

## Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism, with Postscript (2005)\*

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David Lewis develops something like an antinomy concerning change which he calls “the problem of temporary intrinsic.” The resolution of this puzzle provides his primary motivation for the acceptance of a metaphysics of temporal parts.<sup>1</sup> Lewis’s own discussion is extremely compressed, showing up as a digression in a book about modality. So I shall set forth in some detail what I take to be his line of reasoning before suggesting that, at least for those philosophers who take seriously the distinction between past, present, and future, the argument poses no special threat.

### The structure of Lewis’s argument

Lewis’s argument for temporal parts has the following structure. He offers reasons to deny that “the only intrinsic properties of a thing are those it has at the present moment”<sup>2</sup> —

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\* This paper appeared in an anthology intended primarily for undergraduates: Metaphysics: The Big Questions, ed. by Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 206-219. An ancestor was presented at meetings of the Central States Philosophical Association in 1990. I am grateful to members of the audience, especially Roderick Chisholm and Mark Heller, for criticisms and suggestions. (Heller’s excellent comments on the original version formed the basis of his paper, “Things Change”, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 52 (1992), pp. 695-704). Later on, Trenton Merricks provided useful comments as well. My deepest debt is to David Lewis, who provided extensive criticism of a late draft, and saved me from a number of serious mistakes — would that he were here to find the rest of them!

Recent work that would require discussion in a fuller treatment of the topic includes: Trenton Merricks, “Endurance and Indiscernibility”, Journal of Philosophy 91 (1994), pp. 165-84; Sally Haslanger, “Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic”, Analysis 49 (1989), pp. 119-125; Peter M. Simons, “On Being Spread Out in Time: Temporal Parts and the Problem of Change”, in Existence and Explanation, ed. by Wolfgang Spohn, Bas C. van Fraassen, and Brian Skyrms (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 131-147; and Mark Hinchliff, “The Puzzle of Change”, Philosophical Perspectives, Vol. 10 (Metaphysics) ed. by James E. Tomberlin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), pp. 119-136.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. On the Plurality of Worlds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 202-4; the relevant passage is reprinted as the previous chapter of this volume, and also (as “The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic: An Excerpt From On the Plurality of Worlds”) in Metaphysics: The Big Questions, pp. 204-206.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lewis, Plurality, p. 204.

reasons, that is, for rejecting the “second solution” he considers. But if, in addition to the intrinsic properties I have now, I also have the intrinsic properties I have at other times, then I will end up having pairs like being bent and being straight — pairs that are, in some sense, incompatible. The challenge is then to answer the question: How can I have a pair of incompatible properties?<sup>3</sup> Lewis thinks there are only two possible ways to answer this question. The first is unacceptable, and the second leads to the doctrine of temporal parts:

(1) My being both bent and straight is like my son’s being both tall and short — tall for a two-year-old, say, but short by comparison to most people. This strategy for dealing with apparent contradiction construes the seemingly incompatible properties as really relations to other things (in the case of tall and short, relations to different comparison classes). The version of this strategy that Lewis considers for temporary intrinsics is his “first solution”: that shapes and other seemingly intrinsic properties “are disguised relations, which an enduring thing may bear to times.”<sup>4</sup> There is no more difficulty in standing in the bent-at relation to one time and the straight-at relation to another than there is in bearing the tall-for-a relation to two-year-olds and the short-for-a relation to the citizens of the United States as a whole. But Lewis doesn’t like this solution; he thinks it is tantamount to the rejection of intrinsic properties altogether.

(2) There’s only one way left, says Lewis, to make the apparent contradiction go away while retaining the incompatibility of being bent and being straight; and that is to treat it as we do the case of the road that is both bumpy and smooth. How can a

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<sup>3</sup> It might be replied that there is no problem with having both if the verb “having” is taken tenselessly — that is, in such a way that “I have both” is equivalent to something like: “I had, now have, or will have the one; and I had, now have, or will have the other”). But then we should want to know why these properties deserve the label “incompatible”. How do they differ from a pair of compatible intrinsics, like being red and being round?

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, Plurality, p. 204.

road be both? Easily: by having one part that is bumpy and another that is smooth. So, analogously, the only way for me to be both bent and straight is for me to have a part that is bent and a part that is straight. But these cannot be ordinary spatial parts of me, like an arm or a hand. The bent “part” of me is exactly my size and shape, with arms, legs, torso, and head; and likewise for the straight “part” of me. And, like the different spatial parts of the road, these different parts of me must be distinct one from another. So I emerge as a whole spread out along the temporal dimension with different (temporal) parts for the different times I occupy, much as the road is a whole spread out along the spatial dimension with different (spatial) parts for the different places it occupies.

I am willing to grant Lewis’s assertion that, once someone admits that I have more properties than just those I have now, she must choose between alternatives (1) and (2). And perhaps it is true that (1) eliminates temporary intrinsics altogether. At the very least, it eliminates temporary monadic properties (“one-place” properties, properties that are not relations); and it’s easy to see why someone might think that really intrinsic properties should be monadic.<sup>5</sup> What I want to question instead is the very first move: Why suppose that I must have more than just the properties I have now?

### Serious tenses and presentists

Before looking at Lewis’s answer, I want to make clear what view Lewis is targeting: namely, “presentism”. A closely related position is that of one who “takes tense

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<sup>5</sup> One might, however, attempt to treat intrinsic properties as monadic while the having of them is a relation between a thing, a property, and a time. See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, “Four-dimensional Objects” 245-55; Sally Haslanger, “Endurance and Temporary Intrinsics”, *Analysis* 49 (1989), pp. 119-125. For a response that regards the temporal modification of the having of a property as adverbial, see Mark Johnston, “Is There a Problem About Persistence?”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 61 (1987), pp. 107-135.

seriously”. As shall appear, one can’t very well be a presentist without taking tense seriously, although it’s possible to do the reverse.<sup>6</sup>

When a philosopher says, “The only properties I have are those I have now”, it is tempting to respond by saying: This thesis is either an uninteresting, tautologous truth; or an obvious falsehood. If the first occurrence of “have” is in the present tense, then the assertion is equivalent to “The only properties I have now are those I have now.” Who could disagree? But how dull! On the other hand, suppose this “have” is an instance of what philosophers sometimes call a “tenseless” verb. To say that I (tenselessly) have some property, for instance that I (tenselessly) am straight, is to say something more or less equivalent to this: I either was straight, or I am straight, or I will be straight. But “The only properties I (tenselessly) have are those I have now” is true only if either I never change or I exist for but an instant. Taken, then, in the only way in which it can be true (i.e., with the first “have” in the present tense), the claim seems too trivial to be the focus of a substantive philosophical debate.

I am convinced that there is an important disagreement between those who take tense seriously and those who don’t. Precisely what the disagreement boils down to will depend to some extent upon metaphysical theses about what kinds of things are, in the first instance, true and false. Here is one example; but I believe that nothing much hinges on accepting just this view about the most fundamental bearers of truth. Suppose you think that the sentences we write down and utter are true or false in virtue of their expressing propositions that are true or false in some more basic sense. A proposition is something that can be expressed in many different ways; it can be believed by one person and disbelieved by another; and, at least in the case of a proposition that isn’t about a particular sentence or thought, it would have existed and been either true or false even in the absence of all sentences or thoughts. This familiar conception of the ultimate bearers of truth and

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<sup>6</sup> See the postscript for a more subtle account of these distinctions.

falsehood<sup>7</sup> can be conjoined with a tensed or a tenseless theory about the nature of the proposition. On a tensed construal, a proposition's being true is not typically a once-and-for-all thing. The sentence "I am bent" could now be used by me to express a true proposition; but the proposition in question hasn't always been true, and it won't continue to be true for very long. A tenseless account of propositions, on the other hand, takes them to be like statements made using tenseless verbs: each is either always true, or never true.

The competition between the tensed and tenseless approaches to the fundamental bearers of truth gives rise to a familiar dispute over the importance of "tense logic". Logic is all about describing the most general patterns of truth-preserving inference. If the things that are true and false can be true but have been false, or be about to become false, then some of the patterns of inference logicians should be interested in will involve temporal notions. On the tensed conception of truths, it is a question of logic whether, for example, the proposition: It will be the case that I am bent, implies the proposition: It was the case that it will be the case that I am bent. Thus relations like being true simultaneously, and being true earlier or later than, will turn out to be, at least in part, logical notions.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, those who take truth-bearers to correspond to tenseless statements will regard this as a blunder: temporal relations are for science and (perhaps) metaphysics to explore; but they are not part of the subject matter of logic.<sup>9</sup>

The philosopher who takes a tensed approach to the bearers of truth regards each of them as making a claim about what is the case now. Of course some propositions are eternally true: in other words, there are propositions which, either necessarily, or as a matter

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<sup>7</sup> It can be found in Bolzano, Frege, Church, Chisholm, and Plantinga, to name but a few.

