

# Presentism, Truthmakers, and God

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**Abstract:** The truthmaker objection to presentism (the view that what exists *simpliciter* is coextensive with what exists *now*) is that it does not have sufficient metaphysical resources to ground truths about the past. In this paper I identify five constraints that an adequate presentist response ought to meet. In the light of these constraints, I examine and reject several recent proposals by John Bigelow, Simon Keller, Thomas Crisp, and Craig Bourne. Consideration of how these proposals fail, however, points toward another proposal, that truthmakers for truths about the past are to be identified with God's memories, which seems to work. I conclude that presentists have, in the truthmaker objection, considerable incentive to endorse theism.

## 1. Introduction

*Presentism* is the metaphysical thesis that whatever exists, exists *now*, in the present. The past is no more. The future is not yet. Either something exists now, or it does not exist, period. While arguably the commonsense position [Bigelow 1996: 35–6], presentism faces several objections, one of the chief of which is that it lacks the ontological resources to ground truths about the past [Armstrong 2004: ch. 11; Le Poidevin 2003: 137–40; Sider 2001: 35–42; Tooley 1997: 234–40]. Typically, this objection is stated in terms of the *truthmaker principle* or some variant<sup>1</sup> thereof:

TM Every truth requires a truthmaker, an existing state of affairs (or 'fact') that necessitates and thereby grounds its truth.

If we combine presentism with TM, we get the result that every truth needs to be grounded in some *presently* existing fact (hereafter 'present fact'). And the problem for the presentist is that it is far from obvious that present facts are sufficient to ground all truths, in particular truths about the past.<sup>2</sup> Consider the truth that Caesar was assassinated. What fact makes that true? Most non-

presentists would say that what makes it true is the *past fact* or event<sup>3</sup> it represents, namely, Caesar's being assassinated. But the presentist can't say that. For him, past facts don't exist. What the presentist needs, therefore, is a present surrogate for that past fact. We can easily give this surrogate a past-tensed label: *Caesar's having been assassinated*. But without further elaboration it is unclear what present fact that label is supposed to denote. Moreover, it might seem that all present facts pertaining to Caesar (ancient documents, monuments, etc.) collectively *underdetermine* the truth that Caesar was assassinated. In that case, it is unclear whether presentist can satisfy the demands imposed by TM.

Why not just reject TM, then, at least for truths about the past? After all, there are various classes of truths—in particular necessary truths (e.g., “All triangles are three-sided”) and negative existentials (e.g., “There are no hobbits”)—for which it is difficult to specify an adequate truthmaker and for which it has been plausibly argued that truthmakers are not necessary.<sup>4</sup> Could the same be said for truths about the past? Unfortunately for the presentist, it would seem not. Simon Keller [2004: 83–93] has, I believe, successfully refuted this suggestion. His basic point is that even after we allow for restrictions on TM, the truthmaker objection still gets off the ground because some truths about the past—such as contingent, positive existential ones (e.g., “Anne Boleyn was executed”)—are *not* plausibly regarded as exceptions to TM. Consequently, the presentist cannot avoid giving an account of what makes such truths about the past true.

Most presentists have agreed (though see Merricks [2007] for a dissenting view), and several truthmaker proposals have been offered [Bigelow 1996; Keller 2004; Crisp 2003; Crisp 2007; Bourne 2006], but all involve controversial metaphysical commitments and none, I think, succeeds. In fact, I'm going to argue that they fail to satisfy the minimal constraints that a presentist theory of truthmakers for truths about the past ought to meet. In the next section (§2), I

argue for five such constraints, four structural and one explanatory. Collectively these greatly limit the options available to the presentist. Over the next three sections (§3–5) I critically examine and reject the proposals of Bigelow, Keller, Crisp, and Bourne, respectively. Following that (§6), I reintroduce a suggestion by Hartshorne [1984] that has been overlooked in the current discussion, namely, that God’s memories are truthmakers for truths about the past. I argue that, unlike the other proposals on the table, this one actually works for the presentist. Consequently, unless other satisfactory alternatives come into view, it seems that the presentist has in the truthmaker objection a considerable incentive to endorse theism.

## 2. Five Constraints on a Solution

So as not to get bogged down discussing the pros and cons of various refinements of TM, I’m simply going to set aside two of the more controversial classes of truths (logically necessary truths and negative existentials), and work with the following, weaker version of the truthmaker principle:

TM\* Every *contingent, positive existential* truth requires a truthmaker, an existing state of affairs that necessitates and thereby grounds its truth.

This should give us a version of the truthmaker principle that is neither so strong as to be easily undermined by plausible counterexamples nor so weak as to make things too easy on the presentist vis-à-vis the truthmaker objection. Anyway, adopting TM\* as a working assumption still leaves us with a plethora of truths in need of truthmakers. Some of these, like ‘Caesar was assassinated,’ are *simple* truths about the past. Others, like ‘Rome was founded *after* the Trojan War,’ are *comparative*, expressing a relation of temporal precedence between two or more past events. Still others, like ‘Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. on the Ides of March’ are *metrical*

in that they refer to position(s) on a time-scale. And still others, like ‘Caesar was assassinated over 2000 years ago,’ are both *comparative and metrical*. Any account of truthmaker for truths about the past has to be able to handle all of these cases.

