

On Presentism, Endurance, and Change

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Presentism is the doctrine that the present time is ontologically privileged. According to the presentist, all that exists, exists at the present time; and an object has only those properties it exemplifies at the present time. —Trenton Merricks¹

The presentist says: "The only things that exist are those that exist at present." —Dean Zimmerman²

According to Presentism, only the present is real. —Michael Tooley³

Presentism, as I understand it, is the thesis that, for any x , x exists only if x is present. —Michael C. Rea⁴

Presentism is the doctrine that only the present is real. —Theodore Sider⁵

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- 1 'On the Incompatibility of Enduring and Perduring Entities,' *Mind* **104** (1995), 523
 - 2 'Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism,' in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, P. van Inwagen and D.W. Zimmerman, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell 1998), 209
 - 3 *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997), 232
 - 4 'Temporal Parts Unmotivated,' *The Philosophical Review* **107** (1998), 236
 - 5 'Presentism and Ontological Commitment,' *The Journal of Philosophy* **96** (1999), 325. See also Sider's *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001): 'According to *presentism* ... only currently existing objects are real' (11).

There has been much recent debate about Presentism among those who believe the doctrine to be nontrivial and true, those who believe it to be nontrivial and false, and those who believe it to be trivial — either trivially true or trivially false. Formulating Presentism precisely is problematic, which accounts for some of the controversy.

We note in Section I that an acceptable formulation of Presentism must preserve its consistency with Transient (i.e. dynamic) Time and inconsistency with Static (i.e. space-like) Time. After arguing in Section II that certain formulations of Presentism are unacceptable, we offer in Section III a formulation of Presentism that we defend against the charge of triviality.⁶

We turn in Sections IV-VI to matters involving Presentism, endurance, and change. Trenton Merricks has argued that enduring entities can undergo genuine change only if Presentism is correct.⁷ After arguing that certain of Merricks' assumptions pose grave problems for his presentist reconciliation of endurance and change, we entertain the Lewisian charge that presentists are committed to the radical conclusion that nothing can persist. By developing an alternative presentist reconciliation of endurance and change, we conclude that Presentism does *not* imply eliminativism regarding persistence.

Though we do argue that one should *not* reject Presentism on grounds that it is trivial or on grounds that it precludes persistence, we address no other objections to Presentism⁸ and take no stand on whether Presentism *is* correct.⁹ Also worth noting is that nothing we write below about Presentism, Transient Time, Static Time, persistence, and change implies

6 We agree with those who argue that the temporal dispute between presentists and eternalists is genuine on grounds that (i) the modal dispute between actualists and possibilists is *not* merely verbal and (ii) the temporal dispute is 'merely verbal' if and only if the modal dispute is merely verbal. See Sider, 'Presentism and Ontological Commitment,' 327.

7 T. Merricks, 'Endurance and Indiscernibility,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994) 165-84. More recently, Merricks has offered accounts of Endurance and Perdurantism cast in terms of parts *simpliciter*; see 'Persistence, Parts, and Presentism,' *Noûs* 33 (1999) 421-38.

8 See, for example, Rea's argument involving special relativity in 'Temporal Parts Unmotivated,' 236.

9 Although Sider does not endorse Presentism, he defends it against a number of standard objections. Sider's thesis is that 'presentism remains plausible if, or to the extent that, ordinary statements about the past can be shown to be quasi true.' See 'Presentism and Ontological Commitment,' 339. We do not address in this paper quasi truth and its role in defending Presentism.

that *times* exist. Whether *times* (i.e. temporal locations) exist is a controversial metaphysical question irrespective of whether there are real entities other than those that exist in the present or of whether time is transient or static.¹⁰ Though our work is cast in terms that do not commit us to the existence of times, we leave open the question of whether times *are* eliminable (in the way that, some have argued, spatial locations are eliminable in terms of spatial relations).

I Presentism, Transient Time, and Static Time

An acceptable formulation of Presentism should make clear that Presentism implies Transient Time:

Transient Time: it is possible that objects and events undergo (in some sense) temporal becoming; in an irreducibly non-tenseless sense, it is possible that there did exist or did occur objects or events that do not presently (or will not), respectively, exist or occur; and it is possible that there will exist or will occur objects or events that, respectively, do not presently exist (or have not yet existed) or do not presently occur (or have not yet occurred).

Because Presentism implies that only that which *presently* exists or occurs (in an irreducibly non-tenseless sense) enjoys privileged ontological status, one should leave open the possibility that that which *presently* exists or occurs has undergone or is undergoing (in some sense) temporal becoming.

