
PRESENTISM, TRUTHMAKERS, AND GOD

BY

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Abstract: The truthmaker objection to presentism (the view that only what exists *now* exists *simpliciter*) is that it lacks sufficient metaphysical resources to ground truths about the past. In this paper I identify five constraints that an adequate presentist response must satisfy. In light of these constraints, I examine and reject responses by Bigelow, Keller, Crisp, and Bourne. Consideration of how these responses fail, however, points toward a proposal that works; one that posits God's memories as truthmakers for truths about the past. 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,¹ presentism faces several objections, one of the chief of which is that it lacks the metaphysical resources to ground truths about the past.² Typically, this objection is stated in terms of the *truthmaker principle* or some variant³ thereof:

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

If we combine TM with presentism, we get the result that every truth needs to be grounded in some *presently* existing fact (hereafter 'present fact'). 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.⁴ 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 event⁵ it represents, namely, Caesar's being assassinated. But the presentist can't say that. For her, past facts don't exist. What the presentist needs, therefore, is a present surrogate for that past fact. We can give this surrogate a past-tensed label: Caesar's *having been* assassinated. But without elaboration it is unclear what present fact that label is supposed to denote. Moreover, it looks like all present facts pertaining to Caesar (ancient documents, monuments, etc.) may collectively *underdetermine* the truth that Caesar was assassinated. If that is so, then the presentist cannot 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.⁶ Could the same be said for truths about the past? Unfortunately for the presentist, it would seem not. Simon Keller has, I believe, successfully refuted this suggestion.⁷ 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,⁸ and several truthmaker proposals have been offered.⁹ I will argue that none of these proposals succeeds because each of them fails to satisfy one or more constraints that a presentist theory of truthmakers for truths about the past needs 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. Following that (§6), I reintroduce a suggestion by Hartshorne that has been overlooked in the current discussion, namely, that God's memories are truthmakers for truths about the past.¹⁰ 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 someone who wants to be a presentist probably ought to be a theist as well.

2. *Five constraints on a solution*

So as not to get bogged down debating the pros and cons of various refinements of TM, I'm simply going to set aside two of the more

controversial cases (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. Adopting TM* as a basis for discussion leaves us with plenty of truths in need of truthmakers. Some, 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 BC 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 truthmakers 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 she 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 cross-temporal 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*) some 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.¹¹ 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. If causality is a genuine relation, and if the obtaining of a relation entails the existence of its relata, then it seems that *any* appeal to traces as causal effects of past facts would commit the presentist to the existence of past facts, and thus to a rejection of presentism. This worry is misplaced, however, for there is no reason for the presentist to concede that causality is a genuine relation.¹² 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. A prior state *causes* its successor by *becoming* – morphing into, if you will – its successor. This dual reference – to a predecessor state and a successor state – naturally requires the 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.¹³

The first challenge for the presentist, then, is to find truthmakers that can satisfy the trace constraint. But not any sort of trace will do. There are several additional constraints that must be satisfied. For starters, it is clear that the past is largely contingent; it could have been very different. Consider, therefore, P, the conjunction of all contingent and positive existential truths about the past as of time *t*₀. By TM*, each truth in P has a truthmaker. And since P itself is a contingent and positive existential truth about the past, by TM* it also has a truthmaker. Moreover, these truthmakers must be contingent. For if a truthmaker is necessary, if it obtains in all possible worlds, then any propositions it makes true would be made true in all possible worlds, which would make them necessary truths. Consequently, no contingent truth can have a non-contingent truthmaker. This gives us a second truthmaker constraint:

Contingence Constraint. Truthmakers for contingent, positive existential truths about the past must be contingent.

