

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Presentism, tenselessness and dates

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Abstract

Tooley (2012) has attacked presentism by urging that dated tenseless sentences can be both meaningful and true, but they imply consequences that presentism cannot accept. Tooley is right in acknowledging tenseless language, because without it the competing theses in temporal ontology, including presentism, cannot be appropriately formulated and the ontological dispute risks to be unsubstantial. Thus, presentism should indeed acknowledge dated tenseless sentences. However, when properly interpreted, such sentences do not have the anti-presentist consequences claimed by Tooley. The problem is that Tooley puts forward, rather than a proper interpretation, truth conditions that an eternalist could associate to them, in the light of eternalistically acceptable truthmakers. A presentist, however, would provide different truthmakers. We need a formal language that allows us to rigorously distinguish between proper interpretations of sentences and their truth conditions driven by different ontological views. One such language is sketched here in broad outline.

KEYWORDS

presentism, tense, Tenselessness, time, Truthmaking

1 | INTRODUCTION

It is important to acknowledge that we can speak both in a tenseless and tensed way, in order to formulate appropriately competing theories in temporal ontology, such as presentism, growing-

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blockism, A-eternalism, B-eternalism and others.¹ Not all agree that we should distinguish these two ways of speaking, and those who do not typically end up taking the deflationist line, according to which, there is no substantial dispute regarding these ontological views; they would differ only verbally (see Graziani & Orilia, 2019).

Michael Tooley is an important philosopher of time and not a deflationist. He appears to acknowledge the tensed/tenseless distinction and has defended a temporal ontology usually understood as growing-blockist (Tooley, 1997). However, more recently, Tooley (2012) has also claimed that tenseless talk is shipwreck for presentism. He has urged that (i) dated tenseless sentences such as

(S1) Socrates is (tenselessly) a philosopher in 400 BCE.

are meaningful and sometime also true (as in this case),² but, once this is acknowledged, (ii) presentists are in trouble. The reason is that the truth of (S1) entails ‘by logic alone’³ consequences that the presentist cannot swallow, such as that Socrates exists. Typically, notes Tooley, critics of presentism have concentrated on the presentist problem of providing truthmakers for true past-tensed sentences such as

(S2) Socrates was a philosopher in 400 BCE.

Tooley thinks that, by concentrating on (S1) or the like, a more direct route to argue against presentism is available, a route different from pressing the truthmaker issue for past-tensed sentences.

If Tooley were right, we would have indeed a serious problem for presentism. On the one hand, presentists should acknowledge tenseless language, for otherwise the very idea of a substantial dispute in temporal ontology would be in jeopardy, and even presentism itself could not be meaningfully stated; on the other hand, once tenseless language is acknowledged, presentists should then admit that Socrates exists and many other similar claims, which of course would be extremely embarrassing for a presentist.

I think however that Tooley is wrong; presentists can accept a tenseless language and take a sentence such as (S1) to be both meaningful and true, while at the same time denying that there are unwelcome anti-presentist outcomes, such as the claim that Socrates exists. To clarify why this is so is a worth enterprise, since, in order to do it properly, it is necessary to shed further light on how tenseless and tensed talk should formally be distinguished. And this is an important task, in view of securing a solid foundation for the substantiality of the debate in temporal ontology. I shall thus first provide the relevant formal details regarding the tensed/tenseless distinction. By taking advantage of such a formal apparatus, I shall then argue that the presentist can take (S1) and their like to be both meaningful and true, without any worry, or at least without worries that past-tensed sentences such as (S2) do not already deliver; at worst, the problem that the presentist must face is the very same truthmaking problem for both sorts of sentence.

In brief, the problem with Tooley, as I see it, is that he confuses the proper interpretation of the relevant tenseless sentences, their logical forms, with the truth conditions that an eternalist could associate to them, in the light of eternalistically acceptable truthmakers. At the end of this paper, I shall illustrate how the formal apparatus outlined here can be used to convey different truth conditions, motivated by competing temporal ontologies, for the same sentences, where the latter are properly interpreted with their own logical forms, independent from the temporal ontologies in question (or, to put it differently, neutral with respect to them).

