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The idea that the present is objectively distinguished from the past and the future is, arguably, one of the most influential ideas in Western thinking about time. Presentists gloss this idea in ontological terms: they say that the things that exist in the present are all and only the things there are, unrestrictedly speaking. Many of us find this view highly intuitive. Others would even classify it as a conceptual truth – its denial being the Meinongian-sounding claim there are things which do not currently have existence. Yet presentism faces formidable challenges. Some think that it is at odds with contemporary physics. Most notably, presentists have been hard-pressed to explain how the existence of an absolute difference between past, present and future (which their view presupposes) can be reconciled with Einstein's theory of Special Relativity (according to which simultaneity is not an absolute matter). And, even setting physics aside, there are questions about language and metaphysics that presentists have a difficult time answering, given their austere views about ontology. For example, how is it that we manage to think and talk about past entities like Julius Caesar, if there are no such entities to be thought and talked about? And how is it that the things we think and say about Julius Caesar can be true (or false), if they are not made true (or false) by Julius Caesar?

These are some of the issues that are taken up in this interesting collection of papers, edited by Roberto Ciuni, Kristie Miller and Giuliano Torrenco. The collection offers an illuminating and much-needed state-of-the-art overview of some of the major problems discussed in the contemporary debate on presentism. It includes eleven original papers, nicely organized in three parts.

The first part of the book deals with the problem of how to properly characterize the debate between presentists and their opponents. The first paper, by Neil McKinnon, argues that presentism is best formulated, not as the thesis that only present entities exist, but as the thesis that “everything instantiates properties in a tensed way” (p.28). A consequence of this claim is that certain theories of time that have traditionally been distinguished from presentism (such as the growing block and the moving spotlight theory) turn out to be best classified as variants of this view, or else to require a distinction between a tensed and a tenseless way of instantiating properties. In the second paper, Samuel Baron and Kristie Miller distinguish different versions of eternalism (the view that present, past and future objects are ontologically on a par) and argue, against presentism, that quantification over past and future times is indispensable to our best scientific theories. Ulrich Meyer's paper aims to show that we can neither identify presentism with the claim that “Nothing exists that is not present” (because, depending on how we disambiguate it, that claim is either trivially true or obviously false) nor construe it as the temporal counterpart of actualism (because actualism is a meta-theory concerning the semantic analysis of modal operators in terms of possible worlds, and “there is no tensed analogue of the possible-worlds analysis of the modal operators” (p.82)). Meyer's overall conclusion is that, despite their best efforts, presentists have failed to put forward a substantive metaphysical thesis.

There is a lot of material to engage with here, but I will limit myself to discussing the most decisive points, starting with Meyer's claim that actualism has no temporal counterpart. Meyer supports

this claim by observing that, if we state the truth-conditions of past- and future-tensed sentences in terms of abstract objects (which is what actualists do with modal sentences), we find ourselves unable to provide a non-circular account of why those abstract objects represent past and future times, as opposed to merely possible times (all we can do is saying, somewhat circularly, that the abstract objects in question represent a way reality actually *was* or *will be*). I agree with Meyer on this point, but I disagree that this marks a difference with respect to the modal case. Actualists never offered a convincing non-circular account of why the abstract objects we use to state the truth conditions of modal sentences represent possible worlds, as opposed to impossible ones (all they have been able to do is saying, somewhat circularly, that the abstract objects in question represent a way reality *could be*). Nothing here seems to me to suggest any breakdown in the analogy between time and modality.

What Meyer is right about is that, by focusing on the parallel with the possible-worlds analysis of modal operators, we don't get even close to pinning down a thesis worth calling "presentism": that the semantic analysis of tense operators is to be given in terms of abstracta rather than concreta seems to be neither here nor there with respect to the question whether only the present is real. As to the slogan "Nothing exists that is not present", I agree that it verges on triviality (if anything, because of the analyticity of all the instances of "p if and only if presently p"). I find more promising McKinnon's suggestion that presentism concerns the irreducibly temporary nature of instantiation. The problem is that, as McKinnon recognizes, not all those who think that properties can be instantiated in a temporary fashion would be happy to be classified as presentists, and I don't think it can be seriously maintained that admitting both a tensed and a tenseless way of instantiating properties is incompatible with presentism (presentists need tenseless property-instantiation just as much as anyone else in order to deal with all sorts of necessary, essential and contingent-but-sempiternal properties of concrete objects). So we are left with a choice: either we find an alternative way of distinguishing presentism from the other 'tensed' theories of time or we accept that no such distinction is deep enough to be worth making. The success (or unsuccess) of Miller and Baron's indispensability-argument against presentism depends crucially on the outcome of this choice.