<sup>8</sup> This point of view is exemplified by A. N. Prior and Peter Geach. See Prior, "Changes in Events and Changes in Things", in his Papers on Time and Tense (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 1-14; Prior, "The Notion of the Present", Studium Generale 23 (1970), pp. 245-48; and Geach, "Some Problems About Time", reprinted in his Logic Matters (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 302-318.

<sup>9</sup> See Gerald Massey, "Temporal Logic! Why Bother?", Noûs 3 (1969), pp. 17-32.

of contingent fact, have always been true and will always be true. That two and two make four is an example of the first sort. And historical propositions expressed by tenseless statements, such as my utterance in a lecture of “Plato believes in universals”, are examples of the latter sort. But the proponent of tensed truth-bearers will insist that the true proposition expressed is composed of tensed propositions; it’s a disjunction of three propositions: Either Plato (now) believes in universals, or he did, or he will.<sup>10</sup> This is a truth, but it’s made out of three other propositions, only one of which is true, and each of which concerns what is now the case. I shall call a philosopher who takes this sort of position a “serious tensor”.

Many serious tensors are also presentists. The presentist says: The only things that exist are those that exist at present. The ‘once was’ no longer exists and the ‘will be’ doesn’t exist yet. But the proponents of presentism are also confronted with a skeptical challenge to the significance of their thesis. Is the first occurrence of “exist” in the presentist’s assertion a tensed one? Then the presentist is simply making a fuss over a pointless tautology: “The only things that exist now (i.e. at present) are those that exist at present”. Who denies this? Or is “exist” here a tenseless verb, equivalent to “existed or exists now or will exist”? But then it’s an implausible metaphysical thesis: the claim that everything exists at all times, that nothing can have a less than eternal history. So either presentism is a boring truth, or an interesting falsehood.

Presentism is neither; it is a substantive thesis, and one that is not equivalent to the claim that everything exists eternally. Just as the serious tensor thinks there is, at bottom, only one kind of truth, and that is “truth-now”; so the presentist thinks there is only one largest class of all real things, and this class contains nothing that lies wholly in the past or

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<sup>10</sup> If the tenseless verb used in my lecture were the ordinary historical present tense, the proposition in question would lack the final conjunct; only the more arcane tenseless verb introduced by philosophers is used to express disjunctive propositions with disjuncts concerning the future.

future.<sup>11</sup> Presentism is, in fact, a thesis about the range of things to which one should be “ontologically committed”.

Philosophers are always looking out for the ontological commitments of their views — where someone is ontologically committed to a certain kind of thing just in case something she believes implies that something of that kind exists. There are many perfectly sensible truths which, on the surface, seem to require the existence of highly problematic entities — *entia non grata*, as it were. Consider, for example, the following:

- (1) Jeeves was nonplused by the dearth of champagne in the ice box.
- (2) Moriarty is the most well-known criminal in detective fiction.
- (3) Courage is a virtue displayed by many people.
- (4) There could have been a person who is not one of those who actually exist.

On the face of it, these are statements about such things as dearths, fictional characters, characteristics that may be possessed by many people, and merely possible persons. One might think that it could be inferred from them that: there is at least one dearth, there are some fictional criminals, there is something displayed by every courageous person, there are merely possible people. But each of these statements can seem hard to swallow for one reason or another:

A dearth of champagne isn't a kind of thing, a sort of invisible anti-champagne located where the champagne should be. To say that Jeeves was nonplused by the dearth of champagne is simply to say that there was no champagne in the ice box, and that he was taken aback by the situation.

Nor are there some criminals (among the least dangerous of criminals) who are fictional. Fictional characters are not an odd group of people who, for some reason, we

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<sup>11</sup> For a paradigmatic statement of this position, see Prior, “The Notion of the Present”.

cannot meet in the way we meet other people, but can only get to know through stories. Statements about, say, Moriarty must really be elliptical for claims about the stories Arthur Conan Doyle wrote that had the name “Moriarty” in them.<sup>12</sup>

It might seem less problematic to suppose that there are some things called “virtues”, of which courage is one. But if courage is something that can be displayed (or possessed or exemplified) by many different people at once, then some puzzling questions immediately arise. For how could anything be displayed in many different places at once, except by having a part displayed in each of those places and only there? Those philosophers particularly perplexed by this question (called nominalists) claim that (3) doesn’t imply that there is one thing possessed by all the courageous people. Some nominalists would say that each of the courageous people has his or her own particular instance of courageousness (in D. C. Williams’s terminology, a courageousness “trope”<sup>13</sup>), and that statements about courage are really about the big group or heap of all these instances.

For present purposes, the final case is the most illuminating. Do we really want to say that there are some merely possible people? That some people are tall, some are short, and some are nonexistent — the limiting case of diminutive stature, as it were? Philosophers who answer, No, are called modal actualists: they hold that there are no nonactual things. But then how to make sense of (4)? One strategy is to posit individual essences for nonexistent individuals, and then construe talk about nonactuals as really talk about these essences. Then (4) becomes the claim that there is an unexemplified individual essence that would be the essence of a person if it were exemplified.<sup>14</sup> Another is to say

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<sup>12</sup> On some problems for carrying out this project, see Peter van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction”, American Philosophical Quarterly 14 (1977), pp. 299-308; “Fiction and Metaphysics”, Philosophy and Literature 7 (1983), pp. 67-77; and “Pretense and Paraphrase”, in Peter J. McCormick (ed.), The Reasons of Art (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), pp. 414-422.

<sup>13</sup> See Williams, “On The Elements of Being”, Review of Metaphysics 7 (1953), pp. 3-18 and 171-92.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Alvin Plantinga, “Actualism and Possible Worlds”, Theoria 42 (1976), pp. 139-160; reprinted in The Possible and the Actual, ed. by Michael J. Loux (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

that what (4) really comes to is the claim that it's possible that there be something that is a person and is not identical with Jones, Robinson,...or any of the other actual people. This is an assertion about the possible truth of a certain proposition (that there be something that is a person and is not identical with...); the proposition itself isn't about any particular nonactual thing; and it's not equivalent to the claim that there is something that is a possible person and is not identical with....<sup>15</sup>

These are some typical attempts to avoid ontological commitment to undesirable entities. Statements which, on the surface, seem to imply that there are certain problematic entities, are given philosophical glosses or paraphrases which seem to capture the truth in question while avoiding the implication that the troublesome things exist. The presentist is engaged in precisely the same sort of enterprise. But the truths that bother her are of this sort:

(5) There was a person who is not one of the people who presently exist.

(6) There will be a person who is not one of the people who presently exist.

The presentist is a 'temporal actualist' — she is troubled by the fact that (5) and (6) seem to imply that there are some people who do not now exist, just as the modal actualist is bothered by the fact that (4) seems to imply that there are some people who do not actually exist. How can there be something that no longer exists, or that hasn't existed yet, she wonders? And so the presentist tries to show that the truth of (5) and (6) doesn't really conflict with her thesis that no nonpresent things exist.

One way of trying to show this would be to make use of individual essences again: (5) becomes the proposition that there is an individual essence not now exemplified that was once exemplified, and was then the essence of a person; and analogously for (6). Another

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<sup>15</sup> See Prior, Papers on Time and Tense, pp. 142-43; and Kit Fine's Postscript to Prior and Fine, Worlds, Times and Selves (London: Duckworth, 1977).

is to insist that the truth of (5) implies only that it was the case that there is someone not identical with Jones, Robinson,... or any other presently existing person; but not that there is someone who used to exist and is not identical with Jones, Robinson,... And likewise for (6).<sup>16</sup>

How is presentism related to taking tense seriously? The presentist must, I think, be a serious tensor. At the very least, tenseless statements that ostensibly require ontological commitment to past and future things must be treated as equivalent to tensed truths that do not. And the presentist could not very well regard all the fundamental truth-bearers as eternally true, corresponding to tenseless statements. According to her, one of the truths is that wholly future things, like my first grandchild, do not exist — and such truths had better be susceptible to change. On the other hand, the serious tensor need not be a presentist. Quentin Smith, for example, is a non-presentist serious tensor.<sup>17</sup> According to Smith, fundamental truths are all tensed; but past and future individuals and events, although no longer present, nonetheless exist. Ostensible ontological commitment to such things cannot, on Smith's view, be paraphrased away.

