is based, would be no more substantive than historical fiction. For this reason, thoughts about the past, according to these views, are about something that is no more substantive than historical fiction.

To clarify this, ghostly theorists, just like presentists, can only match some encoded properties presented in thoughts about the past with exemplified ones, the same as with fiction. Although REPR may instantiate between some encoded properties and their exemplified counterparts, it cannot instantiate for encoded properties that do not correspond with exemplified properties. Consequently, we cannot determine that such thoughts are about reality.

Ultimately, whether proponents of GGB and GMSV face this problem will come down to their explanation of the ontology of the past. If they can only explain the reality of some properties, yet not others, then it is not easy to see how they can distinguish a thought about the past from a thought about fiction. The intentional objects of both kinds of thoughts would always depend on merely encoded properties in addition to any exemplified properties with which they correspond. Consequently, the connection between the intentional objects of thoughts about the past and reality is like that between the intentional objects of thoughts about fiction and reality. This cost is too great a price to pay for anyone who believes our thoughts can represent the reality of the past. The ontologies of GGB and GMSV are insufficient to explain mental representations of the past.

Conclusion

This chapter considered intentionality to illuminate an answer to the question of the past. The chapter highlighted the importance of the intentionality relation in analysing the ontology necessary for our thoughts to be about past reality. I introduced the puzzle of thinking about things that do not exist which is closely related to the puzzle of thinking about the past. A thought about something non-existent or the past implies the existence of what it is about. However, if the object that is thought about does not exist, precisely what the thought directs towards becomes unclear. The chapter explored the extent to which different theories of time can explain the objective reality of thoughts about the past. I introduced Brentano's theory of intentionality, that thoughts are directed towards an immanent or intentional object. The chapter introduced Twardowski's contribution, which helps differentiate conscious acts of thinking, the content or objects of thought, and their ultimate targets. Then I focused on Arkadiusz Chrudzimski's research on theories of mediating entities. Strictly representational theories were rejected because they are unable to account for many of the positive characterisations presented in thought. Instead, I favoured the intentional object account,

appreciating its capacity to explain *all* of the positive characterisations presented in thoughts, namely by positing immanent or intentional objects which do not exist in the external world. The chapter differentiated between immanent objects that encode their properties and external objects that exemplify theirs, clarifying how we can differentiate between the objects of thoughts about real things and unreal things. If the encoded properties of an immanent object correspond with properties exemplified in the world, then the represented object is real. If the encoded properties do not fit with properties exemplified in the world, then the represented object is unreal. This explains how we can determine which thoughts are about external reality. Nevertheless, this account poses challenges for presentists and ghostly theorists because many of the encoded properties presented in thoughts about the past cannot be identified with exemplified properties. The ontologies of presentism, GGB and GMSV are insufficient to explain our thoughts about the past. On the contrary, the ontologies of eternalism, GB and MSV can account for our thoughts about the past. By positing an existent past, these theories explain the connection between thoughts about the past and past reality. However, because they conflate the ontological status of the past with that of the present or future, they imply that our thoughts do not accurately represent external reality. In summary, for a theory of time to account for the ontological ground of our mental representations of the past, it must posit an existent past, but it also must recognise a substantive ontological distinction between the past, present, and future.

Chapter 7: Substantive Past and Nonsubstantive Present and Future

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue for three theses about the past: that the past is immutable, that its immutability distinguishes it from the mutable present and future, and that the past is the paradigm of existence. The chapter begins by defining the object of the enquiry: the past, which is shown to be a unique kind of object, not comparable to the merely possible, nor the impossible, nor the actual as described by presentists or eternalists. I then proceed to explicate the fundamental difference between the past, present and future, which is change. The past is ordered by B-relations, while the present and future are A-theoretic. Next, I distinguish the unchanging past from the changing present and explain why different theories of time fail to adequately capture the significance of this difference. I appeal to our experiences to illuminate and support this distinction, arguing that the fundamental difference between them implies the pasts' substantiveness and the present and futures' nonsubstantiveness. Lastly, I draw an analogy with Plato's distinction between appearance and reality to argue that the past's immutability and substantiveness entail its existence, while the present and future's mutability and nonsubstantiveness entail their non-existence. I conclude that only the past, inclusive of past objects, properties, and relations exists.

7.1 The Past qua the Past

Answering the question of the past is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of reality. Throughout this thesis, the question of the past gives rise to three problems: What serves as the referent of a reference to a past object? What is a truthmaker for a true proposition about the past? What is the object of a thought about the past? Theorists of time should agree that the past that we refer to, speak truly of, and think about amounts to an actual constituent of reality rather than being confined to referring to, speaking of, or thinking about something unreal like a fiction.

Different theories of time have explained the past in diverse ways. According to GB and MSV, the past exists similarly to the present, or future. According to eternalism, *pastness* is not an objective feature of reality; instead the past is on a par with the present and future. For Meinongian presentism, the past is non-existent, much like the future. In contrast under various forms of serious presentism, the past is assumed to have some connection with the present, which they explain by appealing to present features of the world, such as *ersatz* times, Lucretian properties, or thisnesses.

If the phrase "the past" refers to something, then there is something or some object to which it refers; and if that object is mind-independent, then "the past" refers to something real. "The past" does refer to something mind-independent; therefore, the referent of "the past" is something real. I consider reference to entail a two-place relation. However, to pre-empt a potential objection—for instance, that reference is not a two-place relation, as in reference without referents—we can modify this argument to involve the intentionality of thoughts. On this rendering, given a thought about the past's directedness toward a mind-independent reality, the past must be something real. In this section, I would like to consider whether "the past" is an object, just like presently instantiated books, bicycles, and barbecues to shed light on the referent of "the past," or the object of a thought about it.

Objecthood is the condition of *being an object*. If a property is exemplified or instantiated, then there must be something that exemplifies or instantiates it.[166] Hence, any individual that exemplifies or instantiates a property meets this condition.

Some objects are concrete, and we call these objects "actual," while others are non-concrete and merely possible, or impossible; we call these objects "non-actual." Mount Everest is an actual object, it's directly observable, and it has physical properties (having a summit of

[166] This includes both standard and non-standard exemplification.

8848m in elevation, being in Nepal, and being located at 27°59′17″N 86°55′31″E / 27.98806°N 86.92528°E). By contrast, other objects such as "the Misty Mountains of Middle-earth," abstract objects like the number "2," and impossible objects like "the round-square" are not directly observable, do not have any physical properties, and are not actual objects. These non-concrete objects are not tangible, unlike the comparison class of concrete objects.

Objects are categorised as either actual or non-actual, and this classification determines whether they are tangible or not. An ontological principle should serve to distinguish actual objects from merely possible or impossible ones. Meinong (1960) calls the principle that restricts objecthood to actual objects a "prejudice in favour of the actual" (pp. 78–81). It is a prejudice because the principle eliminates crucially important objects from the ontology, such as mathematical entities. Only actual objects can be observed or detected through sense experience, so the principle rules out whole classes of objects that cannot be observed or detected.

The principle leads us back to the disagreement over the existence of the past. The past and all of its content cannot be observed or detected. Thus, it should follow that past objects and events are non-actual. If the past and all of its content are non-actual, then they are to be treated like any other non-actual objects. The past, however, is not like other non-actual objects. The objects that comprise the past once existed but do not now exist, while typical non-actual objects never have existed and never will. The past is more closely related to actuality than fictional characters and mythical creatures but less so than presently instantiated books and barbecues because it was actual even though it is not presently actual.