Though Presentism implies Transient Time, an adequate formulation of Presentism should render it inconsistent with Static Time.¹¹

Static Time: Nothing can undergo temporal becoming; with respect to any (tenselessly) existing object or event, there cannot be an irreducibly non-tenseless sense in which it presently exists or occurs, did exist or occur, or will exist or occur.

10 R.M. Chisholm's work on 'Times and the Temporal' reflects his view that the 'assumption that there *are* times ... multiplies entities beyond necessity'; see *A Realistic Theory of Categories: An Essay on Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 56-64. Chisholm and Zimmerman describe as mistaken the view that '*times* are a kind of contingent *thing*, distinct from the events which are said to happen *in* time'; see 'Theology and Tense,' *Noûs* 31 (1997), 264.

11 We thank Hud Hudson for a helpful comment that led to our present formulations of Transient Time and Static Time.

Static Time is inconsistent with Presentism because Static Time implies that there is no irreducibly tenseless sense in which something can *presently* exist or occur — that there could be no ontologically privileged present. By rejecting an ontologically privileged present, the Static-Time defender would claim that your birth, your reading this essay, and your death *all* tenselessly occur (though not simultaneously). The presentist would claim, however, that only one of these events — your reading this essay — can be occurring given that your birth and your death do not presently occur.

Throughout the remainder of this essay, readers should construe in an irreducibly non-tenseless sense all further use of the past, present, and future tense. Consider now several misguided efforts to formulate Presentism.

II Unacceptable Formulations of Presentism

Here we must avoid being misled by the variable spelling of the English word “exists”. For if we contrast “exists” with “existed” and “will exist” by defining it as “is present”, we shall make it a mere tautology that only what is present exists.

—D.H. Mellor¹²

The quotations at the beginning of this article suggest the following formulation of Presentism:

P₁ Necessarily, if *x* exists, then *x* presently exists.

P₁ seems innocent enough; but in what sense should one read the first instance of ‘exists’? Is it tensed or tenseless? If tensed, then P₁ should be construed as:

P₂ Necessarily, if *x* presently exists, then *x* presently exists.

P₂, a trivially true tautology, cannot be an acceptable formulation of Presentism. Whereas Presentism is *inconsistent* with Static Time, P₂ is *consistent* with Static Time: if time *is* static, then nothing presently exists; but Static Time is consistent with the tautology that *if* something presently exists, then it thereby presently exists.

12 *Real Time II* (London and New York: Routledge 1998), 20

One may be tempted to construe the first instance of 'exists' in P_1 as 'tenselessly exists':

P_3 Necessarily, if x tenselessly exists, then x presently exists.

If in the following section, we are right that Presentism is *not* trivially false, then P_3 cannot be an accurate account of Presentism because, on certain views, P_3 is trivially false. For example, those Transient-Time defenders *and* those Static-Time defenders who agree both that Mozart tenselessly exists and that tenseless existence is *not* a primitive concept would reject P_3 : if Mozart tenselessly exists, then P_3 is clearly false given that, obviously, Mozart does not presently exist. How such Transient-Time defenders and such Static-Time defenders could argue that P_3 is clearly false is addressed in the following two paragraphs.

Arguing that 'one has no reason to suppose that there are ... irreducibly tensed truths', Roderick M. Chisholm and Dean Zimmerman have written that tenseless existence is to be explicated in terms of tensed existence:

Consider a statement of the form " x is F ", in which the "is" cannot be understood as simply present-tensed — for example, "Bolzano is the first to understand continuity," in which the "historical present tense" is used to describe an event which is obviously not occurring now. What could this tenseless "is" convey, if it is not equivalent to "is now, was, or will be"? Surely the statement implies and is implied by "Bolzano either is, was, or will be the first to understand continuity."¹³

This passage suggests the following analysis:

$D1_a$ x tenselessly exists =Df x presently exists, x did exist, or x will exist.¹⁴

13 'Theology and Tense,' 265, 262. Cf. Q. Smith, *Language and Time* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993), 165: '... " x exists" in the tenseless sense means " x existed, exists, or will exist," where the middle "exists" is present tensed.' See also J. Cargile, 'Tense and Existence,' in *Cause, Mind, and Reality: Essays Honoring C.B. Martin*, ed. by J. Heil, Philosophical Studies Series 47 (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1989), 164.

14 Sider notes that this sort of analysis is not truth-preserving with respect to claims such as, 'There tenselessly exists a set containing a dinosaur and a computer.' See 'Presentism and Ontological Commitment,' 326-7.

P₄ below is the result of replacing 'x tenselessly exists' in P₃ with the definiens of D1_a:

- P₄ Necessarily, if *x* presently exists, *x* did exist, or *x* will exist, then *x* presently exists.