But the combination of rejecting presentism while taking tense seriously is an unstable one. For the primary motivation for treating the fundamental truth-bearers as mutable and true now is the desire to do justice to the feeling that what's in the past is over and done with, and that what's in the future only matters because it will eventually be present. This is the source of the importance Prior attaches to the exclamation "Thank goodness that's over!"<sup>18</sup> If yesterday's headache still exists, and remains as painful as

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<sup>16</sup> For a general discussion of the treatment of past and future individuals in tense logic, see Prior, Past, Present, and Future (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Ch. 8. See also Chisholm, "Referring to Things That No Longer Exist", Philosophical Perspectives, Vol. 4 (Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind), (1990), pp. 545-556.

<sup>17</sup> See Quentin Smith, Language and Time (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); see esp. Ch. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See Prior, "Some Free Thoughts About Time", reprinted in Zimmerman and van Inwagen, Metaphysics: The Big Questions, pp. 104-107; and his "Thank Goodness That's Over", reprinted in Prior, Papers in Logic and Ethics (London: Duckworth, 1976).

ever, then why should I be relieved now? Would the mere fact that it's no longer present justify this attitude? Most serious tenses, including Smith himself, will agree that it would not. And so, to render reasonable our special concern for the present, Smith strips past and future events of all their interesting intrinsic properties.<sup>19</sup> For instance, yesterday's headache, although it exists, is no longer painful. It has a past-oriented property, having been painful — a sort of backwards-looking relation to the property being painful. But it is not painful now, and that's why it no longer concerns us.<sup>20</sup>

Although this view makes sense of our relief when pain is past, I find it unappealing in the extreme. The past and future events and objects it posits are too ghostly to be real. A painful headache cannot exist without being painful; a tanker explosion cannot exist without being violent and loud; Plato cannot exist while having neither body nor soul. What's left of these past and future things and events is too thin: yesterday's headache is still an event, but it isn't painful or throbbing or much of anything else; Plato is still a substance, I suppose, but he doesn't talk or think or walk or sleep or have any spatial location. Neither Plato nor headache has any of the ordinary intrinsic properties it displayed while present. Smith's efforts to preserve the intuition behind "Thank goodness that's over!" while rejecting presentism are, I judge, unsuccessful. Past and future things become nearly-bare particulars, unreal echoes of their once or future selves. The serious tensor is much better off without them.

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<sup>19</sup> Smith is not the only serious tensor to make this move. Timothy Williamson certainly seems to be drawing a deep and important distinction between present things and past or future things — and he does not say, or even slyly hint, that it is, ultimately, a merely relative distinction (see Williamson, "Existence and Contingency", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. 73 (1999), pp. 181-203). So he seems committed to taking tense very seriously. And he winds up with a view much like Smith's, with past and future objects and events stripped of all interesting intrinsics — even their kinds: "A past table is not a table that no longer exists; it is no longer a table" (Williamson, p. 195).

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, Smith's approach to past and future events and things provides him with the means to define "being present" — something he claims cannot be done. Just take all the kinds of intrinsic properties which a contingent thing cannot have when it is wholly past or future; and then say a thing is present just in case it is either a necessary thing (and so must always be present), or it is a contingent thing that has properties belonging to this special class.

Why does Lewis reject presentism?

Now the serious tenses says that it is simply not true that I have the property being straight if I am bent now. I was straight, and will be again; but I am not now, and so there is no problem of my having incompatible intrinsic properties. Of course philosophers are free to invent a tenseless language in which “I am straight” is true just in case I either am now or was or will be straight. Who can stop philosophers from inventing peculiar ways of speaking? But the bare fact that one can talk this way doesn’t create any problem about my having incompatible properties.

What is Lewis’s response to this serious tenses solution of the problem of temporary intrinsics? He seems to suppose (reasonably, I think) that someone who takes this line must be a presentist. But, by Lewis’s lights, presentism is too incredible to be believed. Presentism “rejects endurance; because it rejects persistence altogether”; and it “goes against what we all believe” by implying that “there are no other times”. “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.” And yet, says Lewis, the presentist denies these obvious facts.<sup>21</sup>

This string of claims represents what might be called the “no persistence objection” to presentism. Lewis takes it that the following thesis of “Persistence through Change” is obviously true:

(PC) There are (at least) two different times; one at which I am bent, another at which I am straight.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds, p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> This thesis, and its name, are taken from personal correspondence with Lewis, and used with his permission.

Lewis thinks that (PC) is a simple expression of my belief that I persist through changes in my posture: there are times when I'm bent and times when I'm straight. The presentist is committed to the nonexistence of all times but one, the present. (PC) says there is more than one time; so presentism and (PC) are incompatible.

The serious tenses dissolution of the problem of temporary intrinsics given at the beginning of this section does not require the truth of presentism; a non-presentist serious tenses like Smith has little to fear from Lewis's argument. But Smith's combination of views has turned out to be unacceptable; and so the tensed response to the problem of temporary intrinsics stands or falls with presentism.

In order for Lewis's argument to have any teeth, (PC) must have two features: (i) it must be something we all, on reflection, believe; and (ii) it must require ontological commitment to the existence of more than one time. To be something commonly believed, (PC) must correspond to the humdrum assertion that I am bent at some times and straight at others. The question is whether this belief in my persistence through change — and the similar belief had by anyone who can remember changing posture — implies that there exist more times than the present.

If the statements used to express ordinary beliefs could be counted on to wear their ontological commitments on their sleeves, then an affirmative answer would be justified. But virtually everyone must allow that many statements expressing commonsensical beliefs do not wear their ontological commitments on their sleeves. It would be just like Bertie Wooster to respond to Jeeves's report about the dearth of champagne in the ice box by saying: "Well, at least there's something in the ice box." The source of the joke here would be that, generally speaking, from the fact that there's a such-and-such in the ice box, it follows that there is something in the ice box. But when the "such-and-such" is a dearth of something, it doesn't follow. Why? Because the assertion that there's a dearth of something is just a fancy (and old-fashioned) way of saying that there isn't any of that something — and that's compatible with there being nothing at all in the ice box.

Compare (PC) with a precisely parallel case involving ontological commitment to nonactuals. I suppose that most of us believe that we could have been put in situations that would have resulted in our lives going differently than they have in fact gone. There are certain possible experiences and events which, had they happened, would have prevented me from becoming a philosopher. But does this statement commit me to the existence of nonactual experiences and events? I should think not.

A few people have believed in the existence of alternative universes, just as real and concrete as this one, but with things going differently in them — worlds in which, for instance, the Axis powers win World War II, and the U.S. is partitioned between Germany and Japan.<sup>23</sup> David Lewis, in fact, believes in the literal existence of alternative universes, just as concrete as our actual world, in which every possible way things could go actually plays itself out.<sup>24</sup> But Lewis is one of the exceptions that prove the rule. The rest of us cannot bring ourselves to believe that there is such an event as the Axis powers' winning the war, an event with which, fortunately, we are not space-time neighbors. It's not that we ordinarily ignore these nonactual events because they are "far" from us, unreachable from our world. Rather, we think they simply are not.

How do we know that we aren't, implicitly, committed to the existence of such merely possible events? Well, we just ask ourselves whether we think they exist — whether we think that there are such things, whether we think we stand in real relationships with them. The answer comes back a resounding No. And then, if we are philosophers, we go about the business of finding plausible paraphrases for our beliefs ostensibly about nonactual possibilities — paraphrases that seem to us to capture more or less what we believed all along, but which do not even appear to imply that there are situations involving

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<sup>23</sup> Such is the world of the "alternate history" novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, by Philip K. Dick. Dick became convinced that such alternate streams of history are not mere fictions, but that they are real; he claimed to have been able to "recall" events from lives lived in other worlds.

<sup>24</sup> For Lewis's reasons for believing in concrete worlds besides this one, see his *On the Plurality of Worlds* (for the senses in which his worlds are concrete, see section 1.7 of the book). I should point out that, unlike Dick, Lewis's reasons are purely theoretical and a priori, not empirical.

me that don't occur, or whole worlds full of people and events that are not actual. If it were to become clear that there is no way to do this, then perhaps we would feel forced to reconsider our judgment that our beliefs about alternate possibilities do not implicitly commit us to the existence of such things. But that's not usually the way things go in philosophy: there's usually more than one way to skin a philosophical cat; usually several competing approaches to a given philosophical problem emerge as favorites, with much to be said for and against each of them. And so it is here: there are ever so many fairly plausible projects underway for paraphrasing away ostensible commitment to nonactual things and situations, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, and few confront such grave obstacles as to suggest that they are absolute dead-ends.