I take a broad view of objecthood and follow Brentano (1874/2015) in thinking that a thought is about an object (p. 92) and (the early) Russell in thinking that, if an entity, *x*, may be named, then *x* is an object. Consequently, the question is not, "Is there an object that is

thought about or named?" Instead, the question is, "What is the nature of the referenced object?" To say that "the past does not exist" means that nothing uniquely exemplifies its properties in the external world. It is not to say that there is no past that one is thinking about or referring to. The past as an object of thought is a Brentanian immanent object that may or may not correspond with or represent a set of exemplified properties. If the immanent object does not represent a set of exemplified properties, then the past does not exist in external reality. However, if the immanent object represents a set of exemplified properties, then the past exists in external reality.

Even though philosophers of time disagree regarding the specific referents of thoughts about the past, none of them claim that a thought about the past does not represent something in external reality. Hence, a thought about the past represents something in the external world. I have argued that only the past *qua* the past is sufficient to ground references to, truths about, and properties presented in thoughts about the past. Therefore, the past *qua* the past is the external object of a thought about the past. Nevertheless, because the past is not presently actual, we can distinguish it from presently instantiated objects—actual objects according to presentism. Furthermore, because the past does not exist eternally, as eternalists describe it, we can distinguish its mode of being from their notion of actuality.

7.2 Change and Theories of Time

The arguments I have presented demonstrate that the ontological commitments of extant theories of time cannot resolve the question of the past. We have seen in Chapter 6 that intentionality provides us with limited, but helpful, access to the past. Based on the understanding of the past that we can gain from this access, we are in a position to consider the specific and unique nature of the past. I will now argue that the nature of the past is distinct from that of the present, contrasting the unchanging or fixed nature of the past with the changing nature of the present. Then, I will highlight the errors that are implicated by existing

theories of time concerning their characterisation of the nature of the past. To a lesser extent, I will also address errors related to the present and future.

One way to characterise change is that it amounts to non-identity in the properties of things. Change is the exemplification or instantiation of nonidentical sets of properties by the numerically same individual. Temporal change arises when the identity relation stands between a complete object, *x*, and itself, and the complete sets of properties exemplified or instantiated by *x* at separate times are non-identical. For an object, *x*, *x* at t_1 is the same individual as *x* at t_2; however, the properties exemplified by *x* at the two different times are non-identical: *x* at t_1 is numerically the same as *x* at t_2 despite that *x* may exemplify different properties at the two different times. The properties of *x* change over time.

Consider a banana that changes from green to yellow: At t_1, the banana exemplifies *greenness*. Later, at t_2, the banana exemplifies *yellowness.* There is only one banana, not two. Presentists, GBers, and MSVers think that the set of properties exemplified by the banana as a spatiotemporal whole has changed. For presentists and GBers, the banana has lost and gained properties *simpliciter*, while for MSVers, it is the position of the property of *presentness* that has changed so that different temporal parts have lost or gained this property. In contrast, eternalists think the banana is a spatiotemporally extended whole with different temporal parts at different times. They think that the banana eternally exemplifies the properties it does, the banana is green at t_1 and yellow at t_2. To further contrast these perspectives, consider the views taken by the various theorists at t_2. Presentists will say that the banana at t_1 no longer exists; the banana has genuinely changed by losing the property of *greenness* and gaining the property of *yellowness*. GBers will say that the banana's t_1 part remains existent at t_1 but that part has lost the property of *presentness* and now exemplifies *pastness.* The banana has gained a new property, namely *yellowness*, and the banana's t_2 part now exemplifies *presentness.* MSVers and eternalists, will say that the banana's t_1 and t_2 parts remain green and yellow respectively;

however, while MSVers will say that the part exemplifying *presentness* has changed, eternalists assert that there is no change to the banana as a spatiotemporal whole. For eternalists, change amounts to having different temporal parts with non-identical properties (for example, green at t_1 and yellow at t_2). It's just that our viewpoint relative to t_1 differs from our viewpoint relative to t_2. So, while eternalists view a difference between temporal parts as amounting to change, they deny that the banana as a spatiotemporal whole has gained or lost properties in the same sense as presentists and GBers, who think that the properties of the spatiotemporal whole change.

In light of their denial that things like bananas undergo dynamic change—the spatiotemporal whole gaining or losing properties, eternalists argue that the ontological nature of the past is on a par with that of the present and future. McHenry (2000) has said, "existence is conceived as ontologically complete; that is, the past, the present, and the future are equally determinate *sub specie aeternitatis"* (p. 222). According to eternalists, any apparent differences between the ontological status of the past, present, and future arise from the perspective of an observer in time and are not apparent from an objective or God's eye viewpoint of the world as a whole.

Theorists dispute the relationship between change and time. For instance, A-theorists think that dynamic change occurs, which is to say that it is a real and objective feature of the world. In contrast, B-theorists think change amounts to an object having distinct parts relative to different times, and our experience of dynamic change does not represent the underlying fixed reality. Accordingly, B-theorists think that objective reality is independent of dynamic change.

To understand the nature of change, one must appreciate the nature of properties and their essential role in distinguishing between genuine and merely apparent, or "Cambridge,"

change. Genuine change involves an object's intrinsic properties, while Cambridge change involves an object's extrinsic properties. David Lewis has explained this difference:

> A sentence or statement or proposition that ascribes intrinsic properties to something is entirely about that thing; whereas an ascription of extrinsic properties to something is not entirely about that thing, though it may well be about some larger whole which includes that thing as part. A thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is. Not so for extrinsic properties, though a thing may well have these in virtue of the way some larger whole is. The intrinsic properties of something depend only on that thing; whereas the extrinsic properties of something may depend, wholly or partly, on something else. If something has an intrinsic property, then so does any perfect duplicate of that thing; whereas duplicates situated in different surroundings will differ in their extrinsic properties. (Lewis, 1983, p. 197)

An object, *O*, has extrinsic properties which involve relations to objects external to *O* itself, whilst the intrinsic properties of *O* do not involve any external relations. For instance, Auckland's *being north of Hamilton* is an extrinsic property, whereas Auckland's *being co-present with a volcanic field* is an intrinsic property. That is because *being north of Hamilton* involves Auckland's position *relative to* Hamilton, which has nothing to do with Auckland in and of itself. If Hamilton ceased to exist, nothing about Auckland itself would change. Conversely, *being co-present with a volcanic field* involves the characteristics of Auckland itself. If we were to remove the volcanic field somehow, then Auckland itself would be different. Auckland would no longer be a city that is co-present with a volcanic field.

Eternalists ought to accept that their notion of change is Cambridge change because the variations observed in things may be attributed to an external relation between an object's temporal part and a particular time—not to any change in the intrinsic properties of the

spatiotemporal whole. For example, just as we consider a chair's having a square base and a round top to imply merely that the chair is different in different regions—not that the chair itself has changed—neither should we think that an object's earlier part being distinct from its later part implies a genuine change in the whole object. In both cases, distinct parts simply exist alongside each other within a single object. In contrast, if the chair—in its spatiotemporal entirety—were to lose its round top and gain a square top, then we would recognise a genuine change.

By contrast, for presentism, GB, MSV, GGB and GMSV change is genuine. For instance, on the presentist's account, a caterpillar genuinely changes into a butterfly. At time, t_1, a caterpillar exemplifies the property of *being wingless.* As time progresses, a caterpillar metamorphoses from *being wingless* at t_1 to *being winged* at t_2. When t_1 is the present time, the time t_2 does not exist, and when t_2 is the present time, the time t_1 does not exist. The caterpillar genuinely gains and loses properties. Miller described presentism's genuine change:

> a different set of events comes into existence as each new present moment comes into existence, and those events then pass out of existence as that moment ceases to be the present moment. (Miller, 2013, p. 346)

Changes are genuine when an object's (complete set of) intrinsic properties change.