Now, unlike the non-presentist, the presentist cannot say that what makes such truths true are the *past facts* or events they refer to. But it also seems clear that whatever makes it true that, say, Caesar was assassinated needs to be somehow *tied to* the past event of Caesar’s being assassinated, for had that event *not* occurred it simply wouldn’t be true that Caesar was assassinated. Thus, the presentist needs to make a distinction between the *historical ground* of a truth about the past (i.e., the past fact or event it refers to) and its *metaphysical ground* (i.e., the present fact that serves as its truthmaker), and he needs to say that the latter has the character it does *because* the former had the character it did. And, obviously, the presentist cannot cash out historical grounding in terms of a standing transtemporal relation between a past fact and a present one. Rather, since (given presentism) the historical ground for the truth that Caesar was assassinated no longer exists, and since (given TM\*) the metaphysical ground must exist for that truth to be true, and since the latter is what it is because of the former, the presentist ought to say that the metaphysical ground is a kind of *trace* or *effect* of the historical ground. In other words, insofar as the past remains present *in its effects*, those effects can serve as truthmakers for truths about the past.<sup>5</sup> This insight gives us our first truthmaker constraint:

*Trace Constraint.* The truthmaker for a truth about the past must be an effect or trace of the past facts or events it refers to.

One worry that must be addressed at this point is whether any version of truthmaker-preserving presentism can satisfy this constraint. On the assumption that causality is a genuine relation and that the obtaining of a relation entails the existence of its relata, one might think that

any appeal to traces as causal effects of past facts commits the presentist to the existence of past facts and is therefore incompatible with presentism. This worry is misplaced, however, for there is no reason for the presentist to concede that causality is a genuine relation [Bourne 2006: 109–15]. As the presentist sees it, the passage of time involves a real coming-to-be and a real passing-away as the present state-of-affairs *evolves* in accordance with its inherent propensities. The prior state *causes* its successor by *becoming* its successor. This dual reference—to a predecessor state and a successor state—naturally requires our analysis of “*c* caused *e*” to quantify over both *c* and *e*. The presentist, however, will insist on placing at least one of those quantifiers *within* the scope of a tense operator. Thus, if “*c* caused *e*” then either *e* exists and *it was the case that c* exists, or *e* existed and it was *then* the case that *c had existed*. In other words, the only sense in which appeal to present traces of past facts commits the presentist to the existence of past facts is in terms of the *past existence* of a series of facts leading up to the present.

The first challenge for the presentist, then, is to find truthmakers that can satisfy the trace constraint. But that is not enough, for not any sort of trace will do. Consider P, the conjunction of all true contingent and positive existential propositions about the past as of time  $t_0$ . By TM\*, each truth in P has a truthmaker. And since P is itself a contingent and positive existential truth about the past, by TM\* it also has a truthmaker. It follows, however, from the fact that P is a *contingent* truth that it could have been false. Different possible worlds can have different histories. Consequently, any truthmaker for P must also be contingent. This gives us a second truthmaker constraint:

*Contingence Constraint.* The truthmaker for any contingent truth about the past must also be contingent.

Furthermore, truths about the past can never cease to be true about the past. This follows from the fixity of the past. That Caesar was assassinated is not only true now, but will be so until the end of time since it is impossible to bring it about that Caesar has not been assassinated. What holds for Caesar also holds for P. Let T be the set of all *possible* truthmakers for P, that is, the set of all facts the obtaining of which would make P true.<sup>6</sup> Since P is true, at least one member of T exists to make P true. And since P will always remain true, at all times subsequent to the present at least one member of T must exist. This gives us a third truthmaker constraint:

*Persistence Constraint.* What is true about the past will henceforth always remain true about the past. Hence, at all times  $t \geq t_0$  at least one truthmaker in T for P must exist.

Finally, our truthmakers can't underdetermine what is true about the past. If the trace of some past event  $E_1$  could just as well have been the result of a different past event  $E_2$ , then it does not suffice to make it true that  $E_1$  rather than  $E_2$ . This observation yields a fourth truthmaker constraint:

*Discrimination Constraint.* Every member of T must discriminate the unique *actual* past as of  $t_0$  from all other *possible* pasts.

These four constraints—trace, contingency, persistence, and discrimination—are *structural constraints*. They specify properties that truthmakers for truths about the past have to have if they are to satisfy the demands of truthmaking in a manner consistent with presentism and with our settled intuitions about how such truths behave. The trace constraint is required by presentism—if past facts aren't available as truthmakers, then we need a present surrogate that's historically grounded in those past facts. The contingency and persistence constraints are

required by our settled intuitions that the past could have been otherwise and that it cannot now be changed. And the discrimination constraint follows from the principle of truthmaker necessitation, the idea that if a fact suffices to *make* a proposition true, then the truth of that proposition must be a necessary consequence of that fact's obtaining.

Collectively, these four constraints greatly limit the kinds of facts that can serve the presentist's needs. For example, consider the discrimination constraint in the light of Russell's skeptical hypothesis that 'the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was' [1921: 159]. If this is a logical possibility, then *every* present fact is compatible with the world's having sprung into being five minutes ago and also compatible with the past's having been as it actually was. Consequently, nothing that now exists suffices to pick out the actual past from that skeptical possibility, thereby violating the discrimination constraint. The result is that nothing that now exists is an adequate truthmaker for *any* of the truths in P. Given the unacceptability of this conclusion, the presentist has got to make sure that whatever facts he posits to account for truths about the past are such as to *preclude* the logical possibility of Russell's five-minute hypothesis, and not only of that hypothesis but of all variants thereof. This is easier said than done.