Furthermore, truths about the past can never cease to be truths about the past. This follows from the fixity of the past. Once Caesar has been assassinated it is impossible to bring it about that he has not been assassinated. Hence, that Caesar was assassinated is not only true now, but will be so until the end of time. The same 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.¹⁴ 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. 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.'¹⁵ If this is a metaphysical 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. In this case, nothing that now exists suffices to pick out the actual past from that skeptical possibility. This violates the discrimination constraint and yields the result that nothing that now exists is an adequate truthmaker for P. Since that's simply unacceptable, the presentist has to make sure that whatever facts she posits to account for truths about the past are such as to preclude the metaphysical 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. Whatever that fact could be, it seems clear that no 'ordinary' physical fact could do the job. 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. Human memories won't suffice either. That someone can trace a continuous string of memories more than five minutes into the past is consistent with all memories more than five minutes old having sprung 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. 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 14 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 14 billion years on exactly as it has been? If that is metaphysically possible, then nothing that now exists in our universe suffices to make it true that we have a 14 billion-year history rather than a 15 billion-year one.

To satisfy all four structural constraints, then, 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 metaphysically impossible for any of them to exist and for the past to have been any different (discrimination constraint), it must also be metaphysically 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 can satisfy all four constraints will have to be fairly exotic. 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 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, a knife, 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* their truth. 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, uninformative.

Critics have 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.’¹⁶ 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, mere 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 provide 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, I now look at several recent proposals and assess how well they meet those constraints.

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.¹⁷

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.

One drawback of Lucretius’ proposal is that it requires an absolute conception of space – in order to be persistent bearers of tensed properties, spatial locations require a stable identity over time independent of the objects that occupy them. Since the absolute conception of space is controversial, it would be nice if the presentist could adapt Lucretius’ basic idea without incurring that metaphysical commitment. Such an adaptation of ‘Lucretianism’ has 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.¹⁸

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*. But this property only accounts for the *simple* truth that Helen was abducted. To account for *comparative* and *metrical* truths about the past, the Lucretian's past-tensed properties need to have additional structure, something analogous to 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 BC on the Ides of March, Roman standard time*.¹⁹

Let's now assess this sort of reply to the truthmaker objection. The first thing to note is that both Lucretius' and Bigelow's proposals seem designed to meet the four structural constraints outlined above. In both, the past-tensed properties that accrue to regions of space or to the universe 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 absence of any independent reason for thinking that they *can* 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. Call one such property F. If, as seems likely, the acquisition of that property is itself an event, then the universe must acquire a second-order tensed property (being such that the universe has acquired F), the acquisition of which, being an event, requires the universe to acquire a third-order tensed property (being such that the universe has acquired the property of being such that the universe has acquired F), and so on, *ad infinitum*. If each of these higher-order tensed properties is really distinct from its predecessor, then we've got a runaway metaphysical train. Either the Lucretian has to show how higher-order tensed properties can be reduced to lower-order ones or pay a hefty price in terms of metaphysical parsimony.

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 past-tensed properties are. After all, these

properties that we're asked to posit make *no specifiable difference* to what exists apart from the mere existence of the properties themselves. What is it for the universe to have the property of being such that Caesar was assassinated? How would the universe be different if it didn't have that property? The Lucretian has given us nothing by way of an informative answer to those questions. Accordingly, Lucretianism looks like a paradigm case of metaphysical 'cheating.' Until the Lucretian can give us something more robust to work with, we can have no confidence that these properties are anything other than empty posits.

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.²⁰

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 swordsman who did the severing – and if these haecceities are primitive properties 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, 1536.²¹ Thus, that Anne was executed on that date is made true by a relation obtaining between a group of haecceities which includes that time-haecceity.

Setting aside some minor nuances in Keller's account, there are some obvious problems with this proposal. One that Keller himself notes is that the existence of haecceities is highly controversial.²² Thus, in the absence of cogent independent reasons for positing them,²³ it undermines the overall plausibility of the presentist's position to have to include haecceities in her ontology. A more fundamental problem, 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: Since haecceities are *abstract* objects, it is doubtful whether haecceities or relations among haecceities can be *traces* of past facts, nor it is clear how such relations can be *contingent*. Moreover, one wonders what sort of metaphysical glue binds one group of haecceities together and not another. If the relations that obtain among haecceities are purely internal relations among abstract objects, then how can they be contingent? And if the relations are external, then what external relatum keeps groups of haecceities contingently yet persistently related?