Genuine change occurs in GB and MSV. For GB, a set of events comes into existence when a present event gains new properties, and then that set of events becomes past when it loses a property equivalent to *presentness.* For MSV, a future event genuinely changes when it gains the property of *presentness*. Then, the present event that was once future changes again when it loses this property of presentness and becomes an event in the past. When a set of events becomes a set of events in the past it involves genuine change if the set's *presentness* is an intrinsic property. If *presentness* is a relation between an object and the time of its

instantiation, then *being present* is an extrinsic property. Extrinsic properties are not constitutive of genuine change. Hence, genuine change would not apply to MSV.

Past objects are present relative to that time in the past in which they are instantiated. However, describing *presentness* as a merely external relation fails to capture the concept that GB and MSV intend when distinguishing the unique and privileged present time from past and future times. On their account, *presentness* is an intrinsic temporal property possessed only by objects that exist *now*. Past and future objects do not exist *now,* so they do not possess it.

Perhaps we should introduce different labels for the two kinds of *presentness,* calling the relational property "*R-presentness*" and the intrinsic property "*I-presentness.*" Distinguishing between the relational and intrinsic properties allows theorists to more clearly explain how objects at past or future times exemplify *R-presentness* even though they do not exemplify *I-presentness*.

As A-theories, *presentness* and *pastness* are objective features of the world for both GB and MSV. Temporal properties of *presentness* and *pastness* are intrinsic to specified times, even if they are extrinsic to individual objects or events at a specified time.[167] This explanation overcomes the challenge mentioned above, which arises when one confuses *I-presentness* for *R-presentness.* Even if one considers an object's *presentness* as merely a relational feature, this explanation falls short when it comes to explaining the *presentness* of a time. For instance, if we read "present" as *R-present*, the expression, "t_1 is present," is vacuous. That is because we can replace "t_1" with any other time, $t_{2...}t_n$, and the statement will be true. Consequently, the predicate "is present" tells us nothing of significance.

[167] I interpret temporal properties of GB to be exemplified by individuals at times and by times themselves. This alternative account heads off a possible objection that one may raise: if temporal properties merely relate individuals to times, then individuals in time do not undergo genuine change because the properties are external to the individuals themselves.

This argument does not carry over to objects other than times because it may be meaningful to say "Lily's purple hair is (R-)present at t_1." Lily's purple hair may not be present at any other times. If *presentness* is an intrinsic property of a time, then the expression, "t_1 is present," is meaningful. This statement expresses that out of all the possible times, t_1 exemplifies the unique property of *I-presentness.* If t_1 exemplifies this property, then no other time can. The world genuinely changes because which time is *I-present* changes.

A criticism of GB raised by Bourne (2002) and Braddon-Mitchell (2004) highlights a concern about the distinction between *R-presentness* and *I-presentness* (though they do not use these terms), introducing an epistemic challenge: how can we know whether the moment we experience as present (*R-present*) is objectively present (*I-present*)? This concern suggests that if we are objectively present—*I-present*—right now, then Caesar in 49 BCE must be mistaken about his experience of being *I-present*. However, if Caesar can be mistaken about being *I-present*, then so can we, challenging a primary motivation for GB: it seems to us that we are present.

The challenge arises because GBers accord similar ontological status to the past and present, such that there is no substantive ontological basis to distinguish between our experience of being present and that of Caesar in 49 BCE. Nevertheless, this does not impact on the fact of genuine change in a GB world.

Consider the caterpillar case again. When t_1 is present, t_2 does not yet exist, and the caterpillar is wingless. As t_1 ceases to be present and t_2 becomes present, the caterpillar ceases to be *wingless* and becomes a butterfly and *winged.* The properties of the present have genuinely changed such that the caterpillar exemplifies *winglessness* at t_1 and then instantiates both *being a butterfly* and *being winged* at t_2. Without the property of *I-presentness*, this argument depends on the non-existence of the future. If the future were existent, then it would

not be the case that the caterpillar becomes winged. It would only be that the caterpillar's being winged is (*R*-)present relative to t_2. *I-presentness* is necessary for genuine change in an MSV world.

GMSV may not require *I-presentness* for genuine change because there may be properties that present objects possess and properties that past and future objects fail to possess, which distinguishes present objects from past and future ones. Suppose we assume that *consciousness* is a property possessed only by presently existing things. When a future object that lacks consciousness becomes presently existing, it instantiates the property of *consciousness*. When that object becomes past, it again lacks the property of consciousness. The object undergoes genuine change. GMSV provides a way to distinguish the past from the present.

In summary, according to GB, when a present moment becomes past, its intrinsic properties change such that it loses the property of *presentness* and gains *pastness*. On MSV, a future event or time changes from *being future* to *being present* to *being past*. The intrinsic properties change. Since on both views the intrinsic properties change, the change of properties of both theories is genuine change.

Now that I have explored how different theorists of time view change, I will apply their views to the question of the past. First, presentism's acceptance of genuine change and denial that objects, states of affairs, and events of the past exist entail that they cannot serve as truthmakers for true propositions about the past, cannot be referents for referring terms, and cannot serve as what thoughts about the past are about. Not only are present things inadequate to serve as referents and truthmakers for statements about the past, but these truthmakers and referents are bound up in the changing present, which implies they themselves are bound up in

changing states of affairs. However, if propositions about the past have fixed truth values, then we have a good reason to believe that their truthmakers do not change.

Second, GB faces the challenge of explaining why the past and the present should be considered to have the same existential or ontological status. Suppose that the past and present share the same status. Then one would expect them to be bound by the same governing principles and for the same metaphysical possibilities to be open to them. However, the past is characterised by sempiternal fixity, while the present is marked by dynamism. Therefore, the past and present are not governed by the same principles, nor are the same metaphysical possibilities open to them. Consequently, it is challenging to justify the belief that the past and present are existentially or ontologically alike.

Superficially, my view may appear similar to GB. Both agree that the past exists, the future does not exist, and the world is genuinely dynamic. However, significant differences exist, particularly in our treatment of the present and what the non-existence of the future entails. The fundamental problem with GB is its treatment of the fixed past and dynamic present as having the same ontological status. If the (existent) world is fixed, then it cannot be dynamic; if the (existent) world is dynamic, then it cannot be fixed. Hence, GB gives rise to a contradiction. For the same reason that my view can overcome the challenge of distinguishing between *I-presentness* and *R-presentness*, it can also overcome this challenge. By distinguishing between the ontological status of the past and the present, my view avoids the contradiction that GB gives rise to. On my account, the existent world is fixed; only the non-existent present and future are dynamic.

GBers have various ways to conceive of the non-existence of the future, but none assign it a non-existent mode of being. Consequently, the two views differ in their treatment of references and truthbearers about the future, as well as the intentionality of future-directed

thoughts. Moreover, my view treats the ontological status of future objects as akin to those of the present. While GB sees the border between existence and non-existence as lying between the present and future, I view it as lying between the past and present. Consequently, my view explains why distinct principles and metaphysical possibilities apply to the past compared to the present.

MSV also faces a challenge in explaining why the metaphysical possibilities open to the past differ from those of the present and future. Whether we understand the theory as asserting that the past shares the same existential or ontological status as the present and future, or only the future, it fails to account for the distinct nature of metaphysical possibilities between these different times.