To preclude Russell's five-minute hypothesis it would suffice to have some fact that could not have sprung into being within the last five minutes. What that fact could be is unclear. No 'ordinary' physical facts could do the job. For example, light from the sun takes roughly eight minutes to get here, but by hypothesis the sunlight we see now could have sprung into being at a point five minutes away from the Earth. Nor could any fact of human psychology do the job. That someone can trace a continuous string of memories more than five minutes into the past won't suffice because by hypothesis all memories stretching past the five-minute mark sprang into existence along with everything else. Moreover, for any putative Russell-blocker that

could not have come into being within the last  $n$  minutes we can construct another version of Russell's hypothesis that posits everything's springing into being  $n+1$  minutes ago exactly as it then was, in which case the discrimination constraint still fails. And if it is suggested that we can block all Russell-variants by positing something that could not have sprung into being any earlier than the beginning of the universe (perhaps the universe itself), then we face a different sort of skeptical hypothesis. Suppose that our universe is exactly 15 billion years old. Why could we not tack an extra billion years on the front end of the universe, so to speak, while leaving its history from 15 billion years on exactly as it has been? If that is possible, then nothing that now exists in our universe would suffice to make it true that we have a 15 billion-year history rather than a 16 billion-year one.

To satisfy all four structural constraints, the truthmakers in  $T$  must not only be contingent (contingence constraint), and determined by the past (trace constraint) in such a way that it is logically impossible for any of them to exist and for the past to have been any different (discrimination constraint). It must also be logically impossible for any member of  $T$  to cease to exist without leaving behind another member of  $T$  in its place, so long as the world endures (persistence constraint). Clearly this is a tall order. Any facts that could satisfy all four constraints will have to be fairly exotic indeed. Before looking at some recent proposals, however, there is one more constraint that I need to mention.

Suppose we designate *Caesar's having been assassinated* as the present fact, whatever it is, that makes it true that Caesar was assassinated. So far so good: We have a way to label this fact in a way that makes clear what past event it is historically grounded in. But what we still lack, and need, is an informative account idea of what this fact is. We have a tolerably clear idea of what the fact of Caesar's *being* assassinated amounts to—its constituents include, presumably,

Caesar, an assailant, the assailant's mortally wounding Caesar, and so forth. But what are the constituents of Caesar's *having been* assassinated? What would have to obtain in order for that fact to obtain? This is not an idle question. To offer a theory of truthmakers for some class of truths is to *explain* what makes those truths true. It is to specify the features, aspects, or constituents of reality that ground the truths in question. As such, an adequate theory of truthmakers for some class of truths must satisfy the norms of explanation. In particular, we want an *informative* account of how reality is different from what it would have been if what is in fact true had not been true. But if all we are told is that what makes it true that Caesar was assassinated is the fact of Caesar's having been assassinated, that is no better *as an explanation* of the truth of that proposition than the fact of opium's having dormitive power is for the claim that opium induces sleep. Such 'explanations' hardly do more than restate the explanandum and are, therefore, not informative.

Critics have frequently accused presentists of metaphysical 'cheating', that is, of being 'unwilling to accept an ontology robust enough to bear the weight of the truths they feel free to invoke' [Sider 2001: 41; see also Oaklander 2004: 91, 103]. To meet this charge, the presentist needs an informative account of what past-tensed facts are in order to show that they aren't just empty posits, superficial verbal responses to a metaphysical problem. This gives us a fifth, explanatory constraint:

*Explanatory Constraint.* An account of the truthmakers for truths about the past must be explanatorily adequate. In particular, it must give an informative characterization of how reality is different from what it would have been if what is true about the past had not been true.

Having identified five constraints on presentist responses to the truthmaker objection, let us now look at several recent proposals and see how they stack up.

### 3. Lucretianism

Confronted by a version of the truthmaker objection, the ancient Roman atomist Lucretius replied:

When men say it *is* a fact that Helen was ravished or the Trojans were conquered, we must not let anyone drive us to the admission that any such factual event *exists* independently of any object, on the ground that the generations of men of whom these events were accidents have been swept away by the irrevocable lapse of time. For we could put it that whatever has taken place is an accident of a particular tract of earth or of the space it occupied [1994: 21 (1.464–70)].

What Lucretius proposes is that when an event occurs, say, Helen's being ravished, the region of space in which that event occurs acquires a persistent tensed property, in this case *being the place where Helen was ravished*. Such properties are said to serve as the truthmakers for truths about the past.

Lucretius' proposal clearly requires an absolute conception of space—in order to be persistent bearers of tensed properties, spatial locations have to have a stable identity over time independently of the objects that occupy them. Since the absolute conception of space is highly controversial, it'd be nice for the presentist if there was a way of adapting Lucretius' basic idea without incurring that metaphysical commitment. Just such an adaptation of 'Lucretianism' has recently been advanced by John Bigelow:

I suggest a modification of the Lucretian doctrine. One of the things that exists is the whole world, the totality of things that exist. The world can have properties and accidents, just as its parts may have. It is a present property of the world, that it is a world in which Helen was abducted and the Trojans were conquered [1996: 46].

On Bigelow's proposal, the universe as a whole acquires and retains past-tensed properties for every event that occurs within it. Thus, when Helen was abducted, the universe acquired the property *being such that Helen was abducted*. This property accounts for the *simple* truth that Helen was abducted. But there are also *comparative* and *metrical* truths about the past. To account for truths of these sorts the Lucretian's past-tense properties need to have an intrinsic quantitative ordering principle, probably something like a 'date stamp'. Thus, for example, the universe (or some region of space) cannot merely be such that Caesar was assassinated, it has to be such that Caesar was assassinated *in 44 B.C. on the Ides of March, Roman standard time* [Keller 2004: 95].