Just 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.²⁴ 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 accrue not to the universe as a whole or to regions of space, but to particles. As Keller notes, these cannot be ordinary physical particles, for we normally think it (metaphysically) possible that physical particles can spring into and drop out of existence without taking a bunch of truths with them. To satisfy the persistence and discrimination constraints, these particles necessarily have to be temporally coextensive with the universe.²⁵ That seems a bit odd. Worse, atomic presentism faces the same sort of explanatory inadequacy objection that troubles Lucretianism, namely, 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. Do these particles really have the requisite structure to support the relevant 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 by both Thomas Crisp²⁶ and Craig Bourne.²⁷ To keep matters simple, I'll focus on Crisp's account. He defines 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.' On this account, 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. Similarly, 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. And 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 collectively represent a span of more than 2000 years.

This view has some clear 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 of Keller's proposals. That there exist abstract objects like propositions is a widespread view among philosophers, including many non-presentists.

But how does this 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 would be reflected in a corresponding alteration in the ersatz B-series. What's not clear, however, is how this 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*. Hence, to satisfy this constraint these abstract 'times' would 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, and so they don't exist to bring about an 'earlier than' ordering among the 'times' that describe them *until* they occur. Consequently, it seems that 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 the properties of and/or relations among abstract objects. I noted this problem above while discussing Keller's haecceitist proposal; now I'll elaborate. *Concrete* objects can have non-essential intrinsic properties and stand in contingent internal relations.²⁸ My being human and being brown-haired are both intrinsic, but the former is essential to me and the latter is not. My being taller than my younger brother is an internal relation between us, but not necessary since our relative heights could change enough to alter the relation. For *abstract* objects, however, it seems that intrinsic properties are invariably essential and internal relations are invariably necessary. Take propositions, for example. The identity of a proposition is determined by its intrinsic content; alter the content in any way and you get a different proposition. A proposition's content is, therefore, essential to it. Similarly, a relation like 'entailment' is an internal and, therefore, a necessary relation between propositions. One proposition either does or does not entail another, and which is the case is determined by their intrinsic content. Now, Crisp's 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*. It is very hard to see, however, how he can have his cake and eat it too. If truthmakers for truths about the past are given by internal relations among abstract objects, then how can they be contingent? And if they are contingent, then how can they be internal relations among abstract objects? Initial appearances aside, it doesn't look like Crisp's proposal can satisfy the contingency constraint.

The failure of Crisp's proposal does, however, point toward a better answer to the truthmaker problem. Let's 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. 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 relatum 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 representations 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 gives us at least the beginnings of an informative 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, reflexive, error-proof recording device. This last point 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 essentially omniscient being.²⁹ I want to suggest that in some such being lies 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 all of time from the *nunc stans* of eternity.³⁰ 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 essentially

omniscient, God experiences all 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 essentially 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 adequate truthmakers for truths about the past.³¹

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,³² and even if these reasons aren't fully convincing, 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 using formulaic labels like *being such that Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC 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. By contrast, the theistic presentist does have a story to tell: Past-tensed properties are representational mental states of God, specifically, his memories. Analogy with human memory and other recording devices makes 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 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 far it looks like God's memories give the presentist exactly what she needs by way of truthmakers for truths about the past. There are, however, some objections to address. To facilitate discussion of these let's distinguish between 'memories' and 'quasi-memories.' The latter are phenomenological states of 'seeming-to-remember,' which may or may not be veridical. The former are factive. 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.

First objection: How can God's quasi-memories be caused by the events they represent? If past events no longer exist, then they can't stand in

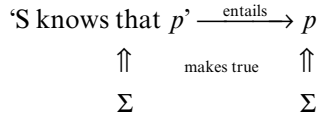
causal relations to God's quasi-memories. Hence, God cannot have actual memories of the past if presentism is correct.

Reply: This objection was addressed in §2 above in relation to the trace constraint. In brief, the objection supposes that causality is a standing cross-temporal relation, an assumption that the presentist will not concede. All that the theistic presentist needs to affirm is that God's present quasi-memories *were caused* by the past events they represent *when those events were present*. That the past events themselves no longer exist is irrelevant. A photo of a past event continues to be a photo *of* that event regardless of whether that event continues to exist. What matters is that the event *did* exist when the photo was taken.