Finally, Eternalism is tricky since it appears to provide an accurate description of the past insofar as it describes the past as fixed and unchanging. However, once we recognise that the view does not differentiate the ontological status of the past, present, or future, we realise that the present and future are also fixed and unchanging. Eternalism would have us believe that times that are present or future relative to our own temporal moment are past relative to a different temporal moment at a later time. What we may perceive as the changing present and open future are, in fact, fixed and on a par with the past. However, our experience of the world in the present is fluid and changing. If we perceive dynamic change of the present, then there is no reason to believe that the present is fixed. Consider the viewpoints of an observer, Ernie, at various times, t_1, t_2, $t_3 \ldots t_n$. According to eternalism, Ernie has a temporal part located at each time. E_1 is located at t_1, E_2 at t_2, and E_3 at t_3 and so on. Ernie would not observe dynamic change but simply consecutive yet static states of affairs. This is because each of Ernie's temporal parts is fixed relative to the time it occupies. For Ernie to observe dynamic change, he (E_1) would have to be present at multiple times.

A second reason that the eternalist's ontology fails to align with our experience is due to the so-called "arrow of time," which is our experience of the world moving in a direction away from the past and towards the future. Eternalists have a ready response to the question of why we remember the past but not the future: the direction of causation. Memories arise as causal effects of earlier events on later times, leaving traces or imprints of these earlier events in later times but not *vice versa*. Causal asymmetry, eternalists claim, explains why we remember the past and anticipate the future, despite all times being equally real.

However, this explanation assumes that causation must flow from earlier to later without justifying why this is necessary in a four-dimensional manifold. If all times exist equally, there is no inherent reason why causation should not flow from later to earlier (reverse causation), particularly given that many of the fundamental laws of physics are time-symmetric. The account assumes that causation is inherently directed, yet it remains unclear why causation is directed in one direction rather than the other.

The eternalist's view of the world as a fixed four-dimensional manifold still lacks a sufficient explanation for this experience.[168] While causation may account for the unidirectionality of memory, it does not explain our perception of the arrow of time or our experience of dynamic temporal flow. If the world is a fixed structure, then it is unclear how we would perceive this directionality or flow. Given the eternally existent status of the past, present, and future, one would expect not to experience any directionality or *flow*. Yet, we do. Therefore, eternalism cannot account for our experience of the world as possessing a fundamentally dynamic and unidirectional aspect.

[168] Eternalists commonly explain the arrow of time by appealing to the second law of thermodynamics and the concept of entropy, which asserts that the disorder of a closed system, like the universe, tends to increase over time. Accordingly, the experience of the arrow of time arises from the fact that earlier times exist in lower entropy states, while later times exist in higher entropy states. However, despite this observation, the explanation falls short in elucidating why we perceive time as flowing towards higher entropy states rather than in the direction of lower entropy states, or even why we perceive time as flowing at all.

The unidirectional nature of time explains why we remember the past while anticipating the future. Thoughts about the past are memories of fixed events that are unchangeable, whereas thoughts about the future are anticipations of various possibilities we feel we can influence. While current psychological and cognitive science may suggest that memory and imagination are closely related, this does not undermine the fixedness of thoughts about the past. If a thought is genuinely about the past, it must concern a fixed and unchangeable event, since the past itself is fixed. If a thought lacks this fixed reference, it is not genuinely about the past. If there were no distinction between the past, present, and future, it would be unclear why we do not remember the future or anticipate the past. This is not a question of whether we know whether a particular thought is about the past or not. If the past, present, and future were similar, we would expect our experience of them to be similar. However, that is not the case. Therefore, based on our experience of remembering the past and anticipating the future, we can infer that the past, present, and future are dissimilar.

Third, a natural consequence of eternalism is that all events, including human choices or actions, are necessarily determined, and cannot be altered.[169] However, this undermines the belief that the present and future are open to multiple possibilities and that we can choose alternative courses of action. If all events are determined, then we are powerless to alter the trajectory of our lives.

[169] Determinism refers to the idea that later states of the world are determined by earlier states, meaning the totality of states of affairs which are now present lead to the causes of the total set of future states of affairs. However, this concept is not exclusive to eternalism. Presentism and the GB may or may not imply that the future is causally determined by the present. Accordingly, although the future does not yet exist, there is a single possible future that will come into existence based on the present state of the world. This concept is better described as "predeterminism," as the future is predetermined at the present time. Notably, something that does not exist cannot be (actually) determined. Predeterminism is a weaker form of determinism compared to what is implied by eternalism. This is because eternalism posits the existence of future states of affairs. Consequently, it is not only the case that future states of affairs are predetermined by present states, but also that future states are completely determined at the times they exist.

I have only briefly sketched these arguments against eternalism and some of the counterarguments available to eternalists.[170] While these arguments are important to the theory of eternalism, examining them in depth would divert from the central scope of my thesis. My contribution to this debate lies in highlighting the role of intentionality in evaluating eternalism. My primary argument against eternalism is that it denies that our mental states, which represent a dynamic world and an ontologically distinct past, present, and future, accurately reflect objective reality. However, doubting the accuracy of these experiences casts doubt on the reliability of all our mental representations and our ability to think accurately about external reality at all.

Consider the argument for deriving ontological conclusions from our intentional experiences, which inherently involve a temporal structure. Intentionality, the directedness of mental states towards objects, is intrinsic and fundamental to conscious experience. The temporal aspect of intentionality is ubiquitous in conscious experience: all intentional acts inherently involve a temporal framework comprising the fixed past, dynamic present, and open future. This temporal structure is not merely an incidental feature of consciousness but integral to how we experience, interpret, and connect with reality. Since this temporal aspect is ubiquitous, rejecting it as indicative of an objective feature of reality undermines the reliability of all mental experiences as representative of external reality.

If the temporal aspect were purely subjective, we would expect variability or inconsistency in how the past, present, and future are represented. Yet, such variability is absent. Alternative explanations for this consistency are less plausible. For instance, attributing it to intersubjective consensus fails to account for the absence of outliers reporting divergent

[170] For thorough discussions of these issues, see Dainton (2010), who critiques B-theory and considers A-theory implications; Price (1996) and Horwich (1987), who advocate B-theory; and Zimmerman (2008) and Craig (2000), who defend A-theory.

temporal experiences. Similarly, explaining the consistency as arising from a common cognitive mechanism requires us to adopt an untenable position: that our cognitive mechanisms systematically deceive us about this most fundamental experience. This not only forces us to acknowledge a gap between experience and reality, but an impassable divide, casting doubt on even the possibility of correspondence between mind and world.

By inference to the best explanation, the universal and consistent experience of the fixed past, dynamic present, and open future is best understood as reflecting the objective nature of time itself. Only this understanding preserves the possibility that our thoughts may reliably be about the external world, while rejecting it amounts to a denial of such a possibility.

None of the problems I have highlighted above necessitates the reality of genuine change. That is because the possibility remains that we may explain them away by virtue of some yet-to-be-determined feature of consciousness. And that is why the debate between A-theorists and B-theorists is so intractable. A-theorists consider our experience of the present's apparently changing nature to represent an objective fact, while B-theorists deny that these experiences represent objective reality. Answering the question of the reality of genuine change itself may be what is required to resolve the dispute. No one can step outside of time and take a God's eye view of the world to observe whether it is dynamic or static. Instead, we must consider what is presented to us within time, which I now turn to.