Now that we have an idea of what the Lucretian proposal amounts to, we need to assess its adequacy as an answer to the truthmaker objection. The first thing we should note is that both Lucretius' and Bigelow's proposals seem designed to meet the four structural constraints outlined above. In both cases, the past-tensed properties that accrue to regions of space or to the universe as a whole are supposed to be *persistent traces* of past events. They are historically *contingent* on those past events—if Helen had not been abducted then neither the universe nor any region of space would be such that Helen was abducted. And because they accrue for *every* event that happens, they serve to *discriminate* the actual past from every other possible past.

So far so good, but closer scrutiny reveals some deep problems. In the first place, it is not clear how the Lucretian's past-tensed properties are supposed to block Russellian skeptical scenarios. Is there anything about these properties that absolutely prevents them popping into or

out of existence independently of the past facts or events that they point to? Certainly, the Lucretian presentist can simply stipulate that they *do* block such scenarios, but the lack of any explanation of *how* they *could* do this is a serious omission.

In the second place, Lucretianism threatens to generate an endless array of new facts. Consider Bigelow's proposal according to which universe acquires a tensed-property every time an event happens. To simplify matters, let's focus on the simple past-tensed property of being such that Caesar was assassinated. The problem is this: The acquisition of this property is *itself* an event, and so it seems that the universe must acquire a second-order tensed property, namely, being such that the universe has acquired the property of being such that Caesar was assassinated, in order to track its acquisition of the first-order tensed property. But the acquisition of that second-order tensed property is also an event, and so the universe must acquire a third-order tensed property, and so forth, *ad infinitum*. If each of these higher-order tensed properties is really distinct from its predecessor, then we're on our way to a seriously bloated ontology. Either the Lucretian has to find a way to reduce higher-order tensed properties to lower-order ones or pay a hefty ontological price.

Third and finally, it seems to me that Lucretianism fails utterly to satisfy the explanatory constraint in that it offers us nothing by way of an informative account of what these past-tensed properties *are*. The tensed properties that we're asked to posit *make no specifiable difference* to what exists apart from the mere existence of the properties themselves. As such, the Lucretian's properties are suspiciously superficial and do nothing to allay concerns about metaphysical 'cheating'. As *explanations* of why truths about the past are true, they are as uninformative as Molière's 'dormitive power'. Furthermore, because the Lucretian's properties have no empirical consequences and are, therefore, undetectable, we have no independent way of knowing that they

even exist. Thus, until the Lucretian can give us something more informative to work with, we can have no confidence that his proposal is not just an empty posit, a merely verbal solution to a metaphysical problem. Let's see if the presentist can find something better.

#### 4. Haecceities and Atoms

Simon Keller concurs that Lucretianism as it stands is inadequate for the presentist's purposes:

Past- and future-tensed truths . . . have structure, and it is hence not enough for the Truthmaker-preserving presentist simply to posit an abundance of past- and future-tensed world properties. The property of being such that Anne [Boleyn] was executed, for example, cannot be just a bare property of the world, but must involve the attribution of a property-like thing to an Anne-like thing [2004: 96].

Of course, if Anne no longer exists, then the Anne-like thing cannot be Anne herself, but must be some sort of Anne-surrogate. Keller suggests that this surrogate might be Anne's 'haecceity', her *thisness* or *individual essence*, the property of being the particular individual she is. If all individual things have haecceities—including the sword used to sever Anne's head, the Tower of London where it happened, and the French swordman who did the severing—and if these haecceities are primitive entities irreducible to any qualitative properties or 'suchnesses', then the fact that Anne was executed, says Keller, might be construed as a relation obtaining among this group of haecceities. He further suggests that comparative and metrical truths about the past can be handled by attributing haecceities to moments of time. For example, the time of Anne's execution has the property of being a time at around midday on May 19, 1536 [2004: 96–7]. Thus, that Anne

was executed on that date is made true by a relation obtaining between a group of haecceities that includes that time-haecceity.

Now, setting aside some minor nuances in Keller's account, there are some obvious problems with this proposal. One that Keller himself notes is that haecceities are strange and unappealing entities whose existence is highly controversial [ibid.]. Thus, in the absence of cogent independent reasons for positing haecceities,<sup>7</sup> it undermines the overall plausibility of the presentist's position to have to include such entities in his ontology. A more fundamental problem, however, which Keller fails to notice, is that even if we grant the existence of haecceities, the presentist still doesn't have an adequate response to the truthmaker objection. I develop the problem more in the next section, but the issue, in a nutshell, is this: Because haecceities are abstract entities it is unclear how relations that obtain among them can be *traces* of past facts, nor it is clear how those relations can be *contingent*. Moreover, what is the metaphysical glue that binds one group of haecceities together and not another? If the relations that obtain among haecceities are purely internal relations, then how can they be contingent? And if the relations are external, then what external relatum can keep a group of haecceities contingently yet persistently related?

In case haecceitist presentism doesn't work, Keller has a second proposal. *If*, he says, the world is made up of atomic particles, such that the existence of all other concrete individuals supervenes on the existence and arrangement of these particles, and *if* these particles carry their pasts around with them by bearing primitive, time-indexed tensed properties, and *if* these particles are eternal and indestructible, then they can provide the presentist with truthmakers for truths about the past [2004: 99–100]. Thus, that Anne was executed at the Tower of London in 1536 is made true by the present existence of the particles upon which Anne etc. supervened together with those particles having past-tense properties like *having been an Anne-particle in 1536*.