The presentist believes that the situation is precisely parallel when it comes to my belief that there are times at which I'm bent and times at which I'm straight. Does this commit me to the existence of times other than the present? Well, when I ask myself whether I think that my childhood exists, or the time of my death, the snows of yesteryear, or the light of other days, the answer comes back a resounding No. Is it just that I feel that past and future things and events can be regarded as nonexistent because they are "temporally far" from me? I think not — the past is no more, and the future is not yet, in the strictest sense. And so those who share this judgment begin the work of philosophical paraphrase, trying to find plausible construals of statements like (5), (6), and (PC) that capture what is meant but do not involve direct reference to other times, nonpresent individuals, and events. So, for instance, (PC) can be taken as a tenseless statement expressing a disjunction of tensed propositions: Either I was bent and would become or had previously been straight, or I was straight and would become or had previously been bent, or I will be bent and will have been or be about to become straight, or I will be straight and will have been or be about to become bent. Surely this tensed disjunction is true if (PC) is true; furthermore, it contains no mention of anything like a non-present time. So, given the presentist's desire to avoid ontological commitment to nonpresent times, this tensed

statement provides a perfectly sensible paraphrase of my conviction that I can persist through change of shape.

Furthermore, it is not as if Lewis himself allows (PC) to stand as it is, with no paraphrastic gloss. After all, he thinks that I am bent at one time and straight at another only in virtue of the fact that I have temporal parts located at these times, one of which is bent, the other straight. So “there is a time at which I am bent”, as it occurs in (PC), receives the paraphrase “there is a time at which I have a temporal part that is bent”. Lewis salvages our common conviction that we persist through change by introducing the uncommon notion of a temporal part. But if his temporal-parts reading of (PC) captures enough of our pretheoretical convictions to be acceptable, then surely he must allow the presentist similar leeway in her attempt to affirm persistence through change while avoiding talk of non-present times.<sup>25</sup>

The large-scale project of paraphrasing truths ostensibly about nonpresent times and things is as complex and difficult as the counterpart project concerning nonactuals. Ways must be found to capture all truths about past and future things without the appearance of ontological commitment to such things.<sup>26</sup> Presentists must, for example, find a way to understand statements ostensibly about relations that hold between presently existing things and things in the past and future. Causation is one instance of this problem: the causal relation holds between events; but no relation can hold between a present event and some future or past event, since such events do not exist. Must the presentist then conclude that no event in the present can be caused by anything earlier, or cause anything later?<sup>27</sup> Such difficulties must be overcome for presentism to remain plausible.

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<sup>25</sup> Trenton Merricks pointed this out to me, in conversation; and Sally Haslanger said it (long before that conversation) in “Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic”, *Analysis* 49 (1989), pp. 119-125; see especially pp. 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> For some presentist responses to the problem, cf. Prior, *Past, Present and Future*, Ch. 8 (“Time and Existence”); Prior, *Papers on Time and Tense*, Ch. 8 (“Time, Existence, and Identity”); Chisholm, “Referring to Things That No Longer Exist”; and John Bigelow, “Presentism and Properties”, in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 10 (Metaphysics), pp. 35-52.

And there are familiar chestnuts bedeviling anyone (presentist or not) who takes tense seriously, such as McTaggart's paradox<sup>28</sup> and the puzzle about the rate at which the present "moves". Is this rate one minute per minute? It couldn't very well move any faster! And yet this doesn't sound like a proper rate at all.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps most worrisome is that positing facts about what is present absolutely (and not merely about what is "present relative to me" or "present relative to my inertial frame") seems inconsistent with a well-confirmed scientific theory: special relativity.<sup>30</sup> But, as indicated in the notes to this and the previous paragraph, these are problems which presentists and others who take tense seriously have tried to address. Have the solutions been satisfactory? Perhaps not in every case. But rejecting presentism on the basis of such problems would require careful exploration of these debates — debates which have nothing to do with the problem of temporary intrinsics per se. Furthermore, there's reason to be hopeful that they will be resolved in the presentist's favor — or at least that they will not be resolved decisively in favor of her opponents. After all, as John Bigelow points out, presentism was accepted

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<sup>27</sup> John Bigelow and I have offered, independently, very similar solutions to this problem. Cf. the final section of my "Chisholm and the Essences of Events", in The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm (The Library of Living Philosophers), ed. by Lewis Hahn (La Salle, Ind.: Open Court, 1997); and Bigelow's "Presentism and Properties", p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. McT. E. McTaggart, The Nature of Existence: Vol. 2 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp. 9-22; and, for a response which, by my lights, completely dissolves this "paradox", cf. C. D. Broad, Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy, Vol. II, Part I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 309-317. (McTaggart's argument and Broad's response are reprinted in van Inwagen and Zimmerman, Metaphysics: The Big Questions, pp. 67-79.)

<sup>29</sup> J.J.C. Smart raises the puzzle about the rate of passage in Philosophy and Scientific Realism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 136. Presentists can hope that Ned Markosian has settled the problem for good and all in his "How Fast Does Time Pass?", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 53 (1993), pp. 829-44.

<sup>30</sup> Prior's description of the problem and his response may be found in "Some Free Thinking About Time". Cf. also Geach, "Some Problems About Time". More recent treatments may be found in Quentin Smith, Language and Time, Ch. 7. For one scientist who thinks that Prior may have been right about the prematurity of giving up on the notion of absolute simultaneity, cf. J. S. Bell, Speakable and Unspeaking in Quantum Mechanics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 77; and Bell's remarks in The Ghost in the Atom, ed. by P. C. W. Davies and J. R. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 48-51.

everywhere by nearly everyone until a mere hundred or so years ago.<sup>31</sup> A thesis with a track record like that shouldn't be expected to go down without a fight.

So far as I know, all presentists (and almost all who take tense seriously) reject the doctrine of temporal parts; indeed, Prior, Geach, and Chisholm have been among its most vocal opponents.<sup>32</sup> What I have tried to show is that the part of Lewis's argument aimed at these philosophers requires considerable buttressing before it will convince. In particular, we need a reason to think that some truths ostensibly about nonpresent things cannot be given plausible paraphrases that eschew commitment to such things. So far as I can see, there isn't any reason to think this is so. At any rate, Lewis hasn't (yet) given us one.

### **Postscript (2005): Can One “Take Tense Seriously” and Be a B-theorist?**

I had hoped to make some radical changes in “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism” before its appearance in this anthology. For one thing, it needed to be brought up-to-date (taking account of Lewis's “Tensing the Copula”<sup>33</sup>, among other things). Another issue to be addressed was the breeziness and informality of my discussions of Quineanism about ontological commitment and the question whether presentism is either trivially true or obviously false. The origins of the paper in an undergraduate-friendly anthology are particularly evident in those passages. For the present volume (and its more sophisticated audience), I had hoped to include a full-dress presentation of a Quinean approach to ontological commitment and a more rigorous argument for the availability of a “tense-

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<sup>31</sup> Bigelow, “Presentism and Properties”, p. 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> For characteristic rejections of temporal parts, cf. Prior, “Some Free Thoughts About Time”; Geach, “Some Problems About Time”; and Chisholm, *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976), Appendix A, pp. 138-44. For a serious tensor who accepts temporal parts, see Quentin Smith, “Personal Identity and Time”, *Philosophia* 22 (1993), pp. 155-67.

<sup>33</sup> *Mind* 111 (2002), pp. 1-13.

neutral” use of the quantifier by means of which proponents of the various positions could express genuinely conflicting views about what there is. Unfortunately, as I attempted to make these changes, the paper came unraveled. I stitched it back together, but the multifarious goals and styles had produced an unlovely hodge-podge. I decided to let the original stand, and come back to these questions afresh at a later date.

There is one deficiency in the original paper that I have the means to address now: I should like to try to improve upon the rather superficial discussion of what it is to “take tense seriously”. In this postscript, I distinguish two doctrines that are easily confused but importantly different: (i) a metaphysically thin thesis about the significance of tensed language (for which I now reserve the term “taking tense seriously”); and (ii) a thesis common to a family of views about the metaphysics of time (the ones usually called “A-theories” or — somewhat misleadingly, I think — “tensed theories of time”).

After exploring the distinction at some length, I return, briefly, to the issues discussed in “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”. The most interesting new question that arises is: Can the strategy for resisting Lewis’s argument that I advocate in the original paper be implemented by someone who merely “takes tense seriously” in my new, less metaphysical meaning of the expression? A number of attempts to respond to Lewis’s argument from temporary intrinsic without accepting any of the alternative “solutions” he enumerates seem to me to be of this type.<sup>34</sup> Although I do not attempt to evaluate their adequacy here, attention to the distinction I draw sheds light upon their strengths and weaknesses — and the reason Lewis will find them unsatisfactory.