7.3 Experience and the Nature of the Past and Present

In Chapter 6 I argued that a thought is about reality when the encoded properties of an immanent object mirror or correspond with the exemplified properties of an individual in the external world. This is how our thoughts are about reality and how we can distinguish such thoughts from thoughts about fiction. I will now apply this understanding to our experiences of the past and the present.

Contrast a thought about the past with a thought about the present. A thought about the past has a B-theoretical structure. We think of past events as spread out in time with different properties at different times. Sir Edmund Hillary's climbing Mount Everest occurred over a time. We can picture Hillary at different stages on his journey, first at the bottom of the mountain, *A*, then halfway up, *B*, and finally at the top, *C*. However, we recognise that *A, B,* and *C* comprise a temporally extended set. That is, we do not think of them in the sense of *B* replacing *A*, then *C* replacing *B*. Instead, we think of them as proceeding from *A* to *B* to *C*.

A thought about the present is A-theoretic. For example, when we think about an event unfolding in the present, we perceive it as *B* replacing *A*, then *C* replacing *B*. Here's another illustration: imagine watching someone blowing air into a balloon. First, you observe a smaller balloon; then, it is replaced by a larger balloon; and finally, it is replaced by an even larger one. We think of it this way because only *A, B,* or *C*, or one size balloon can be immediately present. The whole of a temporally extended event cannot be immediately present at one and the same time. We may illustrate this: *A*—, then, not-*A, B*—, then, not-*B, C*—. This represents that only *A, B,* or *C* are immediately present at a given present time. When *A* is immediately present, *B* and *C* are not; when *B* is immediately present *A* and *C* are not, and when *C* is immediately present, *A* and *B* are not. Or, when we perceive the large balloon, the small balloon has passed from our immediate awareness, and when we observe the even larger balloon, the previous one has passed.

If our thoughts are about reality, then there are objects in the external world that exemplify the properties represented in thought. The denial of the exemplification relation is a denial that our thoughts can represent external reality. However, if we believe that our thoughts can represent external reality, then assuming our thoughts about the past and the present are about reality, the past is a temporally extended fixed structure and the present genuinely changes.

It is a mistake to consider a thought about the present in isolation from the preceding time. If we lack any memory of *A* when *B* occurs, then we will fail to recognise any change. The recognition of change requires that the thought representing *B* is the thought representing *A.* The represented past times are ordered B-relations, earlier, later, or simultaneous with one another, and this ordering does not change. The properties of the event represented as present undergo change. They become present and then cease to be present. Once an event loses the property of *presentness* and becomes past, it undergoes no further change and remains in perpetuity in a B-theoretic state. The past is B-theoretic.

Can we apply a similar analysis to the future? The answer is "no," and there are two primary reasons for this. First, unlike past events, which do not change, future events change when they become present events. Therefore, future events change in at least this respect. Next, unlike the representative properties of objects and events in a thought about the past, the properties of objects and events in a thought about the future may change. They change as present circumstances change and different possibilities unfold. Either our thoughts accurately represent the changing *nature* of the future, whether or not the specific details are correct, or our thoughts inaccurately represent the future, and its structure is fixed. However, even if the ordering of future events is fixed, they still change from being future to present. Therefore, the future, like the present, is A-theoretic. It is worth highlighting how useful this discussion is for understanding the distinction between the unchanging past and the changing present and future. Dyke (2013) has pointed to this feature when describing A-properties: "Events and times possess futurity, which they shed to acquire presentness, which they shed to acquire pastness" (p. 333). Regardless of all other property-related change, the future changes because it *becomes* present, and the present changes because it *becomes* past. When an event has acquired pastness, it just *is*. It doesn't *become* anything.

Returning to the connection between thoughts about the present and the past, if a thought about the present involves the past, then it is about both the past and the present. Some may view this characterisation of a thought about the present as deceptive, but it seems unavoidable to conclude that a thought about the present inherently involves the past. It is unclear whether a thought purporting to represent *the present* truly does represent it. Genuine simultaneity between a thought and the external world would seem to rule out this possibility. Moreover, due to the fleeting nature of the present, a thought cannot isolate an individual present moment from the preceding time. The process of mental representation takes time, which means that a thought purporting to both represent the immediate present and external reality truly must inevitably involve the past. A thought aiming to represent the external world as it is simultaneously with the thought itself must be an anticipation, leaving room for error, or perhaps openness or indeterminacy.

The analysis does not suggest that the past undergoes genuine change. When a present event becomes past, its properties remain unchanged. Even if more events become past, once they are past, they do not change. Consider "E": the event of Hillary climbing Everest. *A* is past, *B* is present, and *C* is future. The *A* part of *E* remains unchanged, while *B* and *C* undergo changes. *B* will lose its *presentness* and remain unchanging when it is past, while *C* will change from *being future* to *being present* until it finally loses *presentness* and remains unchanging in the past. Once *A*, *B*, and *C*, along with any event for that matter, are in the past, they undergo no further changes. The past is constituted by past events. Therefore, the past does not change.

The past appears to be expanding from the point of view of an observer caught up in the dynamic present since present events are constantly becoming past. The past relative to a later time, t_2, will appear to have expanded compared to the past relative to an earlier time, t_1. The apparent expansion that the past undergoes between t_1 and t_2 does not imply any changes in the intrinsic properties of events that are past. This is precisely what is meant by the

expression, “the past does not change.” It should not be misconstrued as suggesting that we do not perceive the past as having new entries as we perceive present events becoming part of its structure. From our dynamic viewpoint, as time passes, we indeed perceive new entries being added to the past. However, once these new entries are determined as past, they undergo no changes. To illustrate, if we think of the past as a set, its cardinality may increase as new members are added; however, this does not change the properties of the existing members.

Whether we view the past as undergoing intrinsic change depends on an observer's viewpoint. I argue that fixity and dynamism together constitute the dual nature of time. From the dynamic present—caught up in the flux of A-theoretic time—things appear to change; however, if we could view the past as it is in itself—which would be unaffected by A-theoretic flux—it would appear static, because the past is B-theoretic. Hence, while the past appears to grow from our viewpoint in the present, if we could adopt a perspective of the past *qua* the past, it would be a changeless, fixed structure. Any attempt to conceive of the dual nature of time from a genuinely “God’s eye” perspective—one that encompasses the singularly determined, fixed past and the indeterminate, open future, separated by a dynamic moment of becoming where an uncountable multitude of possibilities resolves into a single actuality—is inherently limited by the finite nature of our minds and the constraints of our perspective.

Either a past event possesses specific properties or it does not. An events’ gaining or losing properties occurs in the present, and not in the past. For the past to genuinely change, it would require that events in the past gain or lose properties, but they cannot gain or lose properties because the past is unchanging. Consequently, while we may observe the totality of the past as increasing, the nature of its constituent parts remains fixed, highlighting the past’s immutable, B-theoretic nature.

We may also appeal to truthmaking to demonstrate that the present genuinely changes, thereby differentiating the present from the past. If true statements can describe reality, and true statements have truthmakers, then a rudimentary set of statements about the present demonstrates that the present changes. For example, consider the following two present-tense statements:

1. It is raining in Hamilton.
2. It is not raining in Hamilton.

For 1 or 2 to be true, the weather would make one of them true. However, 1 and 2 contradict one another, and they cannot be true simultaneously. The statements are about the same place. Truthmakers of 1 or 2 cannot co-occur at the same time. For 1 and then 2 to be true of the present, genuine change must have occurred.