This is basically a version of Lucretianism in which primitive tensed properties are attributed not to the universe as a whole or to regions of space, but to particles. But, as Keller notes, these cannot be ordinary physical particles. We normally think it (logically) possible that physical particles can spring into and drop out of existence without taking a bunch of truths with them. But to satisfy the persistence and discrimination constraints, these particles necessarily have to be temporally coextensive with the universe [2004: 101]. That is certainly odd enough to make one suspicious. What's more, atomic presentism faces the same sort of explanatory inadequacy objection that I lodged against Lucretianism, namely, that it offers us nothing by way of an informative account of what these past-tensed properties *are*. What it is for a particle to have time-indexed tensed-property? To all appearances, properties like *having been an Anne-particle in 1536* have a complex structure and therefore, it seems, could only be had by particles with structure. Can atomic particles really have the necessary structure to support such properties? That seems doubtful. Without some informative account of what that structure could be there's no way to be sure that these particles can supply the truthmakers that the presentist needs. And to say that these time-indexed tensed-properties are primitive seems gratuitous—why should anyone who is not already sold on presentism and who appreciates the force of the truthmaker objection take these particles and properties seriously?

In sum, then, neither of Keller's proposals looks promising. Let's see if we can find something better.

## **5. Ersatz B-Series**

A quite different proposal has recently been defended both by Thomas Crisp [2007] and by Craig Bourne [2006]. For my purposes the differences in their accounts are not important, so I'll focus on Crisp's account. He begins by defining a 'time' as an abstract representation of a

possible instantaneous state of the world, essentially a conjunctive proposition containing all and only those propositions that would be true were that instantaneous state of the world actual. He then proposes that some of these abstract ‘times’—those that describe moments of the actual past—are ordered by a primitive ‘earlier than’ relation so as to constitute an ‘ersatz B-series’. Thus, for Crisp, what makes it true that Caesar was assassinated is that the abstract ‘time’ representing the moment of Caesar’s assassination is ‘earlier than’ the abstract ‘time’ representing the present state of the world. Comparative and metrical truths about the past are also easily handled. That Caesar was assassinated *after* Troy was conquered is grounded in the ‘earlier than’ relation holding between the respective ‘times’ representing those two events as present. That Caesar was assassinated over 2000 years ago is grounded in the fact that the ordered sequence of ‘times’ stretching back from the ‘time’ representing the present to the ‘time’ representing the moment of Caesar’s assassination spans more than 2000 years.

Crisp’s view clearly has advantages over the other proposals we’ve seen. It’s more explanatorily informative than Lucretianism. Instead of treating complex tensed properties as brute posits, they are cashed out in terms of simple ‘earlier than’ relations among conjunctive propositions—things we know how to analyze. Its metaphysical commitments are also more palatable to most than either Keller’s haecceitist or atomist proposals. That there exist abstract objects like propositions is a widespread view among philosophers, including many non-presentists.

But how does Crisp’s proposal fare in terms of the constraints outlined above? Well, it’s pretty clear that the ‘times’ in this ersatz B-series are related *persistently* since, as a B-series, their relations to each other are static. They are also related *contingently* because in different possible worlds different ‘times’ are related by the ‘earlier than’ relation. And they *discriminate*

the actual past from every other possible past because any alteration in the history of the world is reflected by a corresponding alteration in the ersatz B-series. What's not clear, however, is how Crisp's proposal can satisfy the *trace* constraint. The proposition that Caesar was assassinated is about a past event. By the trace constraint its truthmaker must be historically grounded *in that event*. In general, abstract 'times' need to get ordered by the 'earlier than' relation *as a result of* the occurrence of the events they describe. According to presentism, however, events don't exist before they happen. Hence they don't exist to bring about an 'earlier than' ordering among the 'times' that describe them *until* they occur. Consequently, these 'times' have to be ordered *seriatim*, as they occur, and not statically, as in a B-series.

Moreover, there is a fundamental problem with any attempt to ground truths about the past *solely* in terms of properties of and/or relations among abstract objects. Specifically, if these 'earlier than' relations are *internal* relations among abstract objects, then they must be necessary. Hence, despite initial appearances, his account cannot satisfy the contingency constraint. I alluded to this problem above in discussing Keller's haecceitist proposal, but now I'll elaborate.

A property is 'intrinsic' if something possesses it simply in virtue of what it is, and not in virtue of relations it bears to anything else. For example, I am intrinsically human, intrinsically 6'4", and intrinsically brown-haired. The first is essential to me, but the latter two are not—as I age they will undoubtedly change, but for now they characterize me as I am. In contrast, properties like being famous and being an only child, are not intrinsic but extrinsic. A person who is famous is so only in relation to what other people think of him, just as a person who is an only child is such only in relation to the absence of siblings. A person's becoming famous or ceasing to be an only child do not mark any change *in that person*, whereas changes in height or hair color do.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a relation is 'internal' if it holds simply in virtue of what the intrinsic properties

of the relata are. Thus, my being taller than my brother, who is 6'2", is an internal relation between the two of us, depending only on our respective intrinsic properties. My living in a different country than my brother, however, is an external relation—it depends on our respective locations in relation to something else, namely, the world's current geopolitical boundaries.