¹In a nutshell, this is what such views claim. Presentism: Only present things exist. A-eternalism: All things, whether past, present or future, exist. B-eternalism: All things, whether earlier than, simultaneous with, or later than this utterance, exist. Growing-blockism: All things, whether past or present, exist.

²See Tooley, 2012, p. 35, for this example.

³As Tooley (2012, p. 32) puts it.

2 | TENSEDNESS AND TENSELESSNESS

Present-tensed predication can be used to express propositions that, in typical cases, change truth value in time. For example, the proposition that Trump is president was true, became false and now is true again.⁴ In a formal rendition we can use an exclamation mark to indicate present-tensed predication. If such a mark is absent, we have a merely tenseless predication. For example, consider

(S3) Socrates is a man.

Use '*M*' for 'man' and '*s*' for 'Socrates'. Then, if we read (S3) tenselessly, the formal rendition, its logical form, is

(S3a) $M(s)$;

if we read (S3) present-tensedly, it is

(S3b) $!M(s)$.

The exclamation mark, which may be read as 'presently', works formally as a sentential operator, just like the traditional temporal operators '**P**' (it has been the case that), and '**F**' (it will be the case that), which, following Prior's lead, can be used to formally express past- and future-tensed propositions. For example,

(S4) Socrates was a man.

and

(S5) Socrates will be a man

are formally rendered with these logical forms:

(S4a) $\mathbf{P}!M(s)$,

(S5a) $\mathbf{F}!M(s)$.

Note the difference in (S4a) and (S5a) with the usual formalization in Prior and in standard temporal logic, where we do not find the exclamation mark indicating present-tensedness (see, e.g., Goranko & Rumberg, 2023). There is this difference, because Prior and standard temporal logic take all predications to be present-tensed and thus do not mark present-tensedness explicitly, to distinguish it from tenselessness, in the way I do.

3 | TOOLEY'S OBJECTION

Tooley takes (S1) to have the following logical form:

(1a) $P(s, b)$,⁵

⁴When the paper was originally presented in Siena, the example was: The proposition that Trump is president was true, is now false, and, for all we know, might become true again.

⁵Actually, Tooley uses the formula ' Psb ', since he does not use parentheses and commas in atomic formulas, in the way I do. I prefer my style for atomic formulas to enhance readability.

where ‘*P*’, ‘*s*’ and ‘*b*’ stand, respectively, for ‘Philosopher’, ‘Socrates’ and ‘400 BCE’. Tooley takes for granted here a certain interpretation of what might be called ‘dated constructions’, namely contexts involving a date such as ‘at 400 BCE, ...’ or ‘on May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE’, to pick an example that I shall use below.⁶ This interpretation involves a relational account of property attribution at a time, which transforms a property into a relation linking an individual to a time.⁷ In this case, *philosopher* is the property, Socrates is the individual and 400 BCE is the time. Tooley then argues that, since ‘there is *no intensional context*’ (2012, p. 35),⁸ (1a) entails, by an introduction rule for existential quantification and identity, the following:

$$(1a') \exists x(x = s \ \& \ P(s, b)).$$

However, this is not acceptable for the presentist, since (1a') tells us that Socrates exists. Tooley, does not press this, but he might have also pointed out that we could by the same token infer.

$$(1b') \exists t(t = b \ \& \ P(s, b)),$$

which apparently commits to the existence of a time at which Socrates is a philosopher, obviously a past time. This is something that at least some presentists would not accept (as we shall see below).

In this argument, it looks as if Tooley is taking proper names to be directly referential terms. Now, taking proper names in this way arguably begs the question against presentism, as it amounts to taking for granted that there exist all sorts of past individuals, as referents of proper names such as ‘Socrates’ and ‘Napoleon.’ Tooley is aware of this and counters any objection of this sort, by telling us that his argument goes through even if proper names are viewed as definite descriptions. In particular, he suggests that we could take ‘Socrates’ to mean: ‘the unique person who stands at the beginning of a causal chain of type *T* leading to certain current utterances involving the word “Socrates”’ (Tooley, 2012, p. 36);⁹ we may say ‘the Socratizer’ in the interest of brevity, with ‘Socratizer’ shortened in formulas as ‘*S*’.