All the counterarguments that eternalists may offer in response will amount to some variation of the claim that our experiences defy reality: the observed changes are merely apparent; accordingly, they will say they are due to the viewpoint of the observer being earlier for 1 and later for 2, not because Hamilton's properties have genuinely changed—from raining to not raining. This perspective posits an external ontology that is independent from our experiences. But, as I have said, we cannot take a view from outside of time to establish the truth of the ontological claim. And if we admit that present tense statements are indexed to their time of utterance instead of to a privileged present, then we cannot rule out the possibility of such an ontology. All that we can offer are further examples of true present-tense statements that purport to demonstrate that genuine change occurs: "now *x* is" and "now *x* is not," and point to the truthmakers for them. Eternalism defies our experiences within time; however, conceiving of a viewpoint from outside time is to propose something beyond our comprehension.

7.4 The Immutable and Substantive Past

I will proceed through this section, first, by highlighting why we should distinguish between the fixed past and the changing present and by arguing that something that is fixed is immutable and something that is subject to change is mutable. Then, I will argue that something that is immutable is substantive, and something that is mutable is nonsubstantive. Finally, I will defend the view that existence is substantive and, therefore, nonsubstantiveness implies non-existence.

I have argued that the present is mutable because the intrinsic properties of the present change, and this mutability is not due to the subjective viewpoint of an observer. The past is immutable because the intrinsic properties of the past are fixed, which is not due to the observer's viewpoint. If we deny the distinctions between the past and present, then either the past changes or the present is fixed.

First, the past cannot change because any alteration in past events would disrupt the causal relationship between past events and later events. For instance, if the past changed such that Jacinda Ardern's father never met her mother, then Jacinda Ardern would not have been born. The flow-on effects of this change would be expansive, and many aspects of the recent history of New Zealand would be radically different; perhaps the Labour Party would not have won the 2020 election; perhaps New Zealand would not have implemented wide-ranging social lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19; perhaps many more New Zealanders would have died as a result.

It is possible that our memories are constantly changing in line with a changing past. However, this would imply a universe that is significantly more chaotic than even our current understanding. In such a scenario, the world would undergo abrupt transitions between potentially highly disparate states of affairs, rather than following the smooth progression of

events that we typically assume. This would result in the violation of numerous causal and physical laws that we believe govern the universe. For this reason, it is highly implausible that the past changes.

Second, suppose that the present is fixed. In that case, we would expect for the properties of the present to remain unchanged, resulting in a static world. Our subjective experience would be static, too. Even if we accept the eternalist's view that all times exist, we would still perceive the world as static relative to any given frame of reference unless our consciousness were dynamically moving across the fixed worldly structure, as a version of MSV suggests.

It is worthwhile to be reminded of how eternalists understand our experience of a changing present within their framework of a static world because it reminds us of why eternalism ultimately denies the reality of an objective past. Under eternalism, our perception of dynamic change is the result of an observer's subjective experience. Each temporal part of an individual is present relative to the time it occurs, but objectively, no part is uniquely privileged. However, we perceive the world as dynamically changing and perceive time as passing. Each temporal part perceives itself as uniquely privileged and as being directed towards its future and away from its past. Change is perceived because each temporal part remembers its earlier parts and anticipates its future parts, which are distinct from its present part.

While this explanation seeks to reconcile our subjective experience of genuine change with an objectively static universe, it fails to account for how the external world is represented in consciousness. That is because the account explains our experience of genuine change by describing a B-series, while consciousness represents genuine change through A-properties.

A B-theoretic explanation works for explaining the past because its properties are fixed. However, explaining a change in the present by appealing to B-relations does not adequately capture what consciousness represents. Additionally, it does not do justice to the idea that our thoughts may be faithfully about external reality. Consequently, we must deny that our thoughts about the present accurately represent the true nature of reality; we must accept anti-realism about not only the past, but the present and future too.

Considering that humans are fully capable of conceptualising a B-series, it remains unclear why we would not perceive the present as B-theoretic if that is its nature. Accepting the eternalist's explanation comes at the high cost of rejecting the identifying or representative relation between thoughts about the present and external reality, even though human consciousness can represent the world B-theoretically, as eternalists describe.

Because our thoughts can represent both A- and B-theoretic structures, and our thoughts about the past and present are about the external world, we have little reason to deny that the present genuinely changes and the past does not. Only GB and MSV remain as contenders of theories which neither suffers from the problem of absence facing presentism, given that they posit an existent past, nor the problem of being unable to account for temporal passage facing eternalism because they posit a preeminent present.

Now, I will argue that GB and MSV do not recognise the significance of the difference between the past, present and future. This discussion will illuminate the significance of the difference between something mutable and something immutable. Distinguishing the past and the present requires more than just accounting for different temporal properties. GB admits a genuine change in events from *being present* to *being past*, and MSV admits genuine change

from *being future*, to *being present*, to *being past.*[171] Accordingly, GB and MSV accept the reality of the dynamic present and the fixed past, but they fail to recognise the substantive difference between something that is *mutable* and something that is *immutable.*

The explanation for the experience of temporal passage offered by MSV fails to demonstrate that *presentness* is an intrinsic property of the world because that requires an observer outside of time to make sense of the idea of the property of *presentness* moving across a fixed structure. Only an outside observer could see which moment is illuminated to distinguish it from all the past and future times. There would seem to be nothing that distinguishes one time from another for observers within time, suggesting that under MSV the difference between the past and the present is negligible.

MSV cannot explain the relation between the encoded properties of immanent objects that give rise to the experience of change and the exemplified properties of the external world. According to MSV, temporal parts exist unchanging at the times they occur. Only the properties of *pastness*, *presentness*, and *futurity* change. Therefore, when a new moment becomes present, nothing about the temporal parts that exist at that time have changed, except that they now exemplify intrinsic *presentness*. This explanation is flawed for two reasons. First, it means that objects do not gain or lose properties in the present as they appear to, which suggests that our mental representations of the external world are inaccurate. If our mental representations were accurate, then they should represent fixed temporal parts within a B-series. Second, it is unclear precisely what would distinguish between *I-presentness* and *R-*

[171] An interesting question is whether or not growing blockers should say that *being past* is an intrinsic property, and moving spotlighters that *being past* and *being future* are, or whether these are extrinsic properties due to the position of a time relative to the present. It seems sufficient for growing blockers to appeal to the *presentness* of the present to distinguish it from the past—the past being the times that exemplified this property but no longer do. Similarly, moving spotlighters may say that future times are those that will exemplify *presentness* and past times are those that did. Whether or not *being future* and *being past* are intrinsic properties does not impact my analysis because a change in *presentness* by itself is sufficient to imply genuine change. Therefore, I will speak as though *being past* and *being future* are intrinsic properties; however, I note that they need not be.

presentness because there would be no noticeable difference when a moment that is *R-present* becomes *I-present*. MSV implies that the difference between the past, present, and future is obscure, but this implication contradicts how we experience them.

According to GB, genuine change occurs in the present—non-existent possible future events become existent actual events as they arise in the present—present objects gain properties; then, when they cease to exemplify the property equivalent to *presentness*, they continue to exist unchanging in the past. This account fails to explain why we should think that the present and past have an equal existential or ontological status if they are so distinct. The explanation does not capture the substantive difference between something mutable and something immutable, and thereby fails to adequately characterise the past.

The present is in a constant state of becoming, always in flux and never fully determined, like an imperfect form, constantly evolving towards a perfect state in which it can exist sempiternally—the past. The GBers' explanation of the difference between the past and the present leaves wanting a better explanation of these differences.