Now, for typical *concrete* objects, intrinsic properties can be either essential or accidental and internal relations can be either necessary or contingent. My being human and being brown-haired are both intrinsic, but the former is essential and the latter accidental. My being taller than my brother is an internal relation between us, but not necessary since our relative heights could change enough to alter the relation. But for *abstract* objects, intrinsic properties are invariably essential and internal relations are invariably necessary. For example, the identity of a set is given by its membership; add, remove, or change a member, and you have a different set. Hence, each of the members is intrinsic to and essential to the set. Similarly, the identity of a proposition is intrinsically determined by its content; alter the content in any way and you get a different proposition. Entailment is an internal and, therefore, necessary relation between propositions. One proposition either does or does not entail another, and which is the case is determined entirely by the intrinsic content of the propositions. Examples could easily be multiplied, but by now the problem with Crisp's proposal should be clear. His truthmakers are supposed to be given by *internal* 'earlier than' relations among *abstract* objects ('times') and, at the same time, these relations are supposed to be *contingent*. But he can't have his cake and eat it too. If truthmakers are given by internal relations among abstract objects then they can't be contingent; if they are contingent, then they can't be internal relations among abstract objects.

The failure of Crisp's proposal does, however, point the way toward a better answer to the truthmaker problem. Suppose we retain the idea that past-tensed truths are grounded in

relations between ‘times’ (understood as representations of possible instantaneous world-states) and make appropriate adjustments to the rest of Crisp’s account so as to satisfy the four structural constraints. At least four modifications are needed. First, ‘earlier than’ relations among ‘times’ have to be *external* relations, not internal ones. The reason, again, is simply that internal relations among abstract objects are invariably necessary, whereas the truthmakers we need have to be contingent. Thus, instead of ‘earlier than’ being a dyadic relation between ‘times’ A and B, it must be conceived of as a triadic relation involving A, B, and an external term, C, such that it is the relations that A and B bear to C that determine A as being ‘earlier than’ B. In other words, C establishes a reference frame from the perspective of which A is ‘earlier than’ B. Second, C must be *concrete* not abstract, otherwise we simply trade a dyadic internal relation among abstract objects for a triadic one, and the relation winds up just as necessary as before. Third, to satisfy the trace constraint the ‘earlier than’ ordering of A and B—and therefore, their relations to the concrete external reference frame C—has to be determined by the events they represent *as those events occur*. In other words, C has got to function like a universal recording device, keeping track of everything that happens, as it happens, and in the precise order that it happens. And since ‘everything that happens’ includes the events of its own recording, C has to be able to record itself recording. In other words, it has to be reflexive or capable of self-representation. Fourth and finally, if C’s representational states are to satisfy the discrimination constraint, they need to be able to block Russellian skeptical hypotheses. This means that the recorder, C, must be error-proof, such that it be logically impossible for it to record anything that has not happened or fail to record anything that has happened.

It may look like we’ve come back around to something like Bigelow’s proposal, according to which the universe is its own recording device, but there are important differences.

First, replacing the Lucretian's properties with representational states makes it much easier to understand how they can be past-directed, and so constitute past-tensed facts. Second, in the notion of a recording device, we have a concrete metaphor that allows us to at least begin to give an informative explanatory account of how past events could leave behind traces of sufficient detail to provide discriminating truthmakers for truths about the past. Third, unless the universe is a very different sort of thing than modern physics takes it to be, it's very hard to see how it could itself be a universal, self-reflexive, error-proof recording device. This last fact suggests that we try locating the recording device in a transcendent being, i.e., God.

## 6. Theistic Presentism

Most versions of theism construe God as a necessarily existent, concrete, and omniscient being [Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 2002]. I want to suggest that in such a being may lie the presentist's best response to the truthmaker objection. How so? Well, if presentism is true and God exists, then like everything else God exists *now*, in the present. The theistic presentist is thus committed to a temporal concept of God, as opposed to the atemporal God of medieval theology who surveys time from the *nunc stans* of eternity.<sup>9</sup> On the temporal conception, God has *tensed beliefs*: He *remembers* what has happened, *experiences* (i.e., is immediately acquainted with) what is happening, and *anticipates* what is to come. Moreover, as omniscient, God experiences the entirety of reality and remembers it in perfect detail. Thus, everything that happens, once it has happened, passes irrevocably into God's memory. In addition, these memories satisfy the four structural constraints for truthmakers outlined above. They satisfy the trace constraint since they result from God's experience of events as they occur. They satisfy the contingency constraint since which memories God has depends on which past events have occurred to be experienced by God. They satisfy the persistence constraint since as a necessary existent God

cannot cease to exist and as omniscient he cannot forget. And, finally, they satisfy the discrimination constraint because as omniscient God would not remember what he does if the past had not been what it was. So far, then, God's memories seem to provide ideal truthmakers for truths about the past.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, theistic presentism is not vulnerable to the charge of metaphysical 'cheating' as is Lucretianism. In the first place, there are many independent reasons for thinking that God exists [Swinburne 2004], and even if these reasons don't convince everybody, they have sufficient *prima facie* force that one cannot reasonably accuse the theistic presentist of making an *ad hoc* response to the truthmaker objection. In the second place, the Lucretian's past-tensed properties are suspicious because they make no specifiable real difference to anything else. Apart from giving them formulaic labels like *being such that Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. on the Ides of March*, the Lucretian has no informative story to tell about what constitutes the having of such properties, or of what it is about the universe, regions of space, atomic particles, or what have you that enables them to bear such properties. To regard them as brute primitives is highly implausible because the properties have a manifestly complex structure. By contrast, the theistic presentist does have an informative story to tell: Past-tensed properties are representational mental states of God, specifically, his memories—analogy with human memory and other recording devices making it reasonably clear how those representational states could bear the requisite structure to reflect the past. Furthermore, if theistic presentism is correct, then God's memories can make a specifiable real difference by informing his ongoing providential dealings with creation. For example, God could, if he desired, communicate to us information about the distant past.