Tooley is not explicit here, but I think he is conceding that we could take the logical form of (S1) to be something like this:

$$(1a/\text{descriptive}) P(\mathbf{1}xS(x), b),$$

where ‘ $\mathbf{1}$ ’ is Russell’s symbol for definite descriptions. Moreover, Tooley assumes that no issue of primary of secondary occurrence of the description arises, since no intensional context is involved. So that, in the end, by assuming Russell’s analysis of definite descriptions, (1a/descriptive) is equivalent to.

$$(1a'/\text{descriptive}) \exists x(S(x) \ \& \ \forall y(S(y) \rightarrow x = y) \ \& \ P(x, b)),$$

⁶For present purposes, we may assume, in line, I think, with Tooley, that dates pick up a precise instant, such as the first instant of the minute in question, in my example, or of the century in question in Tooley’s example.

⁷This is one of the views proposed by Lewis (1986, pp. 202–204) in response to his problem of temporary intrinsics, a response that he rejects, but that others have followed, for example, Mozerky (2015, § 6.3).

⁸Here is a more extended quote: ‘Consider, now, the sentence “*Psb*”—that is, the sentence that expresses the proposition that Socrates is (tenselessly) a philosopher at the time 400 BCE. The sentence functions simply to attribute a certain property to an individual at a time, so there is no intensional context within that sentence.’

⁹This is more or less what the descriptivist view defended in Orilia (2010) would suggest.

which says: There is exactly one Socratizer, and he is a philosopher at 400 BCE. Unacceptably for the presentist, this commits to the existence of a Socratizer; the presentist agrees that a Socratizer existed, but denies that a Socratizer exists.

I think Tooley is right in considering this issue about proper names and in responding by taking proper names to be descriptions of this sort.¹⁰ Let us then put aside (1a) and focus on (1a/descriptive), while assuming that individual constants such as 's' (for 'Socrates') are abbreviations of definite descriptions such as $\lambda x.S(x)$ (for 'the Socratizer'), which in turn are understood *à la* Russell. In sum, the argument that Tooley is pressing against the presentist is this: (S1) is both meaningful and true and thus such is (1a/descriptive), since the latter is the logical form of the former (so that they express the same proposition). However, (1a/descriptive) entails (1a'/descriptive), which is unacceptable, by presentist lights. Hence, presentists should consider (S1) as meaningless or false, which it isn't, and thus, they are in trouble.¹¹

4 | A REJOINDER TO TOOLEY

We should agree that, once we grant that we can speak tenselessly, (S1) and their like are meaningful and, possibly, also true. But it does not follow from this that (S1) should be formally regimented in the way proposed by Tooley. That is, we should not take (S1) to express a proposition with the logical form suggested by Tooley. Tooley presupposes a reading of dated constructions that does not generate an intensional context. In fact, formulas such as ' $P(s, b)$ ' or ' $\lambda x.Sx, b$ ' look like typical formulas of first-order logic, which we typically interpret as extensional. And yet, on the face of it, dated constructions do seem intensional. To see this, note first that a typical mark of extensionality, namely the mutual substitutivity of co-referring terms, appears to fail for dated constructions. For example, let 't' be short for 'May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE', corresponding to when Pope John Paul II was shot; then, if we accept to speak tenselessly, it is true that at t the Pope is shot. And yet we cannot conclude that at t the Argentinian Bishop of Rome is shot, from the fact that the Argentinian Bishop of

¹⁰Following the descriptivism of Orilia (2010), one may then appeal to a higher order logic and interpret definite descriptions, actually all singular terms, as properties of properties called 'denoting concepts'. Alternatively, one could assume a free logic and take the individual constants that represent proper names to be possibly non-denoting. Thus, for example, the presentist takes 's' to be non-denoting and 'd' (for 'Donald Trump') to be denoting. The formula ' $\text{exist}(a)$ ', we may assume, tells us that 'a' is denoting. Once we make this move, we can also assume general purpose quantifiers, \exists and \forall , which can be interpreted substitutionally, on the assumption that we have enough names for all objects. Given them, the standard existentially loaded quantifiers, for which we have the usual restrictions on the quantifier rules of free logic, can be so defined:

$$\exists xA = \text{Df } \exists^{\text{exist}}x(\text{exist}(x) \ \& \ A);$$

$$\forall xA = \text{Df } \forall^{\text{exist}}x(\text{exist}(x) \rightarrow A).$$