The genuine change in MSV is minimal because it only involves an object or event's temporal properties, suggesting that this view also does not adequately capture the significant differences between the past, present, and future. Since MSV and eternalism have overlapping ontological commitments, MSV faces the same problem I have raised against eternalism: the encoded properties of an immanent object which purports to represent the present do not mirror the exemplified properties of the external world. The properties of such immanent objects genuinely change. They are not presented as fixed parts of a spatiotemporally extended object, as individual parts highlighted by a *moving spotlight*.

This section has argued that there is a substantive difference between the past and the present. The past is immutable because the intrinsic properties of the past do not change, while

the present is mutable as it is in a state of constant flux. If reality is independent of our perception and consciousness of it, and our thoughts about the past and present represent that reality, then our mental representations of the past and present should not be merely subjective.

I will close out this section by outlining a picture of the past which appeals to its immutable nature, and contrast this with a picture of the present that calls upon its mutable nature. Using Plato on the Forms, I wish to draw attention to the distinction between substantive reality and the mere shadow of that reality. Specifically, that substantive reality is constituted by unchanging and sempiternal objects, whereas the shadow of that reality involves constant change. If the past is immutable, and something immutable entails substantive reality, then the past entails substantive reality. If the present is mutable and something mutable is akin to a shadow of substantive reality, then the present is akin to a shadow of substantive reality. Put another way, the past is substantive, and the present is nonsubstantive.

In his discussion of "Forms," Plato distinguishes physical phenomena, which are subject to change, from the things that underlie these appearances, which he calls the perfect Forms or pure Forms (Plato, 2009, S. VII).[172] According to Plato, no physical phenomenon maintains the same Form indefinitely and neither do they exemplify perfect Forms. Thus, physical objects are imperfect, fleeting representations of unchanging and everlasting perfect Forms. Plato concludes that the Forms constitute the true or fundamental reality, whereas the physical world is a mere shadow of the world of Forms.

There are two primary reasons that led Plato to conclude that the Forms constitute fundamental reality while physical phenomena do not: perfection and eternity. First, perfection is the idea that the Forms have perfectly determined attributes, which is to say they are flawless and complete. Physical phenomena always lack perfect determinations. Second, the Forms

[172] For various original discussions of the nature of the Forms, see Plato (1993, 1996).

exist eternally and immutably, whereas physical phenomena are temporary and subject to change.

While not directly analogous, there are aspects of Plato's descriptions of the Forms and physical phenomena that are useful to consider when comparing the past and the present. The distinction between the present and the past reflects Plato's distinction between appearance and reality. The past is completely determined and unchanging, while the present is characterised by incomplete determinations and constant flux. The similarity lies in the contrast between something sempiternal or eternal, unalterable, and something temporary and subject to change.

Because our mental representations of the external world appear primarily as immediate apprehensions—as occurring simultaneously with the states of affairs they represent—we refer to those states as "present." We are accustomed to thinking of objects that are represented as present as privileged; indeed, this is what motivates presentism, and it is why we think of present objects and the present as paradigms of existence. However, suppose that a mental representation cannot occur simultaneously with the external states it represents. In that case, a mental state of external reality is more likely to represent the past. To be a representation of the present no time should elapse between the instantiation of the external state and the formation of the mental representation of that state. The whole series of events, including light reflecting from the surface of an external object, travelling to the eye of an observer, entering their eye, being focused by the lens onto the retina, converted into electrical signals and sent to the brain via the optic nerve, and finally processed by the brain, would have to occur without any time elapsing. Consequently, a mental presentation of the present represents something distinct from a mind-independent or existent reality.

The nonsubstantiveness of the present should be no surprise. The present is the impossible to grasp transitional moment when the open and mutable future turns into the

determinate and immutable past. The past is complete in every respect. There is no possibility of altering the past, even if we may interpret the story of the past differently or make new discoveries about the details of the past.

Considering the impossibility of a thought about external reality representing the world as it exists simultaneously with the occurrence of the thought, a thought about the existent world cannot be given in an immediate apprehension of the present. This fact, coupled with the indeterminate, mutable, and fleeting nature of the present, imply that the present's *being* is nonsubstantive. In contrast a thought about the past can accurately represent the existent world, and that reality is presented as immutable and unchanging. For these reasons, I argue that the past's existence is substantive. To state this more perspicuously, past objects, properties and relations constitute the part of external reality that exist, while those which are present, or future constitute the parts that do not. However, this explanation raises an important question that must be addressed to ensure a complete understanding of the distinction between the existent past and the non-existent present and future: what does existence itself add to the nature of objects?

7.5 What Existence Adds

In What Makes Time Special? (2017), Callendar raises the concern that the idea of "naked existence" is problematic because it seemingly explains "everything and nothing." Callendar argues that while "[t]he existence of particular kinds of objects can explain' [e.g., the existence of atoms explains observable phenomena such as physical data], the explanatory power lies not in their existence but in their nature, specifically their causal powers" (p. 296). This critique raises a challenge for those of us who view existence as a property possessed by some objects but not by others. For instance, I argue that the distinction between the immutable past and the mutable present and future is best explained by the property of existence.

There are two primary ways to defend my view against criticisms like Callendar's. The first approach focuses on elucidating the nature of existence through substantiveness. While existence alone might seem lacking in explanatory power, understanding it through the lens of substantiveness—which involves complete determination (or perfection, as Plato would put it), immutability and sempiternity—provides significant explanatory power and demonstrates that existence is not just a placeholder but a unique and distinct property that differentiates between what exists and what does not.

This understanding aligns with Plato's theory of Forms, where ultimate reality is characterised by perfection, immutability and eternity. Plato distinguished between the unchanging Forms and the mutable physical world, arguing that ultimate reality is constituted by the former. Similarly, I contend that the past, being completely determined, immutable, and sempiternal possesses substantiveness, implying its existence. In contrast, the present and future, characterised by incomplete determination, mutability, and impermanence lack substantiveness; therefore, they do not exist.

We can represent this argument formally:

Argument for Substantiveness as Necessary and Sufficient for Existence

1. Complete determination, immutability, and sempiternity constitute substantiveness. (premise)
2. An object exists if and only if its properties are spatiotemporally instantiated in external reality. (premise)
3. Any object that exists must possess the properties that ensure it can instantiate its properties in external reality. (premise)

4. Complete determination: Only objects that are completely determined can exist in external reality; objects with incomplete properties cannot exist. (premise)

5. Immutability: Once an object in external reality is completely determined, it cannot (genuinely) change; any change would lead to contradictory properties or a state of indeterminacy, which cannot be (spatiotemporally) instantiated by an existent object. (premise)

6. Sempiternity: An immutable existent must be sempiternal, since its properties cannot (genuinely) change once instantiated and therefore it lasts indefinitely. (from 2 and 5)

7. An object in external reality must possess the properties that constitute substantiveness (from 1 and 5), as these properties ensure it can instantiate its properties in external reality (from 3 and 4), and an immutable existent is necessarily sempiternal. (from 6)

8. Therefore, substantiveness is necessary for existence. (from 7)

9. Since substantiveness includes all the necessary properties for an object to exist, and these properties are required for an object to be instantiated in external reality, substantiveness is sufficient for existence. (from 1, 2, and 7)

10. Therefore, substantiveness is necessary and sufficient for existence. (from 8 and 9)

This argument does not merely draw connections between the qualities that constitute substantiveness and existence; it shows that these qualities are both necessary and sufficient for existence. This does not imply that existence is defined solely in terms of substantiveness; rather, it highlights how the qualities we associate with existence depend on substantiveness.