The second part of the book explores some arguments for and against presentism. It begins with a nice paper by Christian Wütrich, providing a critical taxonomy of the responses presentists have offered to the problem of reconciling their view with Einstein's Special Relativity Theory (SRT). One of these responses is defended by E. J. Lowe, in a thought-provoking paper that discusses also McTaggart's paradox and Lewis's problem of temporary intrinsics. According to Lowe, if SRT has been thought to pose a problem for presentism, it is because it entails that any relation of co-existence holding among simultaneous entities is a non-transitive relation. However, Lowe thinks that this is not really a problem because "presentism [...] is *already* committed to the non-transitivity of co-existence" (p.146). His argument runs as follows:

A certain trope of mine, T_1 , which co-existed with me yesterday, does *not* co-exist with another trope of mine, T_2 , which co-exists with me now, since – we may suppose – T_1 went out of existence yesterday and T_2 came into existence today. So T_1 and EJM are co-existent entities, as are EJM and T_2 , but T_1 and T_2 are *not* co-existent entities. Hence co-existence is not *transitive*. (pp.146-7)

Now, I am not sure that the *non-transitivity* of co-existence is the first thing presentists should worry about in this context (on the face of it, the root of all problems lies with the *relativity* of co-existence). But, even if it is, I am not persuaded by Lowe's argument in the passage above. From the fact that T_1 co-

existed with EJL yesterday it simply doesn't follow that T_1 and EJL *coexist*. In fact, if it is assumed that T_1 went out of existence yesterday, it seems highly plausible to think that T_1 can no longer enter into *any* relation with EJL, let alone a relation of *co-existence*. So Lowe has failed to give us an example in which two entities don't co-exist with one another even if each of them co-exist with a third entity. Of course, it may be possible to concoct other cases supporting the non-transitivity of co-existence. But I confess that, if I were a presentist, I would much rather sever the connection between presentness and simultaneity (an option that, unfortunately, neither Wütrich nor Lowe explicitly consider) than deny the transitivity of co-existence.

The third and fourth paper of the second part deal with the 'grounding objection' to presentism. According to this objection, presentists don't have the resources to adequately ground present truths about the past. Matthew Davidson's paper surveys some possible replies and Brian Kierland's paper defends one of them, based on a view called "primitive record presentism". Both Davidson and Kierland are careful to emphasize that the problem presentists face is *not* that of providing truthmakers for truths about the past. The grounding problem, as they see it, has to do with the more general idea that truth depends on being – or, a little more articulately, that what is true supervenes on and is explained by what things exist and how they are. According to the presentist, dinosaurs no longer exist and all the things that exist now could have existed and be intrinsically exactly the way they actually are even if dinosaurs had never existed. So the truth of the proposition *that the Earth was inhabited by dinosaurs* neither supervenes on nor is explained by what things exist and how they are. Kierland suggests that presentists should tackle the problem head-on, by recognizing the existence of "trace-properties" produced according to a *sui generis* "law of history". Such properties are supposed to be metaphysically fundamental, causally inert and empirically undetectable (p. 189).