¹¹Tooley argues for the meaningfulness of sentences such as (S1), by arguing in general for the meaningfulness of tenseless talk. He then argues for their truth by arguing in general that the best explanation of the truths about the past is offered by the fact that there are (tenselessly) states of affairs at earlier times that are causally connected to the present states of affairs (Tooley, 2012, p. 37). Clearly, this argument could also be used against any presentist attempt to provide truthmakers for past-tensed propositions. For example, to a Lucretian presentist who proposes a present state of affairs as truthmaker for (S2) (see below), Tooley could retort that a state of affairs located at an earlier time is a better explanation of the truth of (S2). Hence, there is no special problem coming from the tenseless (S1) here. The same problem arises, if we turn to the past-tensed (S2). Now, it may be conceded that states of affairs at earlier times are better than present states of affairs, as *explanantia* for truths about the past. However, this cannot be the end of the story, since presentists claim other virtues for their approach and to ignore them simply begs the question against them. The real issue here is something else; it has to do with the proper interpretation of sentences such as (S1), that is, what their logical form is (as Tooley puts it), as we shall now see.

Rome, namely Jorge Mario Bergoglio, is the Pope.¹² Moreover, the other typical mark of extensionality, the one on which Tooley focuses, namely existential generalization, cannot be assumed without begging the question against the presentist; a non-presentist may be happy to infer $\exists x(\text{at } t \ x \text{ is shot})$ from the fact that at t the Pope is shot, but a presentist would object to this. The presentist may be content with simply an ‘internal’ existential generalization: at time t , $\exists x(x \text{ is shot})$.

We must proceed, I think, by taking natural language at face value and consider a formalization of (S1) that grants both its tenselessness and the intensionality of dated constructions, in an attempt to capture perspicuously the propositions that (S1) and the like express. We can then continue by associating different truth conditions to such propositions, that is, other propositions that we take to be equivalent *in the light of a certain ontological theory*, one of which may be the one that Tooley appears to presuppose. Such truth conditions would help us to better identify the truthmaker that a sentence such as (S1) should be taken to have, *given the ontological theory in question*.

In taking (S1) at face value, we should admit that it appears to express that there is a relation, which links a proposition, that Socrates is a philosopher, to whatever the date stands for; in this case, this relation is conveyed by ‘in’, but it could also be meant by other prepositions such as ‘at’, ‘on’ or ‘when’ (depending on the nuances of English grammar). If we take the date to directly refer to a time, which may well be a past or future time, we again beg the question against the presentist who denies that there exist past and future times. It is not appropriate however to take dates as directly referential terms that pick up times, for they are certainly descriptive in character; they are based on a dating system, presupposing that a certain *origin* proposition is true; a proposition asserting that a certain *origin* event has actually taken place, say the birth of Christ. Let ‘JCB’ be a name of this proposition. By taking for granted that JCB was true, a date allows us to refer to a proposition asserting something about the earth and the sun, namely, roughly, that there have been a number of revolutions of the former around the latter, plus a portion of a revolution (when months, hours, etc. are indicated), counting forward or backward from the origin event, depending on whether we specify ‘CE’ or ‘BCE.’ For example, ‘May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE’ stands for one such proposition. Let us assume for convenience that ‘D’, ‘D1’, ‘D2’, etc., abbreviate dates and thus stand for propositions of this sort, which we may call *date propositions*. And let us also suppose that ‘D1’ and ‘D2’ abbreviate the examples on which we are focusing, namely, ‘400 BCE’ and ‘May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, AC.’ Then, for example, the (false) claim that it is presently