P₄ is trivially false: that Mozart *did* exist does not imply that Mozart *presently* exists; and that your fourth great-great-grandchild *will* exist does not imply that your fourth great-great-grandchild *presently* exists. Because even presentists would agree that P₄ is trivially false, presentists will either (i) accept D1_a and reject P₃ as an acceptable formulation of Presentism or (ii) accept P₃ as an acceptable formulation of Presentism and reject D1_a, claiming that, because tenseless existence cannot be reduced to tensed existence, P₃ should not be interpreted as P₄.

Certain Static-Time defenders may be tempted to formulate Presentism as P₃ and then interpret P₃ in such a way that they can dismiss it (and thereby Presentism) as trivially false. This move begins with a reduction of tenseless existence to tenseless temporal relations:¹⁵

- D1_b *x* tenselessly exists =Df *x* [tenselessly] exists prior to the assertion 'x tenselessly exists' or *x* [tenselessly] exists simultaneously with the assertion 'x tenselessly exists' or *x* [tenselessly] exists after the assertion 'x tenselessly exists'.

Replacing 'x tenselessly exists' in P₃ with the definiens of D1_b produces the following interpretation of Presentism:

- P₅ Necessarily, if *x* [tenselessly] exists prior to the assertion 'x tenselessly exists' or if *x* [tenselessly] exists simultaneously with the assertion 'x tenselessly exists' or if *x* [tenselessly] exists after the assertion 'x tenselessly exists', then *x* presently exists.

P₅ is trivially false: that Mozart [tenselessly] exists *prior* to the assertion of 'Mozart tenselessly exists' does not imply that Mozart *presently* exists; and that your fourth great-great-grandchild [tenselessly] exists *after* the assertion of 'Your fourth great-great-grandchild exists' does not imply that your fourth great-great-grandchild *presently* exists. Because even presentists would agree that P₅ is trivially false, no presentist would accept P₅ as a fair formulation of Presentism. So, Static-Time defenders

15 Cf. Mellor, *Real Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981), 40-2.

should not formulate Presentism as P_5 and then reject it on grounds that P_5 is trivially false.

Preliminary summary:

1. P_1 can be interpreted as P_2 or P_3 ; and P_3 can be interpreted as P_4 or P_5 .
2. P_2 is trivially true and consistent with Static Time. Because an acceptable formulation of Presentism should render it *inconsistent* with Static Time, one should not formulate Presentism as P_1 if P_1 is interpreted as P_2 .
3. P_4 is trivially false and would be rejected by presentists. Thus, one should not formulate Presentism as P_1 if P_1 is interpreted as P_3 and if (under the assumption that tenseless existence is reducible to present, past, and future existence) P_3 is interpreted as P_4 .
4. P_5 is trivially false and would be rejected by presentists. Thus, one should not formulate Presentism as P_1 if P_1 is interpreted as P_3 and if (under the assumption that tenseless existence can be reduced to tenseless temporal relations) P_3 is interpreted as P_5 .

We conclude that Presentism can be formulated nontrivially as P_1 only if (i) P_1 is interpreted as P_3 and (ii) P_3 is interpreted in such a way that its antecedent (' x tenselessly exists') involves an irreducible concept of tenseless existence.

III Nontrivial Presentism

...Presentism seems either trivially true or trivially false. —Lawrence Lombard¹⁶

There is a doctrine, venerable and very familiar, that that which does not presently exist does not, properly speaking, exist at all. Alternatively there is the equally ancient and equally intuitive view that only the past and present have determinate reality and that the future has no such being, or at least no such determinate being.

—Lawrence Sklar¹⁷

16 L.B. Lombard, 'On the Alleged Incompatibility of Presentism and Temporal Parts,' *Philosophia* 27 (1999), 254. See also Zimmerman, 'Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism,' 208-9.

17 'Time, Reality, and Relativity,' in *Demonstratives*, P. Yourgrau, ed., Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990), 247

We shall formulate Presentism nontrivially in terms of the undefined concept of existence *simpliciter*, a concept that David Lewis uses when writing on behalf of modal realism:

When we quantify over less than all there is, we leave out things that (unrestrictedly speaking) exist *simpliciter*. If [modal realism is] right, other-worldly things [i.e. things other than those in *this* possible world] exist *simpliciter*.... If [modal realism is] wrong, other-worldly things fail *simpliciter* to exist.... [What] exists only according to some false theory just does not exist at all.¹⁸

If any possible world is as real as any other possible world, then unicorns do not exist in *this* [our] world, but they *do* exist *simpliciter* — they *do* inhabit a world other than ours that is no less real. If modal realism is incorrect, then unicorns do *not* exist *simpliciter* — they do not exist in *this* world, which is the only *real* world there is.¹⁹