Second objection: Theistic presentism says that 'Caesar was assassinated' is made true by God's remembering Caesar's assassination. But remembering, like knowing, is a factive state, hence, for God actually to remember event E (as opposed to merely quasi-remembering it) it must be true that E happened. Theistic presentism thus seems to land us in a vicious explanatory circle: That E happened is supposed to be true because God remembers E, but God can remember E only if E happened.³³

Reply: The appearance of explanatory circularity arises from a conflation of the *truth conditions* of a proposition with its *truthmakers*. A proposition's truth-conditions are given by its entailments, hence, by further propositions.³⁴ For example, that S knows that *p* entails that *p*; hence, it depends on *p* as one of its truth conditions. It cannot be true that S knows that *p* unless it is true that *p*. It would be wrong to conclude from this, however, that its being true that *p* is part of what *makes it true* that S knows that *p*. Truth conditions are not truthmakers. The truthmaking relation is not a relation between propositions, but rather a cross-categorical relation between a proposition (a truth-bearer) and a corresponding state-of-affairs or fact (a truthmaker).³⁵ The connection between truth conditions and truthmakers is this: By spelling out the truth conditions of a proposition *p* we identify what other propositions a truthmaker for *p* has to make true as well. For example, the *truth conditions* for 'S knows that *p*' include 'S exists,' 'S believes *p*,' '*p* is true,' and 'S's believing *p* is appropriately connected to the truth of *p*.' This partial analysis of 'S knows that *p*' tells us that a *truthmaker* for 'S knows that *p*' (call it Σ) has to make each of those propositions true. Naturally, then, we would expect Σ to include S himself, S's cognitive state of believing *p*, a truthmaker for *p*, and a fact that makes it true that there is or has been an appropriate connection between *p*'s truthmaker and S's cognitive state. As with theistic presentism, there may seem to be a vicious explanatory circle here: *p* is made true by Σ , but Σ , in turn, cannot be the case unless *p* is true. But appearances are deceiving. *p* is made true by Σ because Σ includes a *truthmaker* for *p*, whereas Σ cannot be the case unless *p* is true because *p* is

a *truth condition* of ‘S knows that p ’ (falsity of p implies falsity of ‘S knows that p ,’ which requires the nonexistence of Σ by truthmaker necessitation). Here’s the picture:



The application to theistic presentism is straightforward. That God remembers E means that God knows that E happened. Clearly, the proposition ‘God knows that E happened’ cannot be true unless it is true that E happened, as the latter is a truth condition of the former. Equally clearly, and consistent with this, is that the fact that makes it true that God knows that E happened also makes it true that E happened.

Third objection: Divine omniscience guarantees that God is aware of E as E is happening, but what guarantees the correctness of God’s memories after E is past? In other words, what makes it true that God has a quasi-memory of E if and only if E happened? It will not help to answer by appealing to God’s quasi-memories – whether God’s quasi-memory that his quasi-memory of E was caused by E, or God’s quasi-memory of E itself all over again – for we still need *something else* to turn those quasi-memories into actual memories. In the absence of a ground outside of God’s quasi-memories, theistic presentism implies that whatever God quasi-remembered, *whether it happened or not*, would ipso facto be true, which is absurd.

Reply: In essence, this objection challenges theistic presentism’s ability to satisfy the trace, persistence, and discrimination constraints by suggesting the possibility that God’s collection of quasi-memories could become corrupted or otherwise disconnected from the actual past. Various scenarios come to mind: (a) divine forgetfulness, (b) divine self-deception, (c) inducement of phony quasi-memories in God by an outside agent, or perhaps (d) a Humean scenario in which there are no necessary connections between any two moments, in which case God’s state-of-mind at t_2 might bear no systematic relation to his state of mind at t_1 . As the objection points out, appeal to further quasi-memories won’t solve this problem. Instead, the theistic presentist has to appeal to aspects of God’s essential nature. Minimally, theistic presentism is committed to a version of theism that affirms God’s necessary existence, essential omniscience, and temporal eternity (everlastingness). But there are strong independent reasons for a theist to embrace a more robust conception of God in light of the Anselmian notion that God (if he exists) would have to be the greatest possible being. Accordingly, a robust theism naturally includes essential divine attributes like maximal power, maximal

goodness, and incorruptibility. In addition, God's having maximal power plausibly entails the idea that all (concrete) beings other than God ultimately owe their existence and causal powers to God as their creator.³⁶ I'm going to argue that the present objection fails against this fuller conception of God.