¹²One may think that Tooley could object here as follows. Since we are considering a dated tenseless sentence such as ‘at t the Pope is shot’, we should similarly take the identity statement ‘the Argentinian Bishop of Rome is the Pope’ as tenseless and implicitly dated (thanks to Gabriele Usberti for pressing this point at the workshop in Siena mentioned in the first-page acknowledgement note). Presumably, the implicit date would be either the date of the shooting or the present date (say ‘November 19, 2024’), which we may abbreviate as ‘ t^* ’. In the first case, we would have of course a false claim, for in 1981, the Pope was not Argentinian, and, thus, this is not a plausible option. In the second case, the claim would be true, but it would not have the form of an identity statement, involving a dyadic identity relation, such as $\alpha = \beta$. Following Tooley’s suggestion on how to formalize dated tensed sentences, the claim would rather involve a triadic identity relation and be something like $=^3(\lambda xAx, \lambda xPx, t^*)$ (where ‘ A ’ and ‘ P ’ abbreviate the predicates ‘first Argentinian Bishop of Rome’ and ‘Pope.’) Alternatively, in line with the formalization of dated constructions that I shall propose below, the formalization would be something like $AT^d(D, ! = (\lambda xAx, \lambda xPx))$ (see below). Either way, we would not have an identity statement available, so as to licence the replacement of a term with a co-referential one. Similarly, the true claim that, according to Superman stories, the shiest journalist on earth is Superman is not an identity statement, which could licence the inference that John Smith is Superman from the claim that John Smith is (let us suppose) the shiest journalist on earth. It could also be thought that Tooley may suggest that the predication of ‘Argentinian Bishop of Rome’ and ‘Pope’ in the identity statement in question should be taken as tenseless and implicitly dated, so as to mean something like ‘Argentinian Bishop of Rome in 2024’ and ‘Pope in 2024’. As regards this last point, we could grant that this is a possible interpretation of the predicates in question, but then by the same token we should similarly interpret the predicate ‘Pope’ in ‘at t the Pope is shot’, so as to get ‘at t the Pope in 1981 is shot’. By making these moves, however, the identity statement contains ‘the Pope in 2024’, but the sentence regarding which we wonder whether it involves an intensional context contains a different term, namely ‘the Pope in 1981’. Hence, no substitutivity test can be performed. Similarly, it doesn’t make sense to consider the identity statement ‘the number of days in November is 30’, in order to inquire whether there is an intensional context in ‘necessarily, 9 is odd; what we want is an identity statement in which ‘9’ occurs, such as ‘the number of planets is 9’.

‘May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE’ can be formalized as ‘!D2’, whereas the (true) claim that it was ‘May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE’ can be formalized as ‘P!D2.’ Here we are appealing, we may say, to a *present-tensed* date proposition, namely !D2, and to a *past-tensed* date proposition, namely P!D2.

With this in place, we can then assume that (S2) is formalized as

$$(S2') \text{ P AT}(D1, !P(s)),$$

where, in turn, ‘AT’ is appropriately defined, so as to make (S2) equivalent to

$$(S2'') \text{ P}(!D1 \ \&!P(s)).^{13}$$

This says that it was the case that: It is presently 400 BCE, and Socrates is presently a philosopher. Similarly, Tooley (2012, p. 33) proposes this reading of (S2): ‘it was the case that (it is now 400 BCE & Socrates is now a philosopher).’¹⁴

(S1) and (S2) differ in that the former leaves us in the dark regarding whether 400 BCE is past, present, or future, whereas (S2) tells us that 400 BCE is past. We can capture this, by formalizing (S1) as

$$(S1') \text{ AT}^d(D1, !P(s)),$$

where ‘AT^d’ is defined in such a way that (S1’) amounts to

$$(S1'') \text{ P}(!D1 \ \&!P(s)) \vee (!D1 \ \&!P(s)) \vee \mathbf{F}(!D1 \ \&!P(s)).^{15}$$

This can be read as follows. It was the case that: It is presently 400 BCE and Socrates is presently a philosopher, or it is presently 400 BC and Socrates is presently a philosopher, or it will be the case that: it is presently 400 BC and Socrates is presently a philosopher. (For brevity’s sake, I shall usually skip the ‘presently’ in the following; it should be clear when present-tensedness is intended).