#### A-Theorists and B-Theorists

I wanted to spare the student-readers of “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism” as much philosophical jargon as possible; so I did not introduce the expressions “A-theory” and

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<sup>34</sup> Some of what follows is taken from my “The A-theory of Time, the B-theory of Time, and ‘Taking Tense Seriously’”, *Dialectica* 59 (2005), pp. 0000-0000. I thank the editors of *Dialectica* and Basil Blackwell for permission to use this material.

“B-theory”. Although bland and arbitrary, the labels are widely used, and they’re better than the main alternatives (“tensed” and “tenseless” theories of time, which sounds like what used to be called a “category mistake”; and “dynamic” and “static” and theories of time, which rather stacks the deck against the latter). McTaggart gave the name “A-series” to “that series of positions which runs from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present through the near future to the far future, or conversely”; and the name “B-series” to “[t]he series of positions which runs from earlier to later, or conversely”.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the properties being past, being present, and being future, are generally called the “A-properties”. The relations of being earlier than, being later than, and being simultaneous with, are the “B-relations”. And one of the deepest divisions within the metaphysics of time is said to be that between “A-theories” and “B-theories”. The A-theorists take the basic temporal facts to involve the exemplification of A-properties; they believe that the present is objectively different from the past and the future. To say that the distinction between past, present, and future is objective is to deny that things are only past, present, or future relative to some further temporal thing, such as a context of utterance, a time, or a frame of reference.<sup>36</sup> B-theorists deny the objectivity of past, present, and future, taking the B-relations as the most fundamental temporal facts.

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<sup>35</sup> McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence: Vol. 2*, p. 10. McTaggart introduced the terms “A series” and “B series” in “The Unreality of Time”, *Mind* 17 (1908), pp. 457-74.

<sup>36</sup> There are some friends of tense logic and tensed truth who are not A-theorists in my sense: namely, those who claim that the present is relative to a frame of reference. See, for example, Howard Stein, “On Relativity Theory and Openness of the Future”, *Philosophy of Science* 58 (1991), pp. 147-167; and William Godfrey-Smith, “Special Relativity and the Present”, *Philosophical Studies* 36 (1979), pp. 233-244. I am unclear, however, what is left of the thesis that the present is in any sense metaphysically privileged on such a view. Unless existence itself were to be relativized to observers or frames of reference (a doubtful proposition), two of the most widely held A-theories could not be held in conjunction with a relativization of the present — namely, “presentism” and “the growing block theory”, described below.

Although the A-theory is not without defenders<sup>37</sup>, its stock fell steadily throughout the 20th century, largely (I suspect) because of the difficulty of reconciling the A-theorists' "privileged present" with the relativity of simultaneity. Indeed, since Russell and Moore started contrasting "analytic" philosophy with other forms, the B-theory has been favored by the most influential voices in what came to be called the "analytic tradition"<sup>38</sup>: e.g., Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, W. V. O. Quine, and David Lewis.<sup>39</sup> It is my impression that, nowadays, most philosophers with an opinion on the subject are B-theorists.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Present-day A-theorists include: J. R. Lucas, *The Future* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); E. J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1998), Ch. 4; John Bigelow, "Presentism and Properties"; Trenton Merricks, "Persistence, Parts, and Presentism", *Noûs* 33 (1999), pp. 421-438; Ned Markosian, "A Defense of Presentism", in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics: Vol. 1*, ed. by Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 47-82; Thomas Crisp, "On Presentism and Triviality", in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics: Vol. 1*, pp. 15-20; Crisp, "Presentism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. by Michael Loux and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 211-45; Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1997) (although I have reservations about his status as A-theorist — see my "The A-theory of Time, the B-theory of Time, and 'Taking Tense Seriously'", note 11); Quentin Smith, *Language and Time*; William Lane Craig, *The Tensed Theory of Time* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000); Storrs McCall, *A Model of the Universe* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1994); Peter Ludlow, *Semantics, Tense, and Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1999); George Schlesinger, *Aspects of Time* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980); Schlesinger, "Temporal Becoming", in *The New Theory of Time*, ed. by Nathan Oaklander and Quentin Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Zimmerman, "Persistence and Presentism", *Philosophical Papers* 25 (1996), pp. 115-126; and Zimmerman, "Chisholm and the Essences of Events". See also Richard Gale, *The Language of Time* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) (Gale has since repudiated the A-theory). Several well-known philosophers of the last century defended presentism: See, for example, C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923); an excerpt from *Scientific Thought* in which Broad defends an A-theory is reprinted in van Inwagen and Zimmerman, *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, pp. 82-93; A. N. Prior, "Changes in Events and Changes in Things", in his *Papers on Time and Tense*, pp. 1-14; Prior, "The Notion of the Present"; Roderick M. Chisholm, "Time and Temporal Demonstratives", in K. Weinke, ed., *Logik, Ethik und Sprache* (Vienna and Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1981), pp. 31-36; Chisholm, "Events Without Times: An Essay On Ontology" *Noûs* 24 (1990), pp. 413-428; Chisholm, "Referring to Things That No Longer Exist"; and Peter Geach, "Some Problems About Time". See also Ian Hinckfuss, *The Existence of Space and Time* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> "Analytic" is approximately extensionally equivalent with the class of philosophers who would look back upon Russell and Moore's defeat of idealism as a very good thing. Cf. A. P. Martinich's "Introduction" to *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, ed. by Martinich and David Sosa (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), p. 5; and my "Prologue: Metaphysics after the Twentieth Century", *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, pp. ix-xxii, especially pp. xii-xvi.

<sup>39</sup> See Gottlob Frege, "Thoughts", in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 351-372 (see esp. p. 370); Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Mathematics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1938), Ch. 54; W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960), §36; David Lewis, "Tensed Quantifiers", in Zimmerman, *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, pp.

The B-theory's preeminence cannot be written off by A-theorists as just another temporary change in what's philosophically fashionable. The A-theory faces serious problems, apparent conflict with relativity not least among them. Elsewhere, I discuss a few of the most well-known arguments against the A-theory.<sup>41</sup> In "Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism", I ignored the formidable challenges A-theorists face, focusing simply upon the presentist's ability to respond to Lewis's problem of temporary intrinsics, and the merits of presentism relative to other versions of the A-theory.

### What It Means to "Take Tense Seriously"

The metaphysical debate between A-theorists and B-theorists is often described as a dispute between "tensed" and "tenseless" theories of time, or between those who "take tense seriously" (the A-theorists) and those who do not (the B-theorists). Since tense is a linguistic category, and time is not a part of speech (time is not a verb, mood, sentence,...), the supposed equivalence of these labels should raise suspicions. I propose that the most natural thing to mean by the expression "taking tense seriously" is a doctrine about the

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3-14; Lewis, "Attitudes De Dicto and De Se", *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), pp. 513-43, and reprinted in Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Vol. I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1976), pp. 145-52. There are many other important 20th century proponents of the B-theory who could be mentioned here: see, e.g., D. C. Williams, "The Myth of Passage", *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (1951), pp. 457-72; Adolf Grünbaum, *Modern Science and Zeno's Paradoxes* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), Ch. 1; J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism*, Ch. 7; Smart, "Time and Becoming", reprinted in his *Essays Metaphysical and Moral* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 78-90.

<sup>40</sup> For the tip of the current B-theorist iceberg, see: D. H. Mellor, *Real Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mellor, *Real Time II* (London: Routledge, 1998); Paul Horwich, *Asymmetries in Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1987); Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 2001); Robin Le Poidevin, *Change, Cause, and Contradiction* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Nathan Oaklander, "A Defense of the New Tenseless Theory of Time", *Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (1991), pp. 26-38; Steven Savitt, "There's No Time Like the Present (in Minkowski Spacetime)", *Philosophy of Science* 67 (2000; Proceedings), S663-S574; Simon Saunders, "How Relativity Contradicts Presentism", in *Time, Reality and Experience* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ed. by Craig Callender, pp. 277-292.