One can adapt what Lewis writes about existence *simpliciter* vis-à-vis modal realism to make clear the implications of Static Time. After all, as we have noted elsewhere, there is a close similarity between modal realism and Static Time.²⁰ In the same way that modal realism implies that no possible world is the sole *real* world and that ‘the way things really are’ includes the way things are in *every* possible world, Static Time implies that no temporal part of a four-dimensionally extended whole is its sole *real* temporal part and that ‘the ways things really are’ includes all temporal parts of all four-dimensionally extended wholes. Below is an adaptation of Lewis’s passage on modal realism that characterizes the implications of Static Time in terms of existence *simpliciter*:

When we quantify over only that which exists simultaneously with the reading of this statement, we leave out things that (unrestrictedly speaking) exist *simpliciter*. If Static Time is right, things exist *simpliciter* that don’t also exist simultaneously with the reading of this statement. If Static Time is wrong, anything other than those that exist simultaneously with the reading of this statement fails

18 *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 3. Cf. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*: ‘There is a single notion of existence relative to which there can be meaningful dispute.... [We] can meaningfully ask: do dinosaurs exist *simpliciter*? The eternalist says they do, while the presentist disagrees’ (17).

19 In ‘Persistence, Parts, and Presentism,’ Merricks formulates Endurance and Perdurance in terms of parts *simpliciter*. In Lewis’s terms, one could say that an entity has a part *simpliciter* if it has a part that exists *simpliciter*.

20 ‘On Passage and Persistence,’ *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994), 270, 276. Cf. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*, 11-12.

simpliciter to exist. What exists only according to some nonexistent past or future just does not exist at all.

Though we take the concept of existence *simpliciter* to be primitive, the following is an informal explication of the concept:

X exists *simpliciter*, if and only if, *X* is among the things that the universe includes — if and only if *X* is *real*. That *X* exists *simpliciter* does *not* alone imply that *X* *did* exist, that *X* presently exists, nor that *X* *will* exist.

We shall use ‘existence_s,’ ‘existing_s,’ or ‘exists_s’ to signal use of the concept of existence *simpliciter*.

We interpret Presentism as the following nontrivial doctrine:

P₆ Necessarily, if *x* exists_s, then *x* presently exists.

It is false that Mozart and our great-great-grandchildren presently exist, so P₆ (if true) implies that Mozart and our great-great-grandchildren do not exist_s.

Is P₆ subject to Lawrence Lombard’s charge that Presentism is trivial? Lombard writes:

Presentism is a view that I am not certain that I understand. Is it the view that the present time is the only time that exists? Of course, it is the only time that exists *now*. Of course, it is not the only time that exists at some time or other. So, Presentism seems either trivially true or trivially false. Similarly, if the first occurrence of the word “has” in the claim that “an object has only those properties it has at the present time” is in the present tense, the claim seems trivially true; if it is not, the claim seems trivially false.²¹

Whether true or false, Presentism (i.e. P₆) has controversial implications and is thereby nontrivial.

First, the denial of Presentism is inconsistent with what many philosophers innocently presuppose about the ontological difference between you and Mozart. If Presentism is false — if there *can* exist_s entities other than those that presently exist — then presumably Mozart and your fourth great-great-grandchild exist_s as robustly as you exist_s (though neither exist_s simultaneously with you). Because many philosophers innocently presuppose that Mozart and your fourth great-great-grand-

21 ‘On the Alleged Incompatibility of Presentism and Temporal Parts,’ 254

child do *not* exist, as robustly as you do, rejecting Presentism is controversial; so Presentism, if false, is not *trivially* false.

Second, Presentism is inconsistent with what some philosophers claim about the existence of multiple times and Mozart. Many innocently presuppose not only that there exists, the time at which you read this essay but that there exist, indefinitely many preceding and later times as well. Many innocently assume that Mozart *does* exist at some past time, unlike Santa, who exists at *no* past time. If Presentism is true, however, then (if any moment of time exists at all) no more than one time can possibly exist, and Mozart would be on an ontological par with Santa given that neither exists.²² Because these implications are inconsistent with what many philosophers innocently assume about the ontological status of multiple times and Mozart, Presentism, if true, is not *trivially* true.

Finally, Presentism is philosophically significant because it implies that Transient Time is correct²³ and, thereby, that Static Time is incorrect:

(A)

1. Presentism is correct and Transient Time is incorrect. [assumption for *reductio ad absurdum*]
2. If Presentism is correct, then Mozart exists only in the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart.
3. If Transient Time is incorrect, then there is a sense in which Mozart exists other than the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart.
4. If Transient Time is correct, then Static Time is not correct.