Now, despite the difference in temporal information that these propositions provide, they are alike in encapsulating the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher in an intensional context. We have no more reason to infer $\exists x \text{ AT}^d(D1, !P(x))$ from (S1’), than we have reasons to infer $\exists x \text{ P AT}(D1, !P(x))$ from (S2’). In neither case is the inference to be licensed. Moreover, we can no longer infer, contrary to what happens with Tooley’s formalization, that there exists a (past) time at which Socrates is a philosopher. Note that the fact that the propositions (S1’) and (S2’) involve the date proposition D1 does not in itself imply that there exists a (past) time characterized by D1, that is, identified by a certain date. That depends on the ontology of times we want to subscribe to, as we shall see in the following.

5 | COMPETING ONTOLOGIES AND TRUTHMAKERS

Supporters of different temporal ontologies can agree that (S1) and (S2) are true and that they express the propositions (S1’) and (S2’), respectively. They can differ however in the

¹³Here ‘AT’ is an operator that applies to two sentences. It can be defined as $[\lambda p q (lp \ \& \ q)]$, if we conveniently assume sentential variables such as ‘p’ and ‘q’ and the lambda operator, which allows us to generate complex predicates from formulas.

¹⁴Tooley concedes here that ‘it was the case that’ produces ‘non-extensional contexts’, even though he is not convinced that this assumption is unproblematic.

¹⁵With the assumptions outlined in note 12 above, ‘AT^d’ can be defined as $[\lambda p q \text{ P}(lp \ \& \ q) \vee (!p \ \& \ q) \vee \mathbf{F}(lp \ \& \ !q)]$.

truthmakers they associate to such sentences. The formal language that I am proposing will allow us to indicate what these truthmakers are. Let us see how.

Consider first a B-eternalist, for whom there are times connected by objective relations of temporal precedence and individuals temporally located at such times, for example, Socrates at 400 BCE and Napoleon at 1795 CE. By assuming such an ontology of times, this eternalist might view the exemplification of properties by individuals as relationally involving times, in the way suggested by Tooley, thereby arriving to truth conditions of the sort envisioned by him, which we saw above. This eternalist might instead assume, more plausibly I think, that there are states of affairs occurring at times and involving individuals as participants and properties as attributes. For such an eternalist, there is a state of affairs consisting of Socrates as participant and *philosopher* as attribute, occurring at a time. This time may be taken to exemplify a property of times, call it '*DI**', conveyed (given a dating system) by the date '400 BCE.' The truthmaker for (S1) is then the joint existence of the occurrence of the state of affairs in question at such a time and of the exemplification of this date property by that time. Hence, (S1) has the following truth condition:

$$(S1_B\text{-et}) \exists x \exists y (\text{participant}(x, s) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(x, P) \ \& \ \text{occur}(y, x) \ \& \ DI^*(y)).^{16}$$

This says that there is a state of affairs, x , involving Socrates as participant and *philosopher* as attribute (Socrates' being a philosopher), which occurs at a time, y , characterizable as 400 BCE. The truthmaker of (S2) must involve a further component in addition to those already present in the truthmaker for (S1). In this approach, it may well be the fact that the time in question, at which the Socratic state of affairs at issue occurs, is earlier than the time of utterance. In stating the truth condition, this should be taken into account. Suppose we use '<' for temporal precedence and the predicate '*U*' to univocally identify the time of utterance (e.g., in a token-reflexive way along these lines: 'time at which *this* utterance occurs'). Then, the truth condition is:

$$(S2_B\text{-et}) \exists x \exists y (\text{participant}(x, s) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(x, P) \ \& \ \text{occur}(y, x) \ \& \ DI^*(y) \ \& \ \exists z (U(z) \ \& \ y < z)).$$

In addition to what (S1_B-et) already says, this adds that the time, y , at which the Socratic state of affairs occurs, is earlier than the time of utterance, z .

The A-eternalist differs from the B-eternalist in acknowledging A-properties such as pastness, presentness and futurity, which are objectively exemplified by times. For her, the truth condition of (S1) may well be the same. However, she will take the truth condition for (S2) to be this:

$$(S2_A\text{-et}) \exists x \exists y (\text{participant}(x, s) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(x, P) \ \& \ \text{occur}(y, x) \ \& \ DI^*(y) \ \& \ \text{past}(y)).$$

This adds to what (S1_B-et) tells us that the time, y , at which the Socratic state of affairs occurs, is objectively past.