A significant issue I wrestled with while writing this thesis involved completely determined and immutable abstract objects like mathematical ones, which differ from other non-existent objects such as present and future ones, which may be indeterminate or subject to

change. My analysis of the connection between substantiveness and existence initially worried me, as it appeared at first to necessitate the conclusion that mathematical objects possess the same mode of existence as past objects. However, while mathematical objects are completely determined and immutable, they are atemporal (or eternal) rather than sempiternal, so they do not meet the criteria for substantiveness. This distinction clarifies what existence adds, setting apart mathematical objects from objects that possess substantiveness. An atemporal mathematical object is not grounded in any particular world, whereas an object possessing substantiveness is grounded in a specific world. Nevertheless, while mathematical objects are non-existent, their complete determination and immutability, combined with their atemporality, grants them a distinct mode of being.

Premise 2 aligns with nominalist views by specifying spatiotemporal instantiation as necessary for existence. However, in combination with premises 4, 5, and 6, which introduce complete determination, immutability, and sempiternity as necessary for existence, my view diverges from nominalism, setting a higher standard for what qualifies as existent. Even though spatiotemporal instantiation is necessary for existence, it is not required for an object's being. This distinction reduces the impact of spatiotemporal instantiation for my view, as I assert that there are many kinds of objects that do not exist.

Additionally, premise 2 supports premise 6 by distinguishing sempiternal existents from atemporal objects. Sempiternal existents are completely determined, immutable, and spatiotemporally instantiated, whereas atemporal objects may be completely determined and immutable but they lack spatiotemporal instantiation. This distinction underscores the necessity of all the qualities involved in substantiveness for existence. It strengthens my argument against nominalism, showing how the view fails to appreciate all the qualities of existence, and fails to account for objects that lack existence.

The distinction between sempiternal and atemporal objects clarifies what existence adds. If existence added nothing, then atemporal objects, such as mathematical ones, would exist as much as sempiternal objects do. This distinction shows that "existence" is not merely a nominal predicate; it refers to a genuine property that plays an essential role in determining the nature of objects.

These arguments clarify my position within the debate between realism and nominalism, and where I see abstract objects, such as mathematical ones, fitting into the ontology. Now, let's set aside the comparison with completely determined and immutable non-existent objects and consider the nature of existence contrasted with garden variety non-existent objects.

On a more abstract account, existence can be described as the glue that binds objects both in and to substantive reality, ensuring their immutability there. In contrast, objects that lack existence—whether fictional, merely possible, impossible, present, or future—cannot possess a complete and sempiternal nature due to their inherent propensity for change. While these garden variety non-existent objects may possess properties and have an identity, without existence, they lack the ontological grounding necessary for their complete determination, immutably and sempiternally.

While the first approach focuses on elucidating existence in terms of substantiveness, this more abstract account emphasises the unique and irreducible role that existence plays as a binding force, distinguishing the singular, determinate past from the open and manifold possibilities of the present and future. Existence is not merely a vacuous predicate; like glue, it fixes and anchors objects within a deeper substantive reality. Consider a piece of wooden furniture held together by glue: while we may not see the glue, and it may not seem to add anything to the furniture beyond what is already described by other properties, without it, the

parts would fall apart, altering its constitution. Just as the glue is essential to ensure the furniture's particular identity and attributes remain intact, existence ensures that an object's identity and attributes remain sempiternally immutable.

Criticisms like Callendar's, rooted in a Kantian tradition, assume that existent things have a privileged ontological status simply because, as they claim, there are no other things—non-existent objects lack significance. However, this view overlooks the logical necessity of non-existent objects in accounting for truths, which are often about them, as well as the intentionality of many thoughts, which are often directed at them.

The glue analogy illustrates how existence ontologically grounds the qualities of the past, distinguishing it from the mutable present and future. Other properties alone fail to account for the past's unique nature. Existence is not merely a superficial label but a substantive property that anchors objects in reality, granting them a fixed, determinate identity. This underscores its irreducible role in our understanding of time, showing that existence is not a naked concept but a genuine property of substantive reality.

Taken together, both approaches demonstrate that existence—whether understood through substantiveness or its unique explanatory role—is essential for providing a comprehensive account of the distinction between the past, and the present and future. This understanding not only elucidates the nature of the past but also directly addresses Callendar's concern about the limitations of naked existence. Grounding the distinctions between the past, present, and future in the substantive nature of existence offers a clear and logically precise explanation of the asymmetry of time, the ontological ground of truths and thoughts about the past, and our experience of both temporal passage and becoming. In doing so, it enables us to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive account of the nature of time and reality itself.

Conclusion

This thesis has posed the question, what is the past? This chapter answers that question: the past *qua* the past, a unique object, possessing its own properties, existing in its own right, whose nature is closer to actuality than mere possibility or impossibility, yet it differs substantially from what presentism and eternalism consider as actual objects. If the dynamic present is the paradigm of actuality, or actual objects are fixed eternally and do not come into being, then the past is non-actual. On the other hand, if only existent things are actual, then only past objects are actual. I have explained change and argued that the present and future genuinely change, but the past does not. Our experiences, which are ultimately our only means of accessing the external world, represent these features and the best explanation for the connection between our thoughts and the external world is that they represent external reality. The unchanging past was contrasted with the changing present to demonstrate the pasts' immutable nature and the presents' mutable nature. I argued that eternalism's failure to recognise genuine change opposes our experiences. While presentism, GB, and MSV describe genuine change, they fail to recognise the ontological significance of this distinction between the past, present and future. I drew an analogy with Plato on the Forms to argue that immutability entails substantiveness and mutability entails nonsubstantiveness. Finally, it was argued that the substantiveness of the past implies that it exists, while the nonsubstantiveness of the present and future imply that they do not exist. The thesis has considered three primary challenges that I have called problems of absence: what grounds a referent, truth, and thought about the past if the past does not exist? I have introduced four major theories of time and demonstrated why each one fails to adequately respond to the question of the past. Presentism denies the past's existence, such that serious presentism fails to ground references, truths, and thoughts about the past, while MP gets the point of contrast between existent and non-existent temporal states wrong. Eternalism, GB, and MSV conflate the ontological status of the past, present, and future in one

way or another, making it challenging to reconcile our thoughts with external reality. GGB and GMSV describe the past as "ghostly," lacking a variety of properties that are essential for characterising the past, generating a similar problem to presentism in grounding references, truths, and thoughts about the past. The middle of the thesis took a traditional approach to the question of the past by focusing on logico-semantic analyses. I demonstrated that responses to the question from these approaches fail because they draw our attention away from what the question is asking *about*, leading to inherently problematic responses. Unless the past is the past, then logico-semantic analyses will always fall short. Chapter 6 turned to intentionality, providing a way to consider the object towards which our thoughts about the past are directed. This allowed a critical evaluation of what the past is like, contrasting its nature with that of the future, and especially the present. If the present is the locus of becoming characterised by constant flux and the past is immutably fixed, remaining in this state sempiternally, then the past and the present are fundamentally different: the past is something substantive: completely determined, unchanging and immutable, while the present is something nonsubstantive: lacking complete determination due to its mutable, illusory, and ever-changing nature. Moreover, the most salient explanation for a difference as profound as that between something immutable and something mutable is a difference in *being* itself, which is to say the past occupies a substantive mode of being, while the present and future occupy a nonsubstantive mode. Considering that existence must be a substantive mode of being, it follows that a nonsubstantive mode equates to non-existence. Therefore, the past, in virtue of its immutable nature, exists, while the present and future, in virtue of their mutable natures, are non-existent.

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