22 Cf. J.A. Cover, 'Reference, Modality, and Relational Time,' *Philosophical Studies* 70 (1993), 264. Cover suggests that a time is a 'whole, composed of events standing in the simultaneity relation.' If Presentism is correct, then there exist no events other than present events; so, on Cover's view of what a time is, there could exist no time other than the present time.

23 Whether Transient Time implies Presentism is controversial. M. Tooley has defended the view that 'while the past and present are real, the future is not.' See *Time, Tense, and Causation*, 27. Cf. Q. Smith, *Language and Time*, 160-5. On 165, Smith writes: 'I believe that if something possess [sic] a property, then it is past, present, or future' and 'we may say that "x exists" in the present tensed sense is not a necessary condition of present property possession.' Zimmerman expresses concern that 'the combination of rejecting Presentism while taking tense seriously is an unstable one.' See 'Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism,' 212.

5. Therefore, Mozart exists only in the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart. [from 1,2]
6. Therefore, there is a sense in which Mozart exists other than the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart. [from 1,3]
7. Therefore, Mozart exists only in the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart and there is a sense in which Mozart exists other than the sense that there did exist something that was Mozart. [from 5,6]
8. Therefore, it is false that both Presentism is correct and Transient Time is incorrect. [from 1,7]
9. Therefore, either Presentism is incorrect or Transient Time is correct. [from 8]
10. Therefore, if Presentism is correct, then Transient Time is correct. [from 9]²⁴
11. Therefore, if Presentism is correct, then Static Time is not correct. [from 4,10]²⁵

The prevailing view among philosophers of time is that Transient Time is *not* correct and Static Time correct; so Presentism cannot be trivial if it is inconsistent with the prevailing view.

24 N. Markosian may argue that Presentism is *inconsistent* with temporal passage; see 'How Fast Does Time Pass?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993) 829-44. According to Markosian, 'the passage thesis' implies that 'there are some properties [e.g. *pastness*, *presentness*, *futurity*] possessed by time, but not possessed by a dimension of space, in virtue of which it is true to say that time passes' (830, 832). Markosian claims that times and events may be the bearers of these temporal properties such that (when Markosian wrote in 1993) 'the year 2000 currently possesses the property *being future*, and that the 1984 World Series currently possesses the property *being past*' (834). Because Presentism implies that there can exist no time or event other than those that *presently* exist or occur, Presentism is *inconsistent* with any Markosian-type account of temporal passage that requires times and events to be the bearers of *pastness* and *futurity*.

25 There is another reason to believe that Presentism and Static Time are inconsistent: P_6 implies that all existing_s entities *presently* exist whereas Static Time implies that *no* existing_s entities *presently* exist; so Presentism, if true, would guarantee that Static Time is false.

IV Does Endurance Require Presentism?

Only what is in the present is in the proper sense to be accepted or acknowledged, and nothing in the present stands apart temporally from anything else in the present, but only from something past or future, of which the one no longer is, the other is not yet.

—Franz Brentano²⁶

...I will defend: At any time t , t is the only time that exists. All times other than t either once existed, but exist no more, or will exist, but do not yet exist. So at any given time, only one time is real. It is never true that all times are equally real.

—James Cargile²⁷

We have elsewhere defended the link between theories of time and theories of persistence: whether time is transient or static dictates whether persisting objects endure (i.e. wholly exist at different times) or perdure (i.e. have different temporal parts at different temporal locations) and vice versa. Specifically, we argued that Transient Time implies Endurance (and vice versa) and that Static Time implies Perdurance (and vice versa):²⁸

Endurance: It is possible that something persists; and the concept of persistence is properly analyzed in terms of endurance, which involves a thing's wholly existing — i.e. existing with all its parts — at different times.²⁹

Perdurance: It is possible that something persists; and the concept of persistence is properly analyzed in terms of Perdurance, which

26 'What we can learn about space and time from the conflicting errors of the philosophers,' *Philosophical Investigations on Space, Time and the Continuum*, B. Smith, trans., S. Körner and R.M. Chisholm, eds. (London: Croom Helm 1988), 174. In the same volume, see also 'The Temporal As Relative,' 106-7.

27 'Tense and Existence,' 162

28 'On Passage and Persistence,' 269-83. There were oversights in this earlier work: though we were silent with respect to Presentism, our defense of the time/identity linkage subtly presupposed that Transient Time implies Presentism. Thus, by affirming that Transient Time is correct, if and only if Endurance is correct, we thereby affirmed inadvertently the corresponding biconditional involving Presentism and Endurance.