<sup>41</sup> See Zimmerman, "Past, Present, and Future", in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, ed. by Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman (Malden, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, forthcoming).

ineliminability of what might be called “temporally perspectival propositions”<sup>42</sup> in explications of our propositional attitudes and their linguistic expression. This doctrine about the importance of tense for a theory of the proposition is forced upon A-theorists, but has also been defended by B-theorists, and for reasons similar to those given by A-theorists. On this understanding of what it is to take tense seriously (or to be a “serious-tenser”, as I shall sometimes say), it is not, then, equivalent to adoption of an A-theory. Since “A-theory” and “B-theory” are generally defined more or less as above — as metaphysical theses about the objectivity of the differences between past, present, and future — and “taking tense seriously” sounds more like a doctrine about sentences or the propositions they express; it makes sense, I submit, to reserve the latter expression as a label for philosophers who advocate temporally perspectival propositions.<sup>43</sup>

A description of what I mean by “temporally perspectival propositions”, and the reasons given for and against them, is necessary before raising the question whether all serious-tensers can dissolve the problem of temporary intrinsics after the manner of the A-theorists (i.e., using the presentist’s basic maneuver: to deny that changing things are, for example, both bent and straight). Temporally perspectival propositions are things that play the role traditionally assigned to propositions — the objects of propositional attitudes like belief, doubt, etc.; the primary bearers of truth and falsehood — but that are not immutable with respect to truth-value; they are things that can be true at some times, false at others. Propositions that are not temporally perspectival — that could not possibly change truth-value — will be called “eternal propositions”. So I construe the question whether to take

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<sup>42</sup> I borrow the expression “perspectival proposition” from Ernest Sosa, though I shall use it in a more general way than he does; I apply it not only to the propositions of his own view, but also to the propositions posited by Lewis and Chisholm, to be discussed in detail below. For Sosa’s particular version of perspectivalism about propositions, see Sosa, “Propositions and Indexical Attitudes”, On Believing: Epistemological and Semiotic Approaches, ed. by Herman Parret (Berlin: Walter DeGruyter, 1983), pp. 316-332; and Sosa, “Consciousness of the Self and of the Present”, Agent, Language, and the Structure of the World, ed. by J. Tomberlin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. 131-45.

tense seriously as the question whether something other than eternal propositions is required to play the role of the things that are: (i) the objects of our propositional attitudes, and (ii) the truths and falsehoods that can be expressed using tensed sentences. A venerable tradition (upheld by Bolzano, Frege, and Russell<sup>44</sup>) would say “No”. These hardline de-tensers allege that, whenever I say something true, some true eternal proposition is the content of what I said; it is the semantic value of the sentence I uttered. According to hardline de-tensers, the very idea of a “proposition” that varies in truth-value is a mistake.

### Tensed and “tenseless” verbs

It is tempting to call propositions that can change truth-value, “tensed propositions”; and those that cannot, “tenseless propositions”. But it is potentially misleading as well. After all, if propositions are non-linguistic things — independent of any particular language in which they might be expressed — they cannot literally exhibit tense. And those who think we always believe eternal propositions do not deny that we express our beliefs by uttering tensed sentences. Still, there is an understandable temptation to call propositions “tensed” if they can be true at some times and not others. Sentences with verbs in various forms of present, past, and future tense may be true when uttered at one time, but false when uttered at another; and the difference in truth-value of the sentence may be due entirely to the difference in time of utterance, not to any other differences in the contexts of utterance. So non-eternal propositions are obviously rather like such tensed sentences. Now suppose there are sentences in which the tense of the verbs cannot be responsible for differences in truth-value when uttered at different times. If other contextually determined aspects of such

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<sup>43</sup> Failure to distinguish between the A-theory and what I now call “taking tense seriously” has created quite a bit of confusion over the years — and I speak from personal experience, having evidently been a bit confused when I wrote “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”.

<sup>44</sup> See Bolzano, Theory of Science, ed. and trans. by Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), p. 32; Frege, “Thoughts”, p. 358; Russell, “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions”, reprinted in: Russell, Essays in Analysis, ed. by Douglas Lackey (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 21-76, esp. p. 32; Russell, The Philosophy of Logical Atomism and Other Essays: 1914-19, ed. by John G. Slater, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1986), pp. 42-3 and p. 217.

a sentence's meaning be held constant between occasions of use or contexts of evaluation, the sentence will either express a truth always or never. If there are such things as truly "tenseless" verbs, their use will create sentences of this sort.

One need not argue about whether there is, in English, a form of the verb worthy of the label "tenseless" — something that linguists would recognize as belonging in the same category as "present", "future", "past", etc. What is important is that there are, even in ordinary language, mechanisms for reliably generating tenseless sentences — sentences that will not change from true to false when uttered at different times, leastwise not because of the tense of the main verb. The qualifications "at such-and-such time", "at some time or other", and "at all times" are often used to render a present tense verb effectively tenseless. If I were now to utter the words "I am in New Jersey", a listener would normally take me to be describing my present location. But suppose I am consulting my calendar in order to answer questions about my whereabouts in the past, and my availability in the future; and I say: "I am in New Jersey on June 8, 2005". No one hearing that statement (and knowing the circumstances) would take me to be saying that I am in New Jersey right then; savvy listeners would not think that what I said implies the proposition I could express by means of a significantly present-tensed "I am in New Jersey" (as in: "Why don't you come to New Jersey?"; answer: "I am in New Jersey"). And there is obviously no conflict between my being in New Jersey on January 12, 2004, and the proposition expressed by my use of "I am not in New Jersey on January 12, 2005".

If adding such qualifications is enough to create tenseless sentences, it is a simple matter to introduce more general methods for creating tenseless sentences. One can define a form of tenseless predication that is equivalent to implicitly adding the qualification "at some time or other" to a sentence in the ordinary present tense. Another form of tenseless predication would result from implicitly adding "at every time at which it/he/she exists".

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Perhaps it is a mistake to think that, in English, there are semantically distinguishable categories corresponding to these two forms of tenseless predication. I leave it to linguists to settle the criteria for calling a distinction “part of the semantics of a language”; and I leave it to them to answer the question whether, for English, tenseless forms of predication belong in this category. What matters for present purposes is that tenseless predication can be introduced by means of something that is familiar enough: adverbial phrases like “at such and such time”, combined with the syntactically present tense.

#### De-tensing strategies and their problems

Hardline de-tensers claim that, when I say that the eclipse is starting, for instance, I express some eternal proposition. But what proposition? It should be possible, by a de-tenser’s principles, to assert it using only tenseless verbs in a sentence guaranteed to express an eternal proposition. De-tensers suggest that the present tense of the copula (or other verb) draws the time of utterance into the meaning of the sentence in one way or another. One popular proposal for the mechanism at work is the “date analysis”, according to which the present tense of the verb effects a concealed but very direct reference to a particular time. The eternal proposition expressed by the sentence about the eclipse would be at least as perspicuously expressed using a tenseless sentence that mentioned the time of utterance by a proper name: “The eclipse starts at  $t$ ”, where “ $t$ ” is a name for the time at which I spoke.<sup>45</sup>

Another approach is the “token-reflexive” analysis of tense. A “token-reflexive” statement type is one such that all its instances (or “tokens”) are self-referential, including explicit reference to the particular instance of the statement-type. A sign that says “Read

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<sup>45</sup> David Kaplan’s logic of demonstratives implies the date analysis; see the influential paper, “On the Logic of Demonstratives”, in *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. by Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 401-412.

this sentence out loud” could be said to be giving a token-reflexive command. “Can you hear this statement?” is a token-reflexive question, one that includes a phrase that designates the utterance — the instance, or “token”, of a spoken sentence — of which it is a part. The token-reflexive theory of tensed verbs claims that tense functions in a similar way. A present tense verb in a statement such as “The eclipse is starting”, is a device for saying something about the utterance itself; the statement means something like “The eclipse *starts* simultaneously with this very utterance”.<sup>46</sup>

The date and token-reflexive theories are the most familiar de-tensing strategies, but there are further possibilities for de-tensers to explore. The token-reflexive analysis implies that the present tense introduces a hidden description of a time. One might agree with the principle, but posit descriptive content other than “the time of this utterance”. Perhaps the context of a conversation might be thought to include an unspoken description of a designated time — sometimes, but not always, identical with the time of the conversation itself — that is especially relevant to evaluating present-tense sentences uttered in that context. Here is an example in which a description other than “the time of this utterance” would naturally be associated with the present tense: While watching a person in a home video, one asks, “What is he doing now?” It is plausible to suppose that “the time at which the video was being shot” is the contextually determined meaning of “now”, and that the description is part of the meaning of the present tense copula in this context. Generalizing, a de-tenser might think that context determines a relevant description *whenever* the present tense is used; and that making the description explicit allows one to express the same proposition as did the original sentence, while using tenseless verbs.