Now, while Kierland's proposal is certainly intriguing, I am not sure that it represents a significant improvement on Lucretianism (the infamous view that truths about the past are grounded in past-directed properties that the world as a whole presently instantiates). Nor am I entirely sure that presentists wouldn't be better off rejecting the thesis that truth supervenes on what things exist and how they are, and replacing it with the thesis that truth supervenes on what things exist, *existed or will exist* and how they are, *were or will be*. I don't find much plausibility in the thought that the proposition *that the Earth was inhabited by dinosaurs* is true because of some "traces" that the past has produced in the present. I find much more plausibility in the idea that the proposition *that the Earth was inhabited by dinosaurs* is true because the Earth was inhabited by dinosaurs. Critics of presentism have not done enough to show that this idea, in all its disarming simplicity, fails to represent an adequate response to the problem of 'grounding' present truths about the past.

The last two papers of the second part deal with cross-temporal relations. Roberto Ciuni and Giuliano Torrengo begin their paper by introducing an interesting distinction between two senses in which a relation may be called "cross-temporal". A relation is cross-temporal in the *ontic* sense if it holds between a present entity and a non-present one and it is cross-temporal in the *factive* sense if it is cross-temporally exemplified by its relata. While both sorts of cross-temporality raise problems for presentism, I find it somewhat perplexing that the authors decide to focus their attention on the first. After all, the problem posed by "I am taller than Julius Caesar was" (which involves an ontically cross-temporal relation) is nothing more than a specific instance of the general problem posed also by "Julius Caesar was taller than Cicero" (which is relational, but not cross-temporal) and by "Julius Caesar was tall" (which is

not relational at all). The problem has nothing specifically to do with cross-temporality. It has to do with an old and vexed question, namely 'How can something be true or false of x , if x does not exist?'. In her paper, Berit Brogaard sets out to address precisely this question, but the view she advocates (a kind of "primitivism" that treats cross-temporal relations as conceptually irreducible) does not seem to me to address it convincingly. Brogaard denies that if x and y stand in a certain relation R , they both have to exist. But she doesn't see this as a kind of Meinongianism:

My theory does not presuppose that there are entities with being that do not exist. Socrates does not exist. Period. But he did. So I can now be taller than he ever was, and someone pointing to a little super-baby back in Ancient Greece, saying "You shall be named Socrates" [...] can be part of a causal chain connecting my current use of 'Socrates' to a man that once existed. (p. 262)

What this passage says is that Socrates can do various things (including being shorter than Berit Brogaard and being causally connected with Berit Brogaard's use of the word 'Socrates') even if there is literally *nothing* that Socrates is numerically identical with. Never mind whether or not this idea may be properly described as a kind of "Meinongianism". It is certainly a deeply *puzzling* idea, and it doesn't become any less puzzling if we treat cross-temporal relations as primitive, instead of trying to analyse them away.

The last part of the book deals with 'tensed' but (by usual standards, at least) non-presentist theories of time. Jonathan Tallant defends presentism (which is here characterized as the thesis that "existence is presence" (p. 288)) and offers an insightful critique of Kit Fine's "Fragmentalism", the view that reality is constituted – albeit only in a fragmentary fashion – by all the metaphysically fundamental tensed facts that obtain in the present, have ever obtained in the past or ever will obtain in the future.

Yuval Dolev's paper, by contrast, aims to show that, while "presentists are right to insist that the present is special, [...] they are wrong in their view of what makes it special" (p. 324). For Dolev, the privilegedness of the present "does not consist in its being 'more real' or 'ontologically superior', but in its being *experientiable*" (ibid.). The resulting account is a version of the moving-spotlight theory on which experientiability plays the role of the spotlight. Dolev's criticisms of presentism are well-taken and the view he puts forward has a lot of intuitive appeal. However, one important question remains unanswered: what makes certain things experientiable, in Dolev's sense? It can't be the fact that there exist minds by which they are or could be experienced (for experientiability is not supposed to be a mind-dependent property (pp. 326-7)). It can't be the fact that they are concrete rather than abstract (for then Dolev's view would not differ from the temporal analogue of Williamson's necessary-existent theory). And it can't be the fact they have existence (for then we would be back to presentism, as traditionally construed). We need more than an intuitive handle on experientiability to appreciate advantages and disadvantages of Dolev's view.

In closing, let me say that this book is a very engaging and stimulating read and that it will certainly contribute to advance and enliven the debate on presentism, providing new insights in this very interesting area of metaphysics.