29 Someone like Chisholm, who rejects both times *and* irreducible tenseless existence could formulate Endurance as follows: 'It is possible that something persists; and the concept of a persisting entity is properly analyzed in terms of endurance, which involves an entity that both presently exists wholly (i.e. presently exists with all its parts) and did or will exist wholly.'

involves a thing's having different temporal parts that each exist at different times.³⁰

Without defending Endurance, Merricks has recently explored the connection between Endurance and Presentism, arguing that Endurance is inconsistent with the possibility that persisting entities change unless Presentism is correct — that the endurantist *must* accept Presentism in order to preserve the possibility that persisting entities change. To generate the apparent inconsistency between Endurance and the possibility of change, Merricks introduces the following argument:³¹

(B)

- (1) O at t is identical with O at t^* . [assume for *reductio*]
- (2) O at t is bent.
- (3) O at t^* is not bent.
- (4) If O at t is identical with O at t^* , then O at t is F if and only if O at t^* is F [indiscernibility of identicals].
- (5) O at t is bent and is not bent. (RAA, 1,2,3,4)

Endurance appears to imply that statements of the form in (B1) can be true; and (B2) and (B3) capture the possibility that an enduring object changes. Presumably, given that (B5) is a contradiction, one must either (i) reject (B1) and thereby reject Endurance or (ii) admit that enduring objects cannot change and thereby reject (B2) or (B3).

Merricks argues that Presentism can defuse the contradiction. Having noted that 'the heart of the endurantist's ontology is expressed by claims like " O at t is identical with O at t^* "' (182), Merricks writes:

When do I have the property "being bent at t "? If I ever exemplify that property, I exemplify it at all times. That is, no matter what time is present, so long as I exemplify any property, I exemplify the property "being bent at t ." This is because whenever I exist it is true that, when t is present, I am bent. And if it is true at t both that I exist at t^* and that I exist at t^* , I can sensibly say that I exist at different times (that is, t^* and t^*) at the same time (that is, at t).

...

30 The perdurantist who rejects the existence of times could formulate Perdurance as follows: 'It is possible that something persists; and the concept of persistence is properly analyzed in terms of perdurance, which involves a thing's having at least two different temporal parts such that one exists prior to the other.'

31 'Endurance and Indiscernibility,' 168

The most natural reading of (2) is that ... when t is present, O (exists and) is bent. Reading (3) in like manner, we see that when t^* is present, O is not bent. If we treat " O is F at t " as formally analogous to " O is bent at t ," then (4) means that if O exists at t and t^* , then when t is present, O is F if and only if when t^* is present, O is F . But (4), on this reading, is not justified by the principle that identicals are indiscernible. Rather, (4) makes the much stronger claim that O is F if and only if O is F at all times at which it exists. This obviously makes change impossible, but there is no reason the endurantist should accept (4) thus understood. (178-9)

"Being present" is a property that only one time has (although others had it and still others will have it). It is perfectly intelligible to say "December 1993 is present, but May 1903 is not." (180)

Merricks' resolution is that (B2), (B3), and (B4) should be reformulated to reflect that there exist two times, t and t^* , that O exists at both t and t^* , and that O is bent when t is present and not bent when t^* is present:

(2') t exists, and O is bent when t is present.

(3') t^* exists, and O is not bent when t^* is present.

(4') If O at t is identical with O at t^* , then O at t is F if and only if O at t^* has the property 'being F at t ' [indiscernibility of identicals].

Because (B1) coupled with (B2')-(B3') do *not* imply the contradiction that O at t is both F and not F , Merricks concludes that embracing Presentism allows one to block the reduction to absurdity, thereby preserving the view that enduring objects *can* change.

There is, however, a serious problem with Merricks' Presentist reconciliation of Endurance with the possibility of change. On Merricks' view, in what sense of 'exist' do times t and t^* exist, and in what sense of 'exist' does O exist at both t and t^* ? (And in what sense of 'has' is it true that (F -less) O at t^* has the property 'being F at t '?) An acceptable reconciliation of Endurance and change should allow for the possibility that an enduring fender that was bent ten years ago at t is presently straight at t^* (having been repaired nine years ago). To allow for this, Merricks' Presentist reconciliation of Endurance and change must allow that t and t^* both exist_s, such that t^* presently exists and t did exist ten years ago. If Presentism is correct, however, then Merricks *cannot* allow that there exist_s two times ten years apart:

(C)

(1) All that exists_s, exists in the present. [P6]

(2) If there exists_s a time t that did exist, then t exists_s, but t does not presently exist_s.