Date, token-reflexive, and other de-tensing analyses can be extended in natural ways to other tenses. Past tense verbs, for example, make claims about how things were earlier

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<sup>46</sup> See J. J. C. Smart, Philosophy and Scientific Realism, pp. 131-142.

than the time  $t$  introduced by the tensed verb (the date analysis), or earlier than the utterance in which the verbs are being used (the token-reflexive analysis).<sup>47</sup>

Many philosophers now doubt the adequacy of any translation scheme that provides every tensed sentence with an eternal proposition as its sole meaning. Although the matter is hotly debated<sup>48</sup>, many admit at least this much: that more than eternal propositions are required in telling the full story of what we mean by tensed sentences, and in describing the contents of beliefs typically expressed using tensed verbs. Some philosophers of language will take the date or token-reflexive analysis to provide a proposition that corresponds perfectly adequately to “what is said” by means of a tensed sentence (what John Perry calls the “official content” of the sentence; and David Kaplan just its “content”<sup>49</sup>); but then these philosophers will go on to posit some other semantic value — something “content-like”, but not an eternal proposition — and they will use this other item to explain the intuitive differences in belief states reported by tensed and tenseless sentences, and also to explain the intuitive similarities in belief-states that have different truth-values merely because they occur at different times. This second kind of content is something that can be the same in distinct utterances of “The eclipse is starting”, utterances that occur at different times and can vary freely in truth-value. Examples of the second kind of content-like

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<sup>47</sup> The analysis of the past tense is not completely trivial. Suppose I have often fought with my brother, but that today his injury was entirely accidental. When I say, “I wasn’t trying to hurt him”, I mean neither: “There was a time in the past at which I was not trying to hurt him”; nor: “For every time in the past, I was not trying to hurt him at that time”. These are “indefinite” claims about the past, and the ordinary past tense of English verbs expresses something more “definite”. For a survey of approaches to the past tense, see Steven T. Kuhn, “Tense and Time”, in Handbook of Philosophical Logic, Vol. IV: Topics in the Philosophy of Language, ed. by D. Gabbay and F. Guentner (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1989), pp. 513-552.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Richard will have no truck with anything other than eternal propositions for the meanings of sentences; he gives important arguments against appeal to *any* semantic features of tensed sentences in explaining how they differ in cognitive role from their de-tensed correlates. See Richard, “Objects of Relief”, in Time, Tense, and Reference, ed. by Aleksandar Jokic and Quentin Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. 2003), pp. 157-189.

<sup>49</sup> Perry, “Indexicals and Demonstratives”, in A Companion to the Philosophy of Language, ed. by Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 586-612; and Kaplan, “Demonstratives”, in Themes From Kaplan, ed. by Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 481-563.

semantic-values include Kaplan's "meanings", which include what he calls "character"; Perry's "belief-states" or (more recently) "content-sub-m"<sup>50</sup>; and Robert Stalnaker's "diagonal propositions".<sup>51</sup> These philosophers may be called "soft de-tensers". On their views, although significantly tensed statements have eternal propositions for "official contents", they also have another semantic aspect that is not captured by an eternal proposition. The extra element associated with tense is likened to a Fregean "mode of presentation" — a special way in which an eternal proposition can be expressed or thought.

### Temporarily True Propositions

Some philosophers have drawn a more radical moral from the difficulties faced by de-tensing strategies like the date- and token-analyses — a moral that takes the contribution of tense more seriously yet. These philosophers say that the correct semantics of tensed talk and of the thoughts reported in tensed language should not divide the semantic value of "that the eclipse is starting" (in sentences like "Zimmerman believes that the eclipse is starting") into two elements: an eternal proposition and some sort of "mode of presentation". There is only one thing expressed by my utterance of "The eclipse is starting", and only one object of the propositional attitude I report with these words; and the only reasonable candidate is not an eternal proposition, but rather something that is neither eternally true nor eternally false. I propose to reserve the expression "taking tense seriously" for all those who accept this conclusion. These serious tensers claim that the non-eternal propositions are better suited to the role of the objects of propositional attitudes described in tensed language. They will be happy to admit that sometimes we succeed in expressing, believing, etc., propositions that are eternally true or eternally false; but they

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<sup>50</sup> Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical", *Noûs* 13 (1979), pp. 3-21; and Perry, "Indexicals and Demonstratives".

<sup>51</sup> Stalnaker, "Indexical Belief", *Synthese* 49 (1981), pp. 129-51.

insist that, more often than not, the propositions we express, believe, etc., are non-eternal ones.

The debate I am describing between de-tensers and those who take tense seriously may be a deep and important one in the philosophy of language. On the other hand, perhaps it is not so deep; perhaps there are simply different things one can mean by “what is said”, “the proposition expressed by such-and-such sentence”, and other terms for meanings. Eternal propositions may be part of the best theory of one kind of “meaning”, while temporarily true propositions are part of the best theory of another kind. And philosophers emphasizing one sort of meaning for sentences may simply be more interested in it than in the other sort of meaning. But, deep or shallow, it seems clear that this debate is not equivalent to the one exercising A-theorists and B-theorists.

Some serious-tensers (like Lewis and Mellor) insist that the source of the ineliminability of tensed propositions is simply the fact that much of what we believe is “perspectival”. And this reason for taking tense seriously does not imply that one time is special in and of itself — it does not imply the A-theory. If other temporal perspectives differ from mine only in that I am not at them, then it is possible, in principle, to give a complete description of reality “as it is in itself”, sub specie aeternitatis. Eternal propositions alone are perfectly adequate for describing how things really are.

To make this point, serious tensor B-theorists, like Lewis and Mellor, provide tenseless truth-conditions, relative to a choice of temporal perspective, for temporally perspectival propositions. These truth-conditions are not equivalent in meaning to the propositions with which they are paired; they are, after all, eternal propositions, and the target propositions are not. What such truth-conditions provide is a perspective-free account of what it is for a temporally perspectival proposition to be true or false at a time. The nature of human propositional attitudes — of thinking in time, generally — requires more than just eternal propositions; nevertheless, there is a set of tenseless propositions that describes the world from a “God’s-eye point of view”. These propositions are true

without qualification, true simpliciter. The perspectival ones are merely true-relative-to-such-and-such-time.

The possibility of combining seriousness about tense with the B-theory raises some interesting questions about the precise location of the disagreement between B-theorists and A-theorists. There are relatively unproblematic disagreements between B-theorists, presentists, and growing-block theorists over matters of ontological commitment. Many of us think that these two types of A-theorist can rightly insist upon a tense-neutral use of the quantifier, and refuse to quantify over many things that the B-theorist regards as unproblematic existents. A harder question: Wherein does the disagreement lie between B-theorists who are serious-tensers and A-theorists who accept the same ontology as the B-theorist — i.e., moving spotlight A-theorists, who do not draw the distinction between past, present, and future in terms of existence? I regard this as a very deep question. In another paper, I argue that “eternalist A-theorists” (A-theorists who accept the existence of past, present, and future objects and events — moving-spotlighters) are almost certainly going to have to appeal to the non-relative truth of temporally perspectival propositions — “truth, simpliciter” — in order to articulate a doctrine that differs discernibly from merely taking tense seriously. (This raises a prima facie difficulty for an A-theorist who would be a deflationist about the truth predicate.) It should come as no surprise that the crux of the A-theory—B-theory dispute involves questions about what truths are most fundamental — not merely true relative to this or that, but true, simpliciter. After all, the A-theory just is the thesis that one time is objectively special because it alone is neither past nor future. Objectivity and non-relative truth are cognate, if not identical, notions.

### The Metaphysics of Propositions and Nonrelative Temporary Truth

“Proposition”, as used by philosophers, is a name for the things that play a certain role in philosophical theories of belief, doubt, hope, and other attitudes toward what can be true or false. There is a clear theoretical need for a thing that can be believed by two people even

though they may not express it in the same words, or in any words at all. And the thing that performs this job needs to fit into a general theory of thought, in order to satisfy truisms about the relations between belief, doubt, desire, hope, etc. That the player of this role must be somewhat abstract seems evident, given the possibility of expressing the same proposition in different words. Attempts have been made to identify propositions with entities of a nominalistically respectable nature: sets of possible worlds, or sets of utterances and other types of “sentence-token” (including, perhaps, merely possible ones). Some simply posit a “Third Realm” of language-independent abstract objects, largely structureless (it makes no sense, on such views, to talk as though individuals and properties are parts of a proposition). Russellian propositions, on the other hand, are structured entities, built up out of properties, the individuals to which they may be ascribed, and logical operations. Many philosophers suppose the structure of the proposition associated with a given thought comes from the words (perhaps “words” in a “language of thought”) used to express or conceive of it. These more linguistically structured propositions are something like the combination of a less structured proposition and a way of cutting it up into parts; for two people to entertain the same structured proposition, the parts of the sentences they use (perhaps identifiable with physical states in the brain’s “belief box”, on the language-of-thought hypothesis) must be somehow isomorphic.