Let us now move to presentism. A presentist must of course face the truthmaker problem and thus in particular the issue of what the truthmaker for (S1) is. But this is no more pressing than the issue of specifying what the truthmaker for (S2) is. A popular response is to appeal to Lucretianism and claim that there are states of affairs consisting of the universe's being such that a certain proposition is true (Bigelow, 1996). Presumably, such states of affairs begin to

¹⁶I am conveniently assuming that the formalism is type-free in allowing for predicates such as '*P*' in subject position, as in '*attribute*(x, P)'. No danger of logical paradoxes arises, as long as this is done only for simple predicates such as these, which is all we need for present purposes.

exist precisely when the proposition in question becomes true and then keep existing forever. For example, the proposition that Socrates was a philosopher enjoys as truthmaker the state of affairs consisting of the universe's having the 'propositional' property of being such that the past-tensed proposition that Socrates was a philosopher is true. In the case of (S1), the proposition in question is (S1'). Suppose that ' T ' is a predicate expressing the corresponding propositional property of the universe. Then, the truth condition is:

$$(S1_pres) \exists x \exists y (\text{universe}(x) \ \& \ \text{participant}(y, x) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(y, T)).$$

This states that there is something, x , which is universe and which is involved as participant in a state of affairs, y , which also involves as attribute the following property: being such that it is true that, at 400 BCE, Socrates is a philosopher. In other words, y is the state of affairs of the universe's being such that it is true that, at 400 BCE, Socrates is a philosopher. In the case of (S2), we can have an analogous truthmaker, where the proposition in question is (S2'). Let us assume that the predicate expressing the relevant propositional property is ' $T\#$.' Then, the truth condition is:

$$(S2_pres) \exists x \exists y (\text{universe}(x) \ \& \ \text{participant}(y, x) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(y, T\#)).$$

This tells us that there is state of affairs consisting of the universe's being such that it is true that it was the case that, at 400 BCE, Socrates is a philosopher.

In addition to other problems that it may have (Orilia, 2016), this approach makes truthmakers dependent on the very existence of the universe. It can be objected, however, that there shouldn't be such a dependence. True past-tensed propositions would still be true, even if the universe disappeared. Or, they will still be true when the universe will cease to exist, which may well happen, for all we know. A better option then is the following one. At the time at which a certain proposition, Φ , is true, which is also the time at which a certain present-tensed date proposition, say !D, is true, then a *dating* state of affairs starts existing and keeps existing forever. It involves a relation, *true-at*, that can hold between a date proposition and another proposition. This dating state of affairs consists of the holding of *true-at* between Φ and !D. For example, when Pope John Paul II was shot, the proposition that John Paul II is shot, call it ' Φ_2 ', was true, and the proposition that it is May 13, 1981, h. 5:17 PM, Italian time, CE (i.e., !D2) was also true. Thus, the proposition Φ_2 came to be related by *true-at* to !D2, thereby giving rise to a dating state of affairs, consisting of the holding of the relation *true-at* between the two propositions !D2 and Φ_2 . States of affairs of this sort can provide truthmakers. To further illustrate, focus again on the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher, call it ' Φ_1 ', and consider that when this proposition was true, the present-tensed date proposition that it is 400 BCE (i.e., !D1) was also true. Hence, the dating state of affairs consisting of the holding of *true-at* between !D1 and Φ_1 can be seen as the truthmaker for (S1). Accordingly, for such a version of presentism, the truth condition of (S1) is

$$(S1_pres') \exists x (\text{participant}(x, !D1) \ \& \ \text{participant}(x, \Phi_1) \ \& \ \text{attribute}(x, \text{true-at})).$$

This says that there is a state of affairs, x , with the relation *true-at* as attribute and the two propositions !D1 and Φ_1 as participants. That is, x is the state of affairs consisting, as we may put it, of the being true, at the date proposition !D1, of the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher.