Let's start with (d). Given God's necessary existence and temporal everlastingness, the Humean idea that there are *no* necessary connections between events is a metaphysical impossibility. At the very least, God's existence at t_1 necessitates God's existence at t_2 . Of course, this doesn't prove that there must be a necessary connection between God's *quasi-memories* at t_1 and his quasi-memories at t_2 . But if Humeanism fails in one area, then it may fail in other areas as well. So, rather than trying to refute the Humean scenario, the theistic presentist may reasonably dismiss it on grounds of plausible deniability. But she may be able to go a bit further. On the full theistic conception, it is metaphysically impossible for any contingent event to happen apart from God's knowingly permitting it, in which case the only way God's quasi-memories at t_2 can conflict with those at t_1 is for God either knowingly to deceive himself (b) or knowingly to allow some other being to induce phony quasi-memories in God (c). If that's right, then (d) reduces to either (b) or (c). Let's consider (c). Is it possible for some being other than God to induce phony quasi-memories in God? Could God become a witting or unwitting victim of, say, a Cartesian evil genius? Well, given that every (concrete) being other than God owes its existence and causal powers to God, nothing could deceive God unless God knowingly permits it. Hence, God cannot be an unwitting victim of deception. If any being other than God succeeds in deceiving him, this can only be a case of indirect self-deception. If that's right, then (c) reduces to (b). Now let's consider (a). Can God simply forget? Not passively because, again, nothing can happen apart from God's knowingly permitting it. If God forgets anything it must be because he wants to, which means that (a) also reduces to (b).

So it all comes down to (b). Can God deceive himself? It's hard to see how. God's essential omniscience requires not only that God be fully acquainted with every event taking place, it also requires that God be fully acquainted with himself. Necessarily, God has complete and accurate self-knowledge. Now, suppose that God wants to fabricate a quasi-memory. Suppose, for example, that at t_1 God wants to deceive himself into believing at t_2 that Caesar was not assassinated, but rather, committed suicide. Obviously, other conflicting quasi-memories at t_1 , such as the memory of Brutus stabbing Caesar, will also have to be adjusted in order to maintain coherence. Given God's perfect self-knowledge, he would know at t_1 that he is about to deceive himself in this manner. If he continued to retain that knowledge at t_2 , it would effectively undo the attempted self-deception. So the only way God could deceive himself and

make it stick would be for him to block out all higher-order self-knowledge pertaining to the quasi-memories in question. He would, in short, have to deceive himself into believing that he has not deceived himself. Is this possible? I think not, and appeal to a principle that nearly all theists would accept: *Necessarily, God does nothing without a good reason.*³⁷ Given this and the plausible claim that God could not have a good reason to deceive himself (his future self),³⁸ it follows that God cannot deceive himself.

Fourth objection: Appealing to God's memories as truthmakers leads to a runaway multiplication of facts in the same way that Lucretianism does. After all, God's experiencing event E and retaining a representation of E in memory are themselves events. Hence, since God is essentially 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*.

Reply: There is no runaway multiplication of facts in this case. 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 his experiencing of that event. Moreover, the mental states of an essentially omniscient being are, necessarily, *fully transparent* such that in experiencing and knowing God fully experiences and knows his own experiencing and knowing. In short, for God to know that *p* just is for him to know that he knows that *p*. Even though the two states are conceptually distinct, for a being such as God they are not and cannot be metaphysically distinct.³⁹ Consequently, all higher-order experiencings and representings on God's part are fully reducible to lower-order experiencings and representings.