Those who take tense seriously face a similar range of options for the ontological status of their temporally perspectival propositions. They may choose to identify propositions with sets of possibilia — not sets of complete possible worlds, but sets of “worlds-at-a-time” (a variety of what are sometimes called “centered worlds”<sup>52</sup>). They may posit structureless abstracta to do the job. Or their propositions might be more

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<sup>52</sup> See David Lewis, “Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*”, *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), pp. 513-43; David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 56-65; Chalmers, “On Sense and Intension”, in *Philosophical Perspectives 16: Language and Mind*, ed. by J. Tomberlin (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 135-82. Lewis points out that the idea of taking sets of centered possible worlds as propositional objects is suggested, but not adopted, by Quine; see “Propositional Objects”, in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press 1969).

Russellian, built up out of individuals and properties. They might have more structure, imposed by language. Whatever their constitution, the serious-tensors' propositions will look a lot like properties of times, from the B-theorist's perspective. And serious-tensor B-theorists typically embrace such identification.<sup>53</sup> The serious-tensor, B-theorist or A-theorist, need not accept it. Temporally perspectival propositions, structured or unstructured, may be posited as extra ontological baggage, not reducible to properties of times.

But debates about these issues are beside the point, if the question is simply whether a serious tensor is committed to the A-theory. What distinguishes the A-theorist from the serious-tensing B-theorist is not what ontological story the A-theorist tells about the entities playing the role of propositions in his theory of thought. It is what she says about their truth. Can a temporally perspectival proposition, true at some times but not true at other times, nevertheless be true, simpliciter? If so, she is an A-theorist; if all it has is relative truth, truth-at-a-time, then she is not.

Some will be tempted to deflate the disagreement between these two characters — to claim that they are simply talking past one another. When the would-be A-theorist says the eclipse is present, she uses an ordinary, tensed copula, and she is right. She can add “simpliciter” if she wants, but that changes nothing. When the serious tensor B-theorist says that the eclipse is only present relative to a particular time, and is not present simpliciter, he is using a tenseless copula, expressing an eternal proposition. A-theorists have the resources to express eternal propositions, too, and they should accept this one.

Where's the beef?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lewis does so explicitly (“Attitudes De Dicto and De Se”, p. 144); Mellor's identification of his “A-propositions” (my temporally perspectival propositions) with functions from times to truth-conditions has roughly the same effect. Cf. Mellor, Real Time II, pp. 58-62.

<sup>54</sup> I am grateful to Larry Lombard for pressing this objection repeatedly, and with gusto.

This is a serious question, and well worth pondering. For now, I simply assert (what I believe) that we can understand the notion of something's being merely relatively true, as opposed to just plain true, without qualification. There is "true now" but also "true here", "true of him, but not of her", "true relative to the standards of my community", and so on. Truth, simpliciter, is truth relative to absolutely nothing; it is the notion of absolute truth. If one can understand this notion, then one ought to be able to make sense of the A-theorist's assertion that some temporally perspectival propositions that are not true relative to every time are nevertheless true, simpliciter, while others are just plain false. The A-theorist sees no compelling reason to identify truth, simpliciter, with eternal truth. The fact (as she sees it) that one time is objectively special does not commit her to the conclusion that only one time has ever been or will ever be objectively special.

Suppose that it is simply true that a certain, brief event is presently happening and a certain time is neither past nor future; suppose, that is, that these propositions are not merely true relative to one time but not others, or one temporal perspective and not others. Surely, the truth of the A-theory must follow: the line between past, present, and future is an objective one. It is an objective fact that the event is presently happening, and that a moment simultaneous with it is itself present.

Is there another way for an eternalist A-theorist to make it clear that she is not a mere serious-tensing B-theorist? Can she avoid relying so heavily upon the notion of truth, simpliciter? Elsewhere, I explore the idea that the basic difference between A-theorist and B-theorist is that the former believes in the temporary-but-nonrelative exemplification of monadic properties by enduring things. Although there is much to say for this approach (and it does meet Lewis's demand that something "have simpliciter" monadic intrinsic

properties<sup>55</sup>), I argue that, in all likelihood, its proponent will be forced to put the emphasis back on nonrelative truth, as I have done here.<sup>56</sup>

### Consequences for the Arguments of “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”

In general, when I talk of those who “take tense seriously” in the paper “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”, one should take me to be referring to A-theorists of all stripes, but not to B-theorists who merely take tense seriously. So, for instance, when I say: “... the combination of rejecting presentism while taking tense seriously is an unstable one”, I mean what I would now express by saying that it is very difficult to be an A-theorist but not a presentist. B-theorists, whether or not they are serious about tense, simply reject the intuition that past and future events and individuals are objectively “less real” than ones that are present. Therefore, unlike the moving-spotlight or growing-block A-theorists, they cannot be pressured into stripping past and future things of their locally manifest qualities — they won’t feel obliged to regard past headaches as only formerly painful, formerly in the head, etc.; to construe past parrots as “ex-parrots”; and so on. They are, then, immune to the pressures I brought to bear upon nonpresentist A-theorists.

I also say: “The serious tensor dissolution of the problem of temporary intrinsic ... does not require the truth of presentism.” In other words, anyone who takes tense seriously can respond to Lewis’s argument from temporary intrinsic in the way he associates with presentism. Since I did not clearly distinguish the A-theory of time (in all its forms) from the doctrine I now call “taking tense seriously”, a question remains unanswered: Can one respond to Lewis’s argument in the way he associates with presentism, so long as one takes tense seriously — in the new, metaphysically thin sense of the expression stipulated in this postscript? If so, a B-theorist could affirm the possibility

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<sup>55</sup> See Lewis, “Tensing the Copula”, pp. 4-5, 11-12.

<sup>56</sup> See Zimmerman, “The A-theory of Time, the B-theory of Time, and ‘Taking Tense Seriously’”.

of enduring objects that change with respect to genuinely monadic intrinsic properties, just like the presentist and other A-theorists. And he could do so without buying into the A-theorist's objectively privileged present.

If the serious tensor B-theorist is to stop Lewis's argument at the same point as the presentist, he must derail it at the first step, denying that it is true that I have both being bent and being straight. Perhaps I have bent, but not straight; perhaps the reverse; I do not have both. But which should he choose? We know what the A-theorist would say: It depends upon whether bent or straight is my present shape — the shape I have at the time that is objectively present. It depends upon whether or not the temporally perspectival proposition, that Dean Zimmerman is straight, is true, simpliciter. The B-theorist cannot choose being bent or being straight on this basis, of course. But he can still say, "Zimmerman is bent, not straight" or "Zimmerman is straight, not bent"; and which he should choose depends upon when he is engaged in defending his view from Lewis's argument. If it is a time relative to which that Dean Zimmerman is straight is true, then he should say: "Zimmerman is straight, not bent." If it is not, he should say the reverse.

Are this B-theorist's properties, being straight and being bent, truly monadic, though? Well, what is monadicity, anyway? Here is a perfectly respectable cognitive notion of monadicity, one that will make sense within theories of propositions according to which they are structured entities: To call a property like being bent "monadic" is to say that it, together with a single thing, such as myself, are sufficient all by themselves to yield a proposition — i.e., something that plays the "proposition role", being a fitting object of belief, doubt, etc. There is no need for further "completion" of a complex involving Dean Zimmerman and bentness in order to arrive at a proposition; in particular, nothing like a *time* need be "added" to the property and the thing in order to make the proposition that the thing has the property "complete", ready to attract propositional attitudes.

I feel sure that Lewis is not interested in merely cognitively monadic intrinsics, however. He hankers for, well, real monadicity. Here is a good candidate for a notion of

monadic property that goes beyond the merely cognitive: A property is really monadic if and only if the property plus a single individual can together constitute something that is true, simpliciter, not merely true relative to a time (or anything else, for that matter). Call this sort of property “metaphysically monadic”.

Sally Haslanger and others have offered responses to Lewis’s argument that are meant to be consistent with: (i) the monadic nature of changing intrinsics, (ii) the endurance of the subjects of such change, and (iii) the B-theory of time.<sup>57</sup> I suspect that a close examination of their proposals would reveal that they have substituted a merely cognitive notion of monadicity for real monadicity. But substantiating that suspicion is a job for another occasion.

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<sup>57</sup> See Haslanger, “Endurance and Temporary Intrinsics”; and Haslanger, “Persistence Through Time”, in Loux and Zimmerman, Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics, pp. 313-354, esp. pp. 342-6. See also Graeme Forbes, “Is There a Problem about Persistence?”, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. 61 (1987), pp. 137-55; E. J. Lowe, “The Problem of Intrinsic Change: Rejoinder to Lewis”, Analysis 48 (1988), pp. 72-7, esp. p. 75; and George Myro, “Identity and Time”, in The Philosophical Grounds of Rationality, ed. by Richard Grandy and Richard Warner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 383-409.

**NOTES**