So it looks like God's memories give the presentist exactly what he needs by way of truthmakers for truths about the past. There are, however, a few objections to address.

First, one might worry that as representational states God's memories themselves require truthmakers and so the theistic presentist merely pushes things back a step. After all, we can ask the theistic presentist whether God's memories are true or veridical. If the answer is no, then as nonveridical they can't discriminate the actual past from the false past that God remembers. Consequently, they cannot give us truthmakers. If the answer is yes, then we can ask what *makes* God's memories true, and it looks like we'll have to fall back on something outside God's memories to ground their truth.

My response to this objection is that it confuses propositions with states of affairs (or 'facts' as I have been calling them). The *proposition* that Caesar was assassinated is made true by the *fact* of God's remembering Caesar's assassination. Note, that what makes the proposition true is *not* simply the propositional content of God's memory (i.e., that Caesar was assassinated), but a concrete fact that includes as constituents not only that propositional content but also God himself. But to ask what makes God's memories true is to shift focus from the concrete fact of God's remembering Caesar's assassination to its abstract propositional content (i.e., that Caesar was assassinated). This shift of focus, if unnoticed, creates the illusion that God's memories (which are facts, not propositions) need truthmakers and thus that the truthmaker objection has not yet been answered. In fact, the shift only takes us back to where we started by raising the question of what makes it true that Caesar was assassinated. The answer, of course, is the same as before: The proposition that Caesar was assassinated is made true by the fact of God's remembering Caesar's assassination.<sup>11</sup>

A second worry is that appealing to God's memories as truthmakers will lead to an endless multiplication of facts in much the same way that Lucretianism threatens to. Thus, it might be argued that God's experiencing event E and retaining a representation of E in memory

are themselves events. Hence, since God is omniscient and therefore experiences and retains all events in memory, he must also experience and retain the events of his experiencing and retaining events, and he must experience and retain those events, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

My response to this objection is that because God is immediately and fully acquainted with all of reality and is not limited as we are to a finite cognitive “processing speed”, there can be no time lag between God’s experience of an event and his forming a representation of it in his mind. Nor can there be a time lag between God’s experience of an event and God’s experiencing of his experiencing of that event. So God’s experiencing events and retaining representations of them introduces no new events. In experiencing and knowing God’s experiences and knows his own experiencing and knowing. Nor is God’s knowing of his knowing of his knowing, etc., a problematic regress. The reason is that the mental states of an omniscient being are *fully transparent*, such that for God to know that he knows that *p just is* for him to know that *p*. In other words, all higher-order experiencings and representings on God’s part are fully reducible to lower-order experiencings and representings. So, again, no multiplication of facts results from God’s experiencing events and retaining representations of them.

There is one final objection that I want to examine.<sup>12</sup> Consider first the distinction between *quasi-memories*, which are merely mental states of *seeming-to-remember*, and actual *memories*. For a quasi-memory to count as a memory, it must have been appropriately *caused* by the event it represents. Otherwise, it would not really be a memory *of* that event. In terms of this distinction, the objection is that if past events do not exist (as the presentist will admit) then there can be no causal relations between past events and God’s present quasi-memories. Hence, God cannot have memories of past events, but at most quasi-memories. And the latter, obviously, cannot provide truthmakers for truths about the past.

The astute reader will recall that a generalized form of this objection was addressed above (in §2) in connection with the trace constraint. I won't rehearse that response. Instead I'd like to buttress it with a thought experiment. Consider a past event, say, Caesar's assassination. Suppose, counterfactually, that a photographer was there on the occasion, that she snapped a photo of the event just as Brutus plunged the knife into Caesar, that the photo accurately recorded what an eyewitness would have seen at that moment, and that the original photo has survived in good condition to this day. Clearly, the present photo was caused to be what it is by that past event as photons reflected from Caesar, Brutus, the knife, and the Roman surroundings impacted on the film. Setting epistemological questions about the authenticity of the photo aside as irrelevant, I have no doubt that commonsense would endorse without hesitation that the photo is a record *of* that event, that it is *about* that event and *represents* it. Would all that suddenly change if we were to discover on unimpeachable grounds that that past event had since *ceased to exist*? Frankly, I cannot see how it would make any difference. The photo would still be a photo *of* that event because the event *did* exist and because when it existed it left a trace on the photo. And, of course, what holds for the photo holds *a fortiori* of God's quasi-memories. *Ex hypothesi* they result from God's immediate experience of past events as they occur, and they record all of the details without any possibility of degradation or omission. Consequently, they are genuine *memories* of those events. That the events themselves no longer exist is neither here nor there.

In sum, if there is a necessarily existent and omniscient being of a sort consistent with presentism (i.e., who exists *now* and not timelessly), then that being's memories satisfy all of the truthmaker constraints given above (§2) and thus can function as truthmakers for truths about the past. Hence, if theistic presentism is correct, then the presentist has an adequate reply to the truthmaker objection.