I am not aware of any other relevant pressing objections against theistic presentism. Accordingly, having considered and rebutted the preceding four, I conclude that theistic presentism is an adequate response to the truthmaker objection, and (to my knowledge) the only extant response that satisfies all five constraints that a presentist theory of truthmakers for truths about the past has to meet.

7. Conclusion

To recap, given that the truthmaker objection to presentism cannot be deflected by denying that truths about the past need truthmakers, the presentist needs an account of which present facts serve as truthmakers for truths about the past. In addition, these facts need to meet four 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), and (4) discriminate the actual past from all other possible pasts. Furthermore, because truthmakers are supposed to explain why some propositions are true and others are not, truthmaker theories are also subject to an explanatory adequacy constraint. This means that we need a reasonably informative account of what makes truths about the past true.

Having looked at several proposals – Bigelow’s Lucretianism, Keller’s haecceitism and atomism, Bourne’s and Crisp’s ersatzism, 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 pressing incentive 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 like 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 satisfactory account will need something functionally equivalent to an error-proof, universal, reflexive recorder. Whether that be distinct from ‘God’ or not may turn out to be a merely semantic issue. And, finally, I think that those who are open 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.⁴⁰

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NOTES

¹ Bigelow, John (1996). “Presentism and Properties,” in J. E. Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives, 10, Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 35–36.

² Armstrong, D. M. (2004). *Truth and Truthmakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch. 11; Le Poidevin, Robin (2003). *Travels in Four Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 137–140; Sider, Theodore (2001). *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 35–42; Tooley, Michael (1997). *Time, Tense, and Causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 234–240.

³ 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. See Lewis, David (2001). “Truthmaking and Difference-Making,” *Noûs* 35, pp. 602–615. 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. For example, TM requires the presence of a truthmaker for ‘there are no hobbits,’ whereas TSB only requires the absence of a *falsemaker*. As noted below (§2), the truthmaker objection to presentism can be stated in terms of principles even weaker than TSB, so the relative merits of TSB vis-à-vis TM need not concern us.

⁴ The question of what could ground truths about the future on a presentist metaphysics 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 a complex debate as to whether propositions about future contingents are bivalent or not. To keep the present discussion to a manageable length, I am restricting my attention to truths that are *wholly* about the past and/or present.

⁵ I’ll be using the terms ‘fact,’ ‘event,’ and ‘state of affairs’ interchangeably to mean an arrangement at a time of concrete particulars. It does not matter for my purposes whether those particulars be conceived of as bundles of tropes or as substances having properties or in some other way. What does matter is that the presentist’s truthmakers be able to exist at a time (specifically, the present) and that we be able to theorize about their constituents.

⁶ For extended discussion, see Armstrong, 2004 and Merricks, Trenton (2007). *Truth and Ontology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁷ Keller, Simon (2004). “Presentism and Truthmaking,” in D. W. Zimmerman (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics, 1*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 83–104, esp. pp. 89–93.

⁸ For a dissenting view, see Merricks, 2007, ch. 6.

⁹ Bigelow, 1996; Keller, 2004; Crisp, Thomas M. (2007). “Presentism and the Grounding Objection,” *Noûs* 41, pp. 90–109; Bourne, Craig (2006). *A Future for Presentism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Hartshorne, Charles (1984). *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 33–34.

¹¹ Conversely, the presentist can say that truths about the future are grounded insofar as the future is ‘present in its causes.’ Cf. Prior, Arthur N. (2003). *Papers on Time and Tense*, new edition, P. Hasle, P. Øhrstrom, T. Braüner, and J. Copeland, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 52.

¹² Bourne, 2006, pp. 109–115.

¹³ The causal relations issue is a sub-case of the broader ‘cross-time relations’ problem advanced against presentism by Ted Sider (2001, pp. 25–35). For a sketch of the standard paraphrase strategy for avoiding unwanted metaphysical commitments, see Zimmerman, Dean W. (1998). “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism,” in P. van Inwagen and D. W. Zimmerman (eds) *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 206–219. For an extended presentist response to the cross-time relations objection, see Bourne, 2006, pp. 95–135.