- (3) If it is false that a time t presently exists, then it is false that t exists.
[from (1)]
- (4) If there exists_s a time t that did exist, then t exists and it is false
that t exists_s. [from (2) and (3)]
- (5) It is false that there exists_s a time t that did exist. [from (4)]

Thus, Merricks' appeal to Presentism to reconcile Endurance with the possibility of change is unsuccessful: the endurantist cannot consistently accept Presentism *and* claim that a long-persisting entity can undergo change, existing_s with different properties at two existing_s times ten years apart.³²

There is a potential objection to argument (C): 'The second premise is false: the 21st century is an existing_s time that *did* exist, but the 21st century, contrary to (C2), is also a time that *presently* exists. So, it is false that a past existing_s time cannot presently exist.' Continuing to operate under Merricks' assumption that times exist, the reply is that, strictly, the 21st century is *not* a time that both did exist *and* presently exists. In presentist terms, the 21st century both did exist *and* presently exists only in the sense that there did exist a time that existed after 12:00 AM on January 1, 2001 but before 12:00 AM on January 1, 2101, and there presently exists a time that exists after 12:00 AM on January 1, 2001 but before 12:00 AM on January 1, 2101.³³

V Does Presentism Preclude Persistence?

No man, unless it be at the moment of his execution, believes that he has no future; still less does anyone believe that he has no past.

...

Consider the philosophers who say that the future is unreal. It is hard to believe they mean it. If ever anyone is right that there is no future, then that very moment is his last, and what's more is the end of everything.

—David Lewis³⁴

32 Our objection to Merricks leaves open the possibility that the present is 'thick' — that, in accord with the doctrine of the *specious present*, the presentist might claim that two (or perhaps more) non-temporally-overlapping times can both presently exist.

33 Our reply may pose problems for Merricks, who apparently allows (in 'Persistence, Parts, and Presentism,' 429-31) that sizeable durations — e.g. a year or decade — can presently exist.

34 *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 204, 207

In addition to his arguing that Endurance without Presentism is inconsistent with the possibility of change, Merricks elsewhere argues that Presentism is inconsistent with Perdurantism.³⁵ David Lewis not only agrees that Presentism is inconsistent with Perdurantism, but argues that it is inconsistent with Endurance as well! Lewis claims that if 'times [other than the present moment] are like false stories' such that 'the only intrinsic properties of a thing are those it has at the present moment,' then nothing would persist in any sense — Presentism 'rejects endurance; because it rejects persistence altogether.'³⁶ Lewis's disturbing view suggests a serious problem for the project at hand: argument (C) above seems to imply that Presentism is inconsistent with Endurance (if Endurance must allow for the possibility that something can wholly exist, at two different times that are relatively far apart). If, however, Presentism *is* inconsistent with Endurance, then a presentist reconciliation of Endurance and change would be doomed!

Must presentists pay the high price of accepting a sweeping eliminativism regarding persistence? If all real things presently exist, must one thereby agree that no fossil and no person has persisted through time? The price of Presentism is not so high. By explaining how the presentist can both accept (C) *and* endorse a concept of endurance that preserves the possibility of change, we argue below that Presentism *is* consistent with Endurance.

VI A Presentist Account of Endurance and Change

...[Even] the presentists should accept the obvious fact that objects have properties at times.

—Trenton Merricks³⁷

We argued above in Section III that Presentism entails Transient Time, and we argued in 1994 that Transient Time entails Endurance.³⁸ Thus we are apparently committed to the linkage thesis that Presentism entails Endurance. Obviously, Presentism *cannot* entail Endurance if, following

35 'On the Incompatibility of Enduring and Perdurant Entities,' 524

36 *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 204. See also Zimmerman, 'Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism,' 213 and Rea, 'Temporal Parts Unmotivated,' 242.

37 'Persistence, Parts, and Presentism,' 423

38 'On Passage and Persistence,' 273-6

Lewis's suggestion, Presentism and Endurance are inconsistent. Ironically, we face now the challenge of defending the Presentism/Endurance *consistency* thesis, a much weaker claim than the Presentism/Endurance linkage thesis!

To reconcile Presentism with Endurance and Endurance with the possibility of change, we offer first a presentist account of what endurance involves. If P_6 implies, per argument (C), that there exists_s no past or future time, then the endurantist/presentist should *not* analyze endurance in terms of an entity's existing_s at two existing_s times of which one could be past or future. The presentist can circumvent this difficulty, explicating endurance without invoking the existence of any time at all:

D2 x endures through time =Df x exists in the present and either (i) x did exist or (ii) x will exist.

D2 makes clear that presentists are not forced to pay the high price of eliminativism with respect to persistence: contrary to the Lewisian concern, Presentism *is* consistent with Endurance.

Consider the first of two objections to this analysis: 'D2 is a tensed analysis of endurance, so endurance presupposes Transient Time if not Presentism, which it shouldn't: to avoid begging the question on behalf of the Endurance/Transient-Time linkage thesis, Endurance should be explicated in non-tensed terms.'