## 7. Conclusion

To recap, given that the truthmaker objection to presentism is a serious objection that cannot be deflected by denying that truths about the past need truthmakers [Keller 2004: 83–93], the presentist needs to specify which present facts serve as truthmakers for truths about the past. To provide a satisfactory response, the facts that the presentist specifies need to meet several structural constraints: They must (1) be traces or effects of past events, (2) be contingent, (3) be persistent (i.e., at all future times some truthmaker for every truth about the past must exist), (4) discriminate the actual past from all other possible pasts. Furthermore, because truthmakers are supposed to *explain* why some propositions and others are not, any theory of truthmakers is also subject to explanatory adequacy constraint. This implies, among other things, that we need a reasonably informative theory of what makes truths about the past true.

Having looked at several proposals—Bigelow’s Lucretianism, Keller’s haecceitist and atomist versions of presentism, Crisp’s ersatz B-series approach, and theistic presentism—it appears that only the last, which identifies the truthmakers for truths about the past with God’s memories, satisfies all five constraints. Consequently, committed presentists faced with the truthmaker objection have therein a strong motivation to endorse a temporalist form of theism.

I anticipate three types of response, depending where the reader stands with respect to theism and presentism, respectively. Theistically averse non-presentists will probably be happy with my conclusion because they will see in its theistic commitment one more reason not to be a presentist. Conversely, theistically averse presentists, generally those of a naturalist persuasion, will not be happy with my conclusion. Accordingly, I invite them to try to rehabilitate one of the other proposals in the face of my criticisms or to come up with another, non-theistic account of truthmakers for truths about the past. If my argument is correct, however, then any workable

account will need something functionally equivalent to an error-proof universal (and therefore self-reflexive) recorder. Whether that be distinct from ‘God’ or not may turn out to be a merely semantic matter. And, finally, I think that those who are sympathetic to a temporalist form of theism will find in my conclusion an effective rebuttal to the truthmaker objection to presentism and thereby become more receptive to presentism, theism, or both.<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the objection is stated in terms of the weaker principle that *truth supervenes on being* (TSB), namely, that what is true depends on what exists [Lewis 2001]. Unlike TM, TSB does not imply that corresponding to every truth is an existing ‘parcel of reality’ that grounds its truth. Rather, it only implies that what exists would be somehow *different* if the truth value of the proposition were different. The chief difference between TM and TSB lies in their handling of negative existential truths. Thus, TM requires the presence of a truthmaker for ‘there are no hobbits’, whereas TSB only requires the absence of a *falsemaker*. As I note below (§2), the truthmaker objection to presentism can be stated in terms of a principles even weaker than TSB, so the relative merits of TSB vis-à-vis TM need not concern us here.

<sup>2</sup> The question of what could ground truths about the future on a presentist metaphysic also deserves attention, but requires separate treatment. Because of the asymmetry of time we cannot assume that truths about the future are grounded in the same way as truths about the past. There is also the complex debate as to whether propositions about future contingents are bivalent or not. To keep the present discussion to a manageable length, therefore, I will restrict my attention to truths that are *wholly* about the past and/or present.

<sup>3</sup> I’ll be using the terms ‘fact’, ‘event’, and ‘state of affairs’ interchangeably, where the latter is understood in a broadly Armstrongian sense [Armstrong 1997]. While there may be

interesting distinctions to draw between these concepts, it will not have any bearing on the arguments to follow.

<sup>4</sup> For extended discussion, see Armstrong [2004] and Merricks [2007].

<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the presentist can say that truths about the future are grounded insofar as the future is ‘present in its causes’ [Prior 2003: 52].

<sup>6</sup> My reason for talking about *possible truthmakers* has to do with the fact that truthmaking is in general a many-to-many relation [Armstrong 2004: 21]. There are often many different facts that could make a given truth true, and there may be no one fact that makes a truth true at all times that it is true. For example, that some dogs exist is currently made true by each and every one of the millions of dogs now living on the planet. That proposition, therefore, has millions of truthmakers (Fido, Rover, Cujo, etc.). A hundred years ago it also had millions of truthmakers, but none of the truthmakers that made it true then that some dogs exist continue to make it true now.

<sup>7</sup> Keller suggests that there might be an independent reason for haecceities in the need to ground modal truths [2004: 102].

<sup>8</sup> I draw some of my examples here from D.H. Mellor [1998: 87–9].

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the arguments for and against the atemporalist and temporalist conceptions of God and a defense of the latter, see Craig [2001].

<sup>10</sup> This proposal has long been a staple among process theists, e.g., Hartshorne [1984: 33–4], but there is no reason why a more classical theist willing to countenance divine temporality cannot make the same move.

<sup>11</sup> One source of this confusion, I think, is that we speak both of *remembering* and of *remembering that*. The former takes a fact as its object; the latter, a proposition. It may seem that

these can be used interchangeably, as in ‘I remember your eating a big lunch’ versus ‘I remember that you ate a big lunch’. But there’s an important difference. The former manner of speaking implies that I had a direct acquaintance with the past event of your eating a big lunch—I witnessed it taking place. (Notice also that in the first expression ‘eating’ is present tense, whereas in the second ‘ate’ is in the past tense.) The latter manner of speaking implies no such acquaintance. I may simply be recalling information received from a third party who did witness the event. Now, as essentially omniscient, God’s knowledge of reality cannot be indirect. He cannot fail to have an immediate and full acquaintance with all of reality. Hence, we ought to conceive of God’s rememberings as concrete results of his direct acquaintance with facts. It is only by abstraction that we can speak of God’s remembering *that*.

<sup>12</sup> I owe this objection to an anonymous referee of an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> Special thanks to Tom Belt, Tom Crisp, Ian Dove, Shandon Guthrie, Trenton Merricks, Michael Rea, Patrick Todd, and Bill Vallicella for helpful discussions and feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

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