¹⁴ I speak of *possible truthmakers* because truthmaking is in general a many-to-many relation (Armstrong, 2004, p. 21). There may be many different facts that make a given truth true, and 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 of the millions of dogs now living on the planet. That proposition, therefore, has millions of truthmakers (Fido, Rover, etc.). A hundred years ago it also had millions of truthmakers, but none of the truthmakers that made it true then continue to make it true now.

¹⁵ Russell, Bertrand (1921). *The Analysis of Mind*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 159.

¹⁶ Sider, 2001, p. 41; cf. Oaklander, L. Nathan (2004). *The Ontology of Time*. Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, pp. 91, 103.

¹⁷ Lucretius, Titus Carus (1994). *On the Nature of the Universe*, R. E. Latham, trans.; J. Godwin, rev. London: Penguin Books, 1.464–470.

¹⁸ Bigelow, 1996, p. 46.

¹⁹ Keller, 2004, p. 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Keller suggests that there might be an independent reason for haecceities in the need to ground modal truths (*Ibid.*, p. 102).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁶ Crisp, 2007, pp. 90–109.

²⁷ Bourne, 2006.

²⁸ A property is ‘intrinsic’ to a thing iff that thing possesses it wholly in its own right and not in virtue of relations it bears to other things. Non-intrinsic properties are said to be ‘extrinsic’ or ‘relational.’ A property is ‘essential’ iff a thing cannot exist without having that property; otherwise, the property is ‘non-essential’ or ‘accidental.’ A relation is ‘internal’ iff it holds simply in virtue of the intrinsic properties of the relata; otherwise, the relation is ‘external.’

²⁹ Cf. Hoffman, Joshua and Rosenkrantz, Gary S. (2002). *The Divine Attributes*. Oxford: Blackwell.

³⁰ For discussion of arguments for and against the atemporalist and temporalist conceptions of God and a defense of the latter, see Craig, William Lane (2001). *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

³¹ This proposal has long been a staple among process theists (e.g. Hartshorne, 1984, pp. 33–34), but there is no reason why a classical theist willing to countenance divine temporality cannot make the same move.

³² See, for example, Swinburne, Richard. (2004) *The Existence of God*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³³ I owe this objection and the next to an anonymous referee for PPQ.

³⁴ The language / metalanguage distinction is irrelevant here. All that matters for my point is that the terms on *both sides* of a truth conditional analysis are meaning entities, like sentences or propositions, whereas truthmakers don’t have to be meaning entities at all. Cf. von Wachter, Daniel (2004). “The Ontological Turn Misunderstood: How to Misunderstand David Armstrong’s Theory of Possibility,” *Metaphysica* 5, pp. 105–114: ‘[T]he proposition that the stone has a mass of 5 kg is a meaning entity whereas the stone is not a meaning entity. The proposition is true or false, whereas the stone is neither true or false. . . . A truthmaker [the stone] can fall on your foot and hurt you. No danger of that with a truth condition’ (pp. 112–114).

³⁵ Armstrong, 2004, p. 5.

³⁶ For discussion of the Anselmian conception of God and its connection to standard or ‘classical’ theism, see Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, 2002, ch. 1; and van Inwagen, Peter (2006). *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, ch. 2.

³⁷ This is not to say, with Leibniz, that if God does *x* then, for all other possible actions *y*, God must have a sufficient reason for doing *x* rather than *y*. It is simply to say that if God does *x*, then God has a good reason for doing so.

³⁸ It is hard, for example, to credit the suggestion that God could be so emotionally fragile that he would need to suppress unpleasant memories. See Creel, Richard (1986). *Divine Impassibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch. 7 for discussion.

³⁹ Likewise, 'trilaterality' and 'triangularity' are conceptually distinct, but not metaphysically distinct; to be trilateral is to be triangular, and vice-versa.

⁴⁰ Many thanks to Tom Belt, Tom Crisp, Ian Dove, Shandon Guthrie, Trenton Merricks, Michael Rea, Patrick Todd, Dale Tuggy, Bill Vallicella, Dean Zimmerman, and two anonymous referees for helpful discussions related to this paper.