The reply is that the presentist/endurantist who defends Transient Time independently of a theory of persistence and then offers a tensed account of Endurance is *not* guilty of question-begging. After all, one is not guilty of question-begging on behalf of a materialist theory of mind if one defends it by appealing to neurophysiological findings and ontological simplicity and then offers a functional account of belief.

The second objection to our suggestion that the presentist/endurantist should explicate endurance in tensed terms is more serious: 'Many philosophers who have not been perverted by the literature on time and persistence would agree that Mozart endures through time. According to D2, however, Mozart does *not* endure through time: D2 implies that only presently existing entities endure through time, but Mozart does not presently exist! Given that D2 doesn't allow for the philosophical commonplace that Mozart endures through time, D2 is flawed.'

The presentist/endurantist can simply agree that Mozart does *not* endure through time: Mozart died long ago, so Mozart does not presently exist (given Presentism) and thereby cannot now be something that *endures* through time (given D2). Though the presentist/endurantist would deny that Mozart *endures* through time, the presentist/enduran-

tist can appeal to the Russellian concept of temporal overlapping³⁹ and agree that Mozart *did* endure through time:

D3 x and y did temporally overlap =Df There did exist an x and y such that (i) x did not wholly cease to exist before y and (ii) y did not wholly cease to exist before x .⁴⁰

D4 x did endure through time =Df There did exist a y and z other than x such that (i) x did temporally overlap with y , (ii) x did temporally overlap with z , and (iii) y and z did not temporally overlap.

The presentist/endurantist can claim that, although Mozart does not *now* endure through time ('He's dead!'), he *did* endure through time: there *did* exist something that was Mozart and that overlapped (at least for awhile) with two things that did not themselves overlap.

This presentist/endurantist account of endurance allows for the possibility of change:

D5 x has changed =Df x endures through time, and x did have a property that x presently lacks.

To say that a wire has changed as it was straightened is to say that the presently existing straight wire did exist and was bent. (Contrary to what Merricks claims in the passage that opens this section, presentists need not accept 'the obvious fact' that objects have properties at times because presentists are not obviously committed to the existence of times; they can account for endurance and change without them.)

39 Cf. B. Russell, 'On Order in Time,' *Logic and Knowledge* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons 1971), 347. In this 1936 essay, Russell wrote that two events overlap in time if 'neither is wholly before the other.' Chisholm makes use of Russell's work in developing his own theory of the temporal; see *A Realistic Theory of Categories*, 60.

40 D3 allows that Mozart could have temporally overlapped with something that had an intermittent existence — with something that, say, existed in 1786 and 1788 but not in 1787. If there were such a thing, then it ceased to exist at the end of 1786, but did not then *wholly* cease to exist. Chisholm rejects intermittent existence; see 'Reply to Dean W. Zimmerman,' *The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm*, Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed. (Chicago: Open Court 1997), 103-4. See also J. Hoffman, 'Locke on Whether One Thing Can Have Two Beginnings of Existence,' *Ratio* 22 (1980), 106-11.

We objected earlier to Merricks' presentist reconciliation of Endurance with the possibility of change on grounds that it contradicts Presentism: Merricks' reconciliation implies, contrary to P₆, that there could exist_s two times, one of which does not presently exist. Does our presentist/endurantist account of change also lead to contradiction? Consider a reformulation of Merricks' argument cast in terms of the presentist/endurantist account of change at stake:

(D)

1. *O* endures through time and did exist. [assume for *reductio*]
2. *O* did exist and was bent.
3. *O* presently exists and is not bent.
4. If *O* endures through time and did exist, then *O* did exist and was *F* if and only if *O* presently exists and is *F* [modified principle of indiscernibility of identicals].
5. *O* presently exists and is bent and *O* presently exists and is not bent. (RAA, 1,2,3,4)

The presentist/endurantist can block the contradictory conclusion by rejecting (D4), which is *not* implied by the Identity of Indiscernibles. Indeed, the fourth premise appears to be false: it is dubious that an object endures only if it presently has whatever properties it did have. It *is* dubious that a presently existing_s straight wire endures and was bent only if it is now bent.

VII Summary

Without taking a stand on whether Presentism is true, we have argued that Presentism is neither *trivially* true nor *trivially* false — that it is a metaphysically significant thesis that has implications for the nature of time, persistence, and change. Because Presentism implies that there can exist_s no time other than a presently existing time (if there exists_s any time at all), persistence cannot be explicated in terms of enduring entities that exist_s at multiple times of which at least one is past or future. Our presentist account of endurance [D2] makes clear that coupling Presentism with Endurance *can* preserve (*without* invoking the existence of

times) the possibility that there do exist, persisting entities that undergo real change.⁴¹

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