As truthmaker of (S2), we can have something analogous. Here we could assume that, once a date proposition ceases to be true, it immediately acquires the property *was-true*, so that the *pastness* state of affairs consisting of the possession of this property by the proposition in question starts existing and keeps existing forever. States of affairs of this sort can contribute to

provide truthmakers for past-tensed propositions such as (S2). The truthmaker for (S2) would be the joint existence of (i) the dating state of affairs consisting of the being true at the date proposition !D1 of the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher and (ii) the pastness state of affairs consisting of the possession of the property *was-true* by the date proposition !D1. Hence, the truth condition for (S2) is:

$$(S2_pres') \exists x \exists y (participant(x, !D1) \& participant(x, \Phi_1) \& attribute(x, true-at) \& participant(y, !D1) \& attribute(y, was-true)).$$

This adds to what (S1_pres') already says the information that there is a state of affairs, y , with the dating proposition !D1 as participant and the property *was-true* as attribute; in other words, a state of affairs consisting of !D1's having been true.

It is worth remarking that, in the approach that we have just considered, no past or future times are involved. There are rather date propositions that were true, such as the proposition that it is 400 BCE, on which we focused, or date propositions that will be true, say the proposition that it is 2094 CE. However, there are presentist views that accept, somehow, times other than the present time. For example, Prior (1968, ch. 11) construed times as maximal and consistent *world* propositions that were, are, or will be true. One such proposition is presently true and is (or represents) the present time and of course it exists. However, the others, which were or will be true, exist as well. Moreover, I have defended *moderate presentism* (Orilia, 2016), which acknowledges times as *sui generis* entities; they are all ordered by a relation of temporal succession, but only the present time hosts states of affairs, while the other times are 'empty', although they hosted or will host states of affairs.

If times are propositions, as in Prior, we can envision truthmakers and truth conditions for (S1) and (S2) quite like the ones we just saw above, for after all world propositions are propositions just like date propositions. In the case of moderate presentism, one could appeal to the relation of temporal precedence, holding between 400 BCE and the present time, and to the fact that the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher is true at the time in question. We may call '*true-at**' the relation between a proposition and a time at work here and note that the following is being presupposed: at the time at which a certain proposition is true, then a state of affairs consisting of the holding of *true-at** between the time and the proposition in question starts existing and keeps existing forever. Recall that we already used '*DI**' as the predicate expressing the property that univocally identifies the time 400 BCE. With all this in place, the moderate presentist could propose the following truth condition for (S2):

$$(S2_mp) \exists x \exists y (participant(x, \Phi_1) \& participant(x, y) \& attribute(x, true-at^*) \& DI^*(y) \& \exists z (present(z) \& y < z)).$$

This tells us that there is a state of affairs x consisting of the being true at a time y of Φ_1 , the proposition that Socrates is a philosopher, where this time y is 400 BCE and precedes the present time. The truth condition for (S1) need not specify that 400 BCE precedes the present time, and thus, it is just like (S2_mp) without the clause ' $\exists z (present(z) \& y < z)$ '.¹⁷

There is certainly room for improving on the treatment of the examples we have considered and of course other examples should be considered. I plan to further investigate these issues in future work, but for the purposes of this paper the illustration I have provided should suffice.

¹⁷It may be objected that a time that precedes the present time is a past time, to which moderate presentism would be committed. Hence, as committed to a past entity, moderate presentism would not be a presentism after all. It is not important at this juncture whether moderate presentism is really presentism or not, for the goal here is simply to show how different temporal ontologies may associate different truth conditions to the same proposition. However, see Orilia (2021) for a full defence of the claim that moderate presentism is a form of presentism, despite the objection in question.

6 | CONCLUSION

We should acknowledge both tensed and tenseless talk. Contrary to what Tooley claims, there is no special problem for presentism if we speak tenselessly. To see this, we must properly interpret tenseless sentences and perspicuously represent the propositions that they express. Such propositions must be accurately distinguished from the truth conditions that we may want to associate to them in the light of a certain temporal ontology. Truth conditions driven by an eternalist ontology do have implications that a presentist would not accept, for example, that Socrates exists, but this is as it should be. In contrast, however, truth conditions driven by a presentist ontology do not have